

Pottstown, Pennsylvania

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

October 20–25, 2019



ULI Urban Land
Institute
Advisory Services

Pottstown, Pennsylvania

A Vision to Spur Economic Innovation

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October 20–25, 2019



Urban Land Institute
2001 L Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-4948
uli.org

About the Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 46,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2019 alone, more than 2,400 events were held in about 330 cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

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About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies.

Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives, a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 100 key community representatives, and two days of formulating recommendations. Long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics,

representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

ULI Program Staff

Paul Bernard

Executive Vice President, Advisory Services

Thomas W. Eitler

Senior Vice President, Advisory Services

Deborah Kerson Bilek

Vice President, Advisory Services

Paul Angelone

Director, Advisory Services

Lauren McKim Callaghan

Director, Advisory Services

Jacqueline Canales

Director, Advisory Services

Kelsey Steffen

Director, Advisory Services

Georgia Gempler

Senior Associate, Advisory Services

James A. Mulligan

Senior Editor

Laura Glassman, Publications Professionals LLC

Manuscript Editor

Brandon Weil

Art Director

Deanna Pineda, Muse Advertising Design

Graphic Designer

Craig Chapman

Senior Director, Publishing Operations



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Finally, the panel would like to thank the more than 70 institutional stakeholders, including community members, business and nonprofit leaders, and representatives from Pottstown who shared their perspectives, insights, and experiences with the panel over the week.

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About the Panel

ULI Panel and Project Staff

Panel Chair

Mike Higbee

Vice President, Economic Development
& Community Resiliency
Thomas P. Miller and Associates
Indianapolis, Indiana

Panel Members

Brittany Campagna

President
Inner City Investments
Nashville, Tennessee

James Hardy

Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor for
Integrated Development
City of Akron, Ohio
Akron, Ohio

Jeremy Hurlbutt

Master Planner, The Maryland–National Capital
Park and Planning Commission
Prince George’s County Planning Department
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

Emma Littlejohn

President
emma + co
Charlotte, North Carolina

Donna Schumacher

Architect
Donna Schumacher Architecture
San Francisco, California

Kyle Talente

Vice President and Principal
RKG Associates
Alexandria, Virginia

ULI Project Staff

Deb Kerson Bilek

Vice President, Advisory Services

Kelsey Steffen

Director, Advisory Services

Carly Bushong

Director, Meetings & Events–Business Operations

Rebecca Gale

Journalist



Background, Assignment, and Key Recommendations

A POSTINDUSTRIAL PENNSYLVANIA BOROUGH, Pottstown is facing challenges in how to be economically competitive in the 21st century. The Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation requested that a ULI panel recommend how to create innovative economic development projects that jump-start growth, develop a comprehensive strategy for job enabling and housing in Pottstown, and come up with ways in which such projects could be funded.

Pottstown is located in the tricounty market area, where Montgomery, Berks, and Chester counties connect, and includes the school districts of Pottstown, Daniel Boone, Boyertown, Spring-Ford, Owen J. Roberts, Pottsgrove, and Perkiomen Valley. The tricounty area has a population of 241,550 and is expected to grow slightly, to an estimated 250,000 persons living in the area by 2023.

Pottstown faces greater struggles than its neighbors, including funding its school district. Its education levels are the lowest and poverty levels are the highest in the tricounty region. The industrial boom that gave the city much of its housing stock has struggled to keep pace with modern housing demands,

and many houses cost nearly as much to upgrade or renovate as their overall value. Many of the region's public housing residents have concentrated in Pottstown, and landlords have not always held up their part of the bargain in keeping homes in livable condition.

Nevertheless, Pottstown has resources: a population with pride in the region, a nationally ranked private high school that attracts students from around the globe, a nonprofit hospital with a vast list of open, full-time jobs, a collection of institutions and local leaders committed to improving the borough, and a modern community college campus that continues to grow and attract new students.

ULI's Advisory Services program is pleased to build on its previous work in Pottstown in 1976, 1989, and 2009 in order to continue to provide strategic recommendations focused on helping the borough achieve its vision for the future.

The Panel's Assignment

Pottstown faces high hurdles to economic success in the 21st century. As the rest of Montgomery County gains wealth, Pottstown has fallen behind and seeks ways to become an economic hub for the region.

The Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation went through an intensive and collaborative community engagement effort to develop a scope of work for the Advisory Services panel. Specifically, the panel was asked to address the following possibilities:

- A. Build a catalytic, innovative economic development project that jump-starts growth.
 1. Given Pottstown's residential, retail, employment, and institutional landscape, what sort of catalytic and innovative economic development projects could jump-start growth by increasing economic opportunities and attracting new investment?
 2. Are there precedents for innovative mixed-use projects that could practically unite one or more institutional uses—e.g., public school, senior living, pre-K, health clinic, or social services—with retail, grocery, residential, and other complementary uses in the same building or connected buildings? What development or operational partnerships would make sense or have been successful in project precedents?
 3. How can Pottstown be visionary with such a project? What opportunities and synergies can be found by linking a major institutional use (or a critical mass of smaller institutions) with retail, residential, and other community needs, such as a supermarket? What are the challenges—legal, financial, developmental, operational—to such a project?
 4. What benefits could such a project bring to existing communities and residents? What design elements or programming would best draw in residents and newcomers alike? Aside from direct employment, how could the project support community and entrepreneurialism in a meaningful and continual way?
- B. Develop a comprehensive strategy for “job enabling” in Pottstown.
 1. How can Pottstown embrace recent trends in work, employment, and technology to better enable and support entrepreneurialism? What physical and programmatic interventions make sense to enable more income generation, side work, and entrepreneurship?
 2. How might Pottstown be intentional about job creation to compel existing and new employers to create more jobs? Beyond tax credits and other indirect subsidies, what partnerships, incentives, design interventions, and strategies have been innovative and successful on this front? Which Pottstown assets can be activated toward this goal?
 3. How can Pottstown align its workforce and workforce supports with broader workforce needs and trends? What can the borough and area stakeholders do to better unite employers, educators, and workforce developers with current workers, the unemployed, and communities?
 4. How can Pottstown better activate and use (a) rail lines along the waterfront, and (b) the airport and Circle of Progress developments, given modern trends in retailing, shipping and logistics, light manufacturing, and experience-driven consumption?
- C. Determine financing and implementation strategies for success.
 1. How will the catalytic economic development project be implemented and financed? What critical commitments and milestones must be met to move the project forward?
 2. What opportunities exist to secure sustainable and capacity-expanding financing for Pottstown's economic development entity, Pottstown Area Industrial Development (PAID)? What additional powers, corporate structures, or financing mechanisms can be brought under the PAID umbrella to facilitate its mission?
 3. How might a tax increment financing (TIF) district be applied in Pottstown to cover parts of downtown and the Keystone Employment and Economic Plan (KEEP) footprint, thus enabling significant infrastructure improvements and reroutings?



Train tracks running through downtown Pottstown.

4. What financial strategies can Pottstown use to handle the prohibitively high cost of repair for the borough's system of "stormwater arches"? Could bond revenues under the posited TIF be used? How can the Pottstown Borough Authority (sewer and water authority) be leveraged to assist with stormwater arches, the TIF, road resurfacing, and other potential infrastructure improvements?
 5. What steps are required to achieve a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED ND) certification for the KEEP footprint? How can this commitment be branded to developers and employers as a positive?
- D. Craft a dynamic housing strategy for current residents and the regional workforce.
1. What types of housing investments make the most sense for Pottstown, given the wide range of employment and earnings capacities in and around the borough? What program or policy links can be formed between market-rate, new construction activities aimed at newcomers on the one hand, and rehab, renovation, weatherization, or housing monetization programs for existing residents on the other?
 2. What industries and job types are most prevalent within a 45-minute commute of Pottstown, and how could the borough target these commuter-shed workers as future residents? Absent improvements to the school district, how can the borough attract younger workers, empty nesters, "gig" or "sharing" economy workers, or others that typically do not have children? What price points, design features, and locations would be most attractive to these groups?
 3. How can Pottstown pursue strategies that allow small-scale production in homes or other forms of housing monetization—for instance, live/work units, accessory dwelling units or granny flats, and artist lofts? What sorts of demonstration projects are possible, given the prevalence of upper-floor vacancy downtown, vacant land in the Washington Street neighborhood, and students/workforce trainees clustered around the community college?

4. More broadly, how can Pottstown proactively handle challenges associated with gentrification? How do we maintain affordability and minimize displacement while simultaneously courting growth? How also do we actively link current residents to the new opportunities, spaces, and communities that result from significant urban revival?

This ambitious scope was considered in detail by the panelists throughout their week in Pottstown and remains the foundation of the recommendations formulated in this report. After meeting with key leaders from the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, PAID, and numerous other stakeholders, panelists interpreted the scope of work to formulate bold recommendations toward a community-minded economic development strategy for Pottstown's future. To address the highest-priority needs, panelists prioritized certain elements of the scope to have the most effect in achieving the borough's objective of creating an economic development strategy. The recommendations of this report reflect those priority areas on which the borough should first focus to set itself up for success.

Key Recommendations

Pottstown is not shrinking from the difficult hand it has been dealt. Industry had to leave, and Pottstown has chosen to stand up and move in a different direction. It became evident to the panel during its interviews with community stakeholders that Pottstown has the leadership to make real things happen. This leadership is essential to make catalytic changes, given the borough's limited resources. The panel believes that Pottstown must be efficient and focused to address key priorities and make measurable progress; because the borough has limited resources, calculation and meticulous planning will be required to carry out plans for progress.

