

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Broadening school district's mission

Last month, the Pottstown School District hired a Harrisburg architectural firm to assess the district's facilities.

The firm, called EI Associates, will make recommendations for maintenance and improvements.

The last time Pottstown conducted a district-wide facilities study, in 1997, the district ended up renovating and enlarging our high school, middle school, and four of our elementary schools at a total cost of nearly \$80 million.

Our facilities are currently in excellent condition, and we systematically maintain them at a cost of \$750,000 or more annually.

But now EI Architects will very likely find more things to do.

The Pottstown School District is in excellent financial shape, thanks to a substantial infusion of state and federal dollars, and good management.

A recently concluded audit of the 2021-2022 school year showed the district ended the year with a \$23.3 million fund balance, the highest ever. In fact, our year-end surplus is nearly four times higher than it was 10 years ago (see chart at right).

And that doesn't count a one-time \$9.7 million federal grant that must be spent by September 2024.

While the school district's infrastructure is in excellent shape, Pottstown Borough's infrastructure is falling apart.

Pottstown's streets and homes and businesses are sitting on miles of underground pipes, a lot of them a hundred years old or more.

For example, there are 6.5 miles of streams in Pottstown that were arched over more than a century ago. Those arches are beginning to fail and will need millions of dollars to

Special Federal Funding for Pottstown School District (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund)		
Name	Allocation	Expiration
ESSER II	\$4,819,332	9/30/2023
ESSER III	\$9,741,114	9/30/2024
TOTAL	\$14,560,446	

**THESE ONE-TIME FEDERAL FUNDS are not included in the district's budget totals, right.**



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

repair.

Pottstown has miles of rutted and potholed streets that should be resurfaced. Few of its alleys are paved and none are maintained.

It has four bridges over the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks that will cost \$20 million to repair.

The borough's ability to maintain its infrastructure would be enhanced if the school district relieved the borough of some of its responsibilities.

Specifically, both the Pottstown Public Library and the Ricketts Community Center would be much more appropriate for the school

district to oversee and financially support than the borough.

In 1962, Pottstown Council agreed to support the library in return for the school district financing and managing the parks and recreation department, including the Ricketts Center. But in 1990, the school board unilaterally dumped the parks and recreation department in the borough's lap.

Today, the parks and recreation department costs borough government more than \$1 million annually, and the library receives a \$172,000 annual contribution from the borough.

The school district has plenty of financial wherewithal to help out.

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

### Pottstown School District budgets, end of year fund balances

Year	School budget	End of year fund balance
2013-2014	\$52,947,845	\$6,028,305
2014-2015	\$55,929,737	\$6,433,796
2015-2016	\$57,136,928	\$6,222,584
2016-2017	\$59,553,150	\$8,286,198
2017-2018	\$61,882,242	\$9,158,214
2018-2019	\$62,677,927	\$10,810,047
2019-2020	\$64,284,813	\$14,363,243
2020-2021	\$65,413,614	\$20,304,588
2021-2022	\$64,583,921	\$23,357,216
2022-2023	\$68,467,437	??

