

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Lots of government priorities

The Pottstown School District is conducting virtual learning the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year. Except for a few special education and career technology students, our students are learning remotely from home using Chromebooks.

No one thinks that's an adequate substitute for in-person classes, but it's the safest in a pandemic.

With more than 500 employees, one might think there would be substantial furloughs, but that's not the case. Only a few custodians, food service workers, and proctors were laid off. All the specialists and classroom aides have been kept on.

Seventh highest taxes

Pottstown has the seventh highest tax effort in the state — higher than 95 percent of the 500 school districts in the Commonwealth. It's been that way for at least 20 years, and taxation is eroding this town's viability. The total assessed value of Pottstown's real estate is lower than it was two decades ago, when the county last reassessed.

Excessive spending

Our taxation is exorbitant because our school boards have traditionally spent beyond the community's ability to pay. Per pupil, we spend more than two-thirds of the districts in the state, and we simply can't afford it.

And the reason given is, "We have to put the education of our children first."



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Silo thinking

This is known as "silo" thinking. "Whatever I'm doing is more important than everything else." But the people who are footing the bill, the residents and property owners of Pottstown, may have their own priorities.

Priority 1— Potable Water

The most important service local government provides is potable water. In Pottstown, residents of all ages take ample clean water for granted. It costs money to treat Schuylkill River water and pipe it to everyone in town.

Priority 2—Sewers

Young and old in Pottstown thankfully have access to toilets and drains for wastewater. That's not cheap.

Priority 3— Public Safety

Pottstown residents are concerned about safety. Our residents and taxpayers gladly pay for police and other first responders because we want to feel secure in our homes and on the streets.

Priority 4—Sanitation

We have weekly trash pickup. Otherwise we'd have bags of garbage everywhere. Sanitation affects everyone.

Priority 5—Streets

Very few Pottstown taxpayers stay at home all day. They need to go places. Our streets must be maintained by government.

Priority 6—Public Education

I suggest that for most Pottstown residents — with or without children in public schools — education is their sixth local government priority, certainly not their first.

Sustainability

Our most important task is to make Pottstown viable by retaining productive citizens and attracting new ones. That means focusing on everyone's quality of life.



WALNUT STREET between Adams and Sheridan streets was among nearly five miles of streets resurfaced this fall, a welcome improvement to Pottstown's livability.

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