The following key recommendations address both solutions to existing challenges and visionary ideas and goals for Pottstown's revitalization:

- Define Pottstown's mission for the future and its identity in the region.
- Consolidate current economic development efforts and focus on acquiring economic data to improve future decision-making.



Pollack Auto Restoration is a local Pottstown business that specializes in classic cars in a 1920s building that has been home to many local businesses over the years. In the early 1900s, the site was a coal and lumber yard.

- Continue investing in Pottstown's existing assets, such as High Street downtown, and focus on redevelopment opportunities at specific sites that have the potential to provide new housing as well as economic and industry opportunities.
- Prepare residents for living-wage jobs through strategic training and educational programming.
- Stabilize, renovate, and diversify the housing stock.
- Explore creative financing options and align the available resources with Pottstown's critical priorities.

"Cities need old buildings," noted Jane Jacobs, a well-known sociologist famous for citizen-led and grassroots planning. "Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings." Such a sentiment is well applied to Pottstown, whose historic charm can be leveraged to become a destination and desirable place to live. The panel believes that such dramatic gains can be made, but to do so, the stakeholders in Pottstown must engage, plan, focus, organize, partner, and innovate.

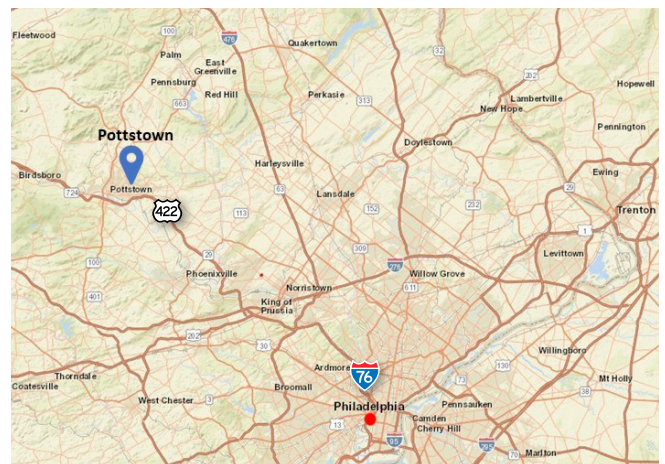


Study Area and Surrounding Context

FORTY MILES WEST OF PHILADELPHIA, Pottstown sits on the edges of Montgomery, Chester, and Berks counties. The borough of Pottstown is centrally located in the Pottstown Metropolitan Region’s planning area and contains the highest-density development in the planning area. The Pottstown Metropolitan Region is composed of Douglass, New Hanover, Lower Pottsgrove, Upper Pottsgrove, and West Pottsgrove townships and Pottstown Borough in Montgomery County, and East Coventry and North Coventry townships in Chester County.

The Schuylkill River runs through the center of Pottstown, separating Montgomery and Chester counties. Although Pottstown is not directly accessible via interstate, it is connected by U.S. 422, a major east–west U.S. highway, and Pennsylvania Route 100, a major north–south state route.

Historically, Pottstown was a metal manufacturing town, first as an iron producer and later as a steel producer, tracing back to the early 1700s. Industry thrived in Pottstown through both World Wars but began its decline after World War II, reflecting increased competition and other national trends away from metal manufacturing.





KELSEY STEFFEN/ULI

The Reading Railroad Pottstown Station now sits vacant at the core of downtown Pottstown. This nationally registered historic building served local rail passengers until the early 1980s.

Pottstown did benefit from rail transport, with steam locomotives running between Reading and Philadelphia with a stop in Pottstown. The trains also carried passengers, which made Pottstown an option for public transit commuters. But since the early 1980s, the train has carried freight only—and not passengers.

According to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, in 2010 Pottstown had some 10,812 jobs. The largest employers in the borough include the Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, the Pottstown School District, the Wal-Mart on Shoemaker Road, and the Hill School. Other major job sources include the Pottstown Borough government, Montgomery County Community College (MCCC), and the county’s social services delivery offices.

Pottstown contains a large number of historic and architecturally distinctive housing units. However, the borough’s older housing stock and limited housing choices have been an ongoing challenge to the redevelopment of Pottstown. As national trends reflect a desire for mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods with modern amenities, Pottstown has struggled to provide this housing typology and attract new residents.

Pottstown’s schools have continuously faced setbacks in funding, which has resulted in an unfortunate perception of school quality in the region and disparity between the borough’s



KELSEY STEFFEN/ULI

Pottstown Wastewater Treatment Facility and industrial complex.

schools and the rest of Montgomery County. Nevertheless, Pottstown Senior High School provides the vocational technical programs for the Pottstown Metropolitan Region and has the potential to provide more vocational services for students interested in such a career path. While more than 90 percent of Pottstown’s school-age population attends Pottstown’s public schools, several private school options exist, including the Hill School, St. Aloysius School, and the Wyndcroft School. The nationally recognized Hill School, a boarding and day school, attracts students from all over the globe, nearly all of whom come from outside the Pottstown regional area.



KELSEY STEFