

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

The future Pottstown's key asset: sustainability

At a recent Progress Pottstown luncheon, borough officials expressed optimism about Pottstown's future. In recent weeks, we've reviewed the past. Today we look to the future.

On Tuesday, we listed three major trends over the last five decades that have undermined Pottstown:

1. Downtown shopping was replaced by suburban malls with ample parking.
2. Heavy manufacturing jobs were lost to automation or cheap overseas labor. New jobs opened in suburban office parks.
3. Middle class residents sought new homes on spacious lots outside of town and adopted car-dependent lifestyles.

The future

But life continues to evolve, and what was true in the past may not be true in the future.

There are major economic, demographic, and environmental trends that favor traditional towns like Pottstown.

Economics

The United States has an enormous national debt, higher than any time since the end of World War II. Mandatory spending programs such as Medicare and Social Security, and servicing the debt, increasingly consumes the federal budget.

The economy grew robustly from 1950 to 2000, but it has slowed dramatically since then. Low density sprawling development is extremely costly to build and maintain, and we no longer have the resources to keep building it.

Demographics

Our population is aging. In the last ten years, Pennsylvania's prime

working age population — 20 to 59 — has decreased, while the number of residents 60 and older has increased dramatically. That trend will continue. The percentage of households with school-aged children is declining, and the average size of new homes and apartments is shrinking.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Older people need a lot of medical care. This is costly for Pennsylvania, but good news for Pottstown, which has a regional hospital. As empty nesters downsize, Pottstown's smaller dwelling units and convenient medical facilities become an attractive alternative to the suburbs.

Education

As the cost of college continues to soar, community colleges are increasingly important because of their affordability and flexibility. Pottstown has one of just two community college campuses in Montgomery County

Diversity

Racial diversity is steadily increasing. The era of a non-Hispanic white-majority population is coming to a close. As more people become comfortable with diversity, Pottstown becomes more attractive.

Climate change

The earth is warming, bringing rising ocean levels, violent storms, crop failures, and species extinction.

Unlike the suburbs, Pottstown is environmentally sustainable. Because of its closely spaced mixture of houses, offices and stores, which enable walking, bicycling, and short car and bus trips, Pottstown is far more energy efficient and much less land-consumptive than sprawling development.

Healthy lifestyles

Pottstown's design is good for human health. It facilitates daily exercise.



EDs and MEDs — Colleges and hospitals are the anchor institutions in many cities and towns — including Pottstown. They are among the largest job generators in America, and their importance will continue to grow.