

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Jobs and quality of life

Earlier this month, Pottstown Council approved a 10-acre site plan for a \$208 million sustainable energy facility on Keystone Boulevard that will employ more than 100 people. Workers' salaries are expected to average \$65,000.

The plant will convert cellulose material like wood palletes, paper and cardboard into diesel fuel, which will be trucked about two miles east to the Norfolk Southern Rail Yard located on part of the former Bethlehem Steel complex, where it will be distributed to other locations by train.

The developers have agreed to donate \$625,000 toward the cost of extending Keystone Boulevard west through the old Stanley G. Flagg site to a recently completed interchange with Route 422 in West Pottsgrove.

The jobs are important, but more important is the project's boost to the borough's tax base, which has been declining for 20 years but recently leveled off.

Real estate assessments are based on the value of a property, not how many people work there.

Properties like the gargantuan former Bethlehem Steel complex actually employ relatively few people in comparison to their size.

Half of Pottstown's top ten employers — the hospital, school district, the Hill School, the bor-

ough, and Creative Health Services — are exempt from real estate taxes.

Yet real estate taxes generate by far the largest local revenues for the borough and the school district. The 1 percent earned income tax, split between the borough and the school district, comes in a distant second.

Unlike income taxes, which can rise and fall significantly with the ups and downs of the economy, the tax base is stable. Property values don't change nearly as fast as incomes.

Moreover, workers today are highly mobile. The Montgomery County Planning Commission estimates more than 70 percent of employed Pottstown residents have jobs outside the borough.

Likewise, it's safe to assume that most people who work in the borough don't actually live here.

For example, about 85 percent of the Pottstown School District's professional staff lives outside of Pottstown.

Therefore, the impact of how many jobs we have in Pottstown isn't as important as it once was. It's the people who actually live here who have the most influence on our quality of life, and the ones local government should be most interested in serving.

The appearance of our streets and buildings, greenery, and cleanliness are vitally important.



Commentary by
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PROPOSED SUSTAINABLE ENERGY PLANT on Keystone Boulevard.