Ironically, Farm field’s last crop: houses

Back in 2017, the Lower Pottsgrove commissioners approved a housing plan to carve up yet more of the township. Now it’s coming to fruition. Bulldozers have scraped away much of what used to be 143 acres of farm fields at Bleim Road and North Pleasantview Road to build 178 homes, some of which have already been completed.

Like many developments, Spring Valley Farms is named for what is being lost, not what is replacing it. Like virtually all the developments in Lower Pottsgrove, Spring Valley Farms is isolated in its own pod. There are hundreds of homes within walking distance, but you would take your life into your hands trying to reach them by walking or bicycling along Bleim Road or Pleasantview Road. Schools, shopping, parks, and offices are also nearby, but they can only be safely reached by car.

Part of the developers’ sales pitch to the commissioners was the donation of two adjacent parcels of 40 and 43 acres to the township as open space. Which can only be accessed by car.

A century ago, most development occurred as an extension of existing towns. For example, Pottstown’s street system evolved over decades, connected to what already existed. By the 1950s, however, a new land use pattern was adopted in the townships, separating land uses: housing subdivisions, stores, offices, and schools, all of them car-oriented.

Developing virgin land rather than recycling already developed land became the rule.

That’s why Pottstown has a mostly vacant shopping center on State Street and scores of vacant houses. It’s easier to keep sprawling out into the countryside. And sprawl helps separate residents by income. Homes at Spring Valley Farms will sell from $285,000 to $334,000 or more. In the last year, only a handful on homes in Pottstown sold for more than $250,000.

Pottstown has a lot of historic homes and stores, but it is short on residents and investors with the financial means to restore and maintain them.

Meanwhile, we continue to pave over the countryside.

Commentary by Thomas Hylton

MORE SPRAWL — A former farm field at North Pleasantview and Bleim Roads, right, has been scraped away and overlaid for another isolated housing development, below. Like virtually all other developments in Lower Pottsgrove, it will be car-dependent.