

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Who pays for stormwater?

Last week, borough officials estimated damage to Memorial Park and other borough property from a July 11 rainfall will exceed \$1 million.

As we previously discussed, the outlays for containing stormwater runoff in Pottstown will soar in coming years, costing property owners millions of dollars.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

But if we don't contain runoff, the damage will cost even more.

Pottstown has four major streams totaling 6.5 miles that were arched over as the borough was developed. In addition, the borough has more than 40 miles of underground stormwater pipes. This infrastructure is aging and needs repairs and upgrades.

The most common source of local government revenue is the real estate tax, based on the value of a property.

But there's no correlation between the value of real estate and the amount of runoff it causes.

Runoff is created when rainfall "runs off" impervious surfaces, which prevent it from percolating into the ground.

In Pottstown, 38 percent of the borough is covered by impervious surfaces. But more of that impervious surface is parking lots than buildings.

A vacant parking lot worth \$50,000 may be creating 10 times more stormwater runoff than a \$300,000 home.

So why should the homeowner pay more than the owner of the parking lot to manage stormwater?

In Pennsylvania and elsewhere, innovative municipalities are charging annual stormwater fees based on the amount of runoff generated by each property. West Chester, Lancaster, Philadelphia, and Radnor are among a growing number of municipalities in assessing stormwater fees.

The more impervious surface, the higher the fee.

In West Chester, for example, the owner of a home covering 2,000 square feet pays a \$140 annual fee.

But the owner of a half-acre parking lot (21,780 square feet) pays an annual fee of \$1,690.

Because the fee is based on impervious surfaces, some homeowners would pay almost as much for their garage as for their home. A big driveway might also be costly.

And it doesn't matter whether a parking lot is bustling and full of cars or vacant 95 percent of the week. The fee is the same.

Citizens may debate how much Pottstown will need to spend on stormwater management.

But there shouldn't be much debate on how to pay for it. Property owners should be charged in proportion to the amount of the problem they are creating.

Projected annual stormwater costs	
Ramp-up	\$780,000
Years 1-3	\$900,000
Years 4-6	\$950,000
Years 7-9	\$1,450,000
Years 10-12	\$1,420,000



MASSIVE RUNOFF — Huge parking lots like this one at Pottstown Plaza on State Street cause an enormous amount of stormwater runoff that must be mitigated before it causes flooding and the pollution of our waterways. Stormwater will cost millions of dollars to manage.