Ten years ago, Pottstown first introduced 65-gallon blue recycling bins to the borough. With a $500,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the borough bought more than 7,000 of them, allowing residents to mix all kinds of recyclables — cardboard, cans, plastic and glass — in one place.

Later, in 2012, after winning a new contract, J.P. Mascaro distributed thousands of bright red bins — with a 96-gallon capacity — for regular trash.

Both times, residents complained the bins were too large, too ugly, too difficult to maneuver, and too bright. Indeed, for streets with buildings placed too close together for storage at the side or back, the garish bins are out on the sidewalk 24/7.

But it’s easy to forget how terrible our downtown streets looked prior to 2009, when curbside trash was stuffed in a variety of beat-up trash cans (often missing lids) cardboard boxes and plastic bags that were often ripped open by animals, leaving a trail of garbage on the sidewalk.

The contract awarded last week to J.P. Mascaro keeps the bins and also provides for the free pick-up of one bulk item per week, which should help eliminate some curbside eyesores.

Thinking long-term, whenever the current bins need to be replaced, specifying olive green models, like Phoenixville’s, below right, would be far less obtrusive. Urban design is an important element for attractive towns, even when it comes to trash containers.

A TOP PRIORITY should be constraining residents from dumping mountains of trash, including furniture and electronic equipment, at the curb.

**Commentary by Thomas Hylton**

EVEN BRIGHTLY COLORED TRASH BINS, left, are better than curbside trash bags and boxes, above. But muted colored bins like Phoenixville’s, right, are a better choice.