

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## School district draining reserves

It was a crowd-pleasing decision.

Immediately after calling the May 16 meeting of the Pottstown School Board to order, president Amy Francis announced the board had decided in executive session against any cuts to music, art or library programs.

The audience of some 200 residents greeted the news with thunderous applause.

But just to make sure, numerous residents spoke against any such proposed cuts this year or in the future.

Unmentioned was the steep decline in Pottstown's tax base in recent years, which has cost the district millions of dollars in tax revenues.

Also unmentioned was the district's exorbitant tax rates, currently sixth highest of 500 districts in Pennsylvania.

The district began the 2019-2020 budget process with a \$1.6 million deficit.

Administrators assume the school board will raise taxes 3.5 percent, the maximum allowed under the state index, bringing in an extra \$1 million from the district's 8,700 property owners.

The administration also proposed taking \$360,000 from its reserves to whittle down the shortfall to \$111,000.

One of the district's seven music teachers is retiring this year, and the administration suggested leaving that position vacant for a savings of almost \$100,000.

Possibly eliminating one teaching position led to the wave of protesters at the school board meeting. So the school board will now cover the deficit by again tapping its reserve fund.

Businesses lay off people all the time when facing financial hardship.

In our case, no teacher was going to be laid off — just not replaced.

As our town experiences hard financial times, the sacrifices will be allocated solely to the taxpayers.

Warning: Pottstown's financial reserves won't last forever.

Earlier this month, the Allentown School Board voted to borrow \$10 million over 20 years just to cover this year's expenses.

That is breathtaking fiscal mismanagement. The borrowed money will be gone by September, and the Allentown taxpayers will pay back the \$10 million plus \$4 million in interest over two decades.

As recently as 2014, Allentown had reserves of \$32 million. But an inability to make tough decisions led the board to gradually drain Allentown's reserves to nothing.

I hope Pottstown doesn't share the same fate. If board members can't leave one position vacant, how could they possibly lay someone off in the future? There will be rocky times ahead.

*Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.*



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton

Pottstown's Tax Base shrinks	
Year	Total assessments valuation
2015	\$810,196,679
2016	\$804,630,169
2017	\$802,795,399
2018	\$772,892,489
2019	\$764,486,739



**OPPOSED TO STAFF CUT**—About 200 Pottstown residents attended a May 16 school board meeting to oppose any cuts to music and other programs.