

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR
Enlightened
 LEADERSHIP

Too much asphalt

Last week, we discussed how Pottstown's historic churches, many built in the mid 1800s, started building parking lots in the 1950s and 1960s to accommodate parishioners who were now driving rather than walking to church.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

In recent decades, as more people have moved out into the suburbs, congregations declined. But the parking lots remained. Even in the best of times, these parking lots were mostly empty

six days a week. Now they are rarely if ever filled.

And it's not just churches. Every business, large or small, began building parking lots with a vengeance in the mid 20th century. Zoning laws often required them.

As a result, Pottstown is pock-marked with parking lots, which are ugly and degrade the environment by eliminating natural vegetation and preventing rainwater from percolating into the ground.

In the summer, parking lots are "heat sinks," absorbing and retaining

the hot rays of the sun. Parking lots are a major reason urban temperatures are often 5 degrees or more hotter than surrounding suburban and rural areas.

Incredibly, more of Pottstown is covered with parking lots than with buildings — 14% for buildings and 15% for parking lots. Another 9% of Pottstown's surface is used for streets.

The chart, below right, shows the borough has more than 44,000 parking spaces — about half in parking lots and the other half on our streets.

This figure comes from painstakingly counting each space using Google Earth, a process that took a colleague more than 100 hours.

Of course, the vast majority of these spaces are empty most of the time. But people want a parking space within a few seconds' walk of any place they want to go. That's right, seconds.

If people were willing to walk 3 minutes from their car to their destination, they could park up to 900 feet away — the length of two city blocks.

And they'd be healthier for it.

Removing some of this excess parking would make Pottstown a much more attractive place to live.

| Pottstown ground cover | |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Buildings | 14% |
| Roads | 9% |
| Parking lots, other | 15% |
| TOTAL IMPERVIOUS | 38% |
| Tree cover | 24% |
| Grass/shrubs | 36% |
| Water | 2% |
| TOTAL | 100% |

| Pottstown parking spaces | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| On-street | 22,116 |
| Downtown off-street | 1,281 |
| School district lots | 713 |
| Church lots | 1,115 |
| Pottstown Center | 2,215 |
| Medical Center | 813 |
| All other private lots | 15,969 |
| TOTAL PARKING | 44,222 |

