# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR
# Enlightened
## LEADERSHIP

# More transparency than ever

On Tuesday I published a list of Pottstown employers and the number of people they employed in 2021 — a total of 10,278.

I received this information from Pottstown Borough through a Right-To-Know request, based on one of the most important state laws passed in recent decades.

Commentary by
Tom Hylton

The 2008 Right-to-Know law assumes that all local and state government records are public (with a few exceptions such as personal information). The law established an easy-to-use process for any citizen to obtain records, and it set up a new government agency to rule on appeals if a Right-To-Know request is denied.

Pottstown Borough and the Pottstown School District handle scores of Right-To-Know requests annually (another unfunded mandate).

### Government websites

But a wealth of local government information is already available on government websites.

For example, tonight's Pottstown School Board agenda is published on the district's website, complete with digital copies of the minutes from last month's meeting and the list of bills paid last month. Contracts and policies to be considered by the board are also included as hyperlinks on the agenda.

### Meetings broadcast online

You can watch the meeting online using the district's Facebook page, which archives previous meetings going back to 2019.

The school district also broadcasts four committee meetings a month on its Facebook page, which are also archived.

### Borough government

Borough Council meetings are also taped. You can view any of dozens of meetings on the borough's website going back to 2008.

Like the school district, the borough publishes its agenda a few days before the meeting, and these agendas include hyperlinks for proposals, contracts, and reports.

The agendas and minutes are also available online for the Historical Architectural Review Board, the Planning Commission, the Pottstown Borough (water and sewer) Authority, and other entities.
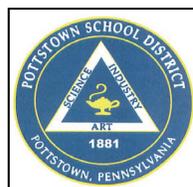
### Policies and ordinances

School board policies, borough ordinances, forms and permit applications are all available online.

Of course, all this seems ho-hum to today's generation, which is used to finding everything online.

But 20 years ago, it was difficult and time consuming to get the most basic government information.

### Assessment information

For example, if I wanted to know who owned a particular property in Pottstown, I would need to go to the codes department at borough hall and flip through a loose-leaf binder which contained only minimal information of ownership listed by address.

Now, of course, you can access information about every property in the county from its website, at any time of day or night, including the past sales history, dimensions, and photos of each property. You can search by property owner name as well as by address.

### Progress taken for granted

But it's in the nature of progress that it erases its tracks. We easily forget how far we have come.