

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

ULI reports have helped Pottstown

First of three articles

Next week, a panel of experts from ULI — the Urban Land Institute — will visit Pottstown for three days to evaluate the community's strengths and weaknesses and suggest ways we can promote economic development and enhance our quality of life.

This is the third time ULI, based in Washington, D.C., has visited Pottstown in recent decades. Founded in 1936, ULI is the nation's premier research institution for urban planning and development.

ULI was first brought to Pottstown in 1976, just after Bethlehem Steel closed its fabricating plant, eliminating 1,000 high-paying jobs. The steel company paid for the ULI study as a farewell gesture to help Pottstown establish a strategy to attract new industry.

A panel of 10 developers, consultants and local government officials from across the country convened for five days in Pottstown and conducted confidential interviews with nearly 100 civic and business leaders.

The recommendations contained in ULI's subsequent report formed a blueprint which the borough followed diligently for years. Many successful initiatives were based on ULI recommendations made in 1976, including:

- Extend Industrial Highway east from Hanover Street to join High Street west of the Central Business District. (Completed in the 1980s, the highway extension, now called College Drive, was built on the old Penn Central Railroad right-of-way.)
- Develop recreational areas along the Schuylkill River and the Manatawny Creek. (Riverfront Park was developed in the mid 1980s, and the Schuylkill River Greenway extension to West Pottsgrove and Berks County was completed three years ago.)



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

- Preserve and restore historic buildings (Pottstown's National Register Historic District was created in 1985 and two local ordinance historic districts were created in 1986 and 1990).
- Subdivide the Bethlehem Steel property for new uses. (This was completed in the 1980s and is now the Pottstown Industrial Complex, housing a variety of industries.)
- Reopen Keim Street from the Industrial Highway to High Street (completed in the 1990s).
- Extend Wilson Street from Farmington Avenue to State Street, connecting central Pottstown to Route 100 (completed in 1990)
- Target vacant land along the Schuylkill River between Route 100 and West Pottsgrove Township for a new industrial park. (It took more than 20 years, but this land was designated a Keystone Opportunity Zone in 1998. Keystone Boulevard was constructed and the 84 Lumber Co. built a truss plant there in 2002. Other land awaits development.)
- Retain the former Reading Railroad station as a transportation center. (The station was rehabilitated as Harleysville National Bank in 1985, but the borough still plans to make the area Pottstown's transportation hub.)

We take for granted such things as our historic districts, Riverfront Park, College Drive and Keystone Boulevard. They were all conceived by ULI more than 30 years ago.

Tomorrow: ULI's 1989 report provides more good ideas.

Thomas Hylton is Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government.

Summary

- Many of Pottstown's most successful development initiatives were first suggested in studies performed by the Urban Land Institute in 1976 and 1989.
- To download pdf copies of the studies, go to www.pottstowncitizens.org. Click on "Pottstown Borough Government" and then click on "strategic plans."