

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Useful dialogue continues

Pottstown Council and the Pottstown School Board will meet 7 tonight at the Montgomery County Community College Sustainability Hub at 140 College Drive, adjacent to the Schuylkill River Greenway Association office.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Council and the School Board have been holding joint workshops three times a year since early in 2012 — a big step forward.

For decades, the borough and the school district operated in their own separate worlds, with very little communication.

But thanks to Borough Manager Mark Flanders and schools superintendent Jeff Sparagana, the two entities are now talking regularly.

So far, the meetings have been mostly informational — which typically avoid difficult but necessary discussions about how to make the best use of our community's resources.

At our February meeting, however, a joint committee was set up to discuss tax incentives.

Two board members and two council members met on their own and reached a consensus on an ordinance to encourage new development that will be adopted by both entities this summer.

As the chart at right shows, the borough and school district spend a huge amount of money for a town of just 22,000 residents.

Half our resources — nearly \$60 million — go to the school district for the education of 3,100 students.

Is that too much? I think so. Pottstown spends more, per student, than two-thirds of the districts in the state.

With a declining tax base, we can't afford that. We have to become more efficient and cut costs.

At the same time, the borough government should

rethink some of its spending practices.

In recent years, borough employees have received wage increases well beyond the rate of inflation.

Meanwhile, our downtown has vacant storefronts, dead trees and stumps. One building at our main intersection has a boarded up display window. The downtown business association's revenue base is declining.

Our major thoroughfares, such as High, Charlotte, and Beech streets, are likewise blighted with dead trees and vacant buildings.

People judge Pottstown on the appearance of these high-traffic areas.

It is through borough-school district joint meetings that we can address these problems and seek solutions.

Pottstown government spending		
2016		
Pottstown School District	\$59,553,150	50%
Pottstown Borough:		
Sewer capital fund	\$9,553,375	8.0%
Sewer fund	\$9,081,439	7.6%
Water fund	\$6,260,400	5.3%
Police	\$5,902,138	5.0%
Water capital fund	\$4,985,235	4.2%
Grant fund	\$6,045,001	5.1%
Trash fund	\$3,003,080	2.5%
Administration	\$2,697,622	2.4%
Employee health benefits	\$2,334,274	2.0%
Capital savings fund	\$1,798,801	1.5%
Pensions	\$1,449,004	1.2%
Fire fund	\$1,470,004	1.2%
Parks	\$1,130,885	.9%
Public works	\$1,097,543	.9%
Licensing, inspections	\$689,383	.6%
Sewer lines fund	\$569,312	.5%
Street repairs fund	\$565,925	.5%
Debt service fund	\$346,342	.3%
Street lighting fund	\$255,876	.2%
Library	\$180,359	.2%
Airport	\$159,685	.1%
Parking Lots	\$79,212	.1%
TOTAL	\$119,207,435	100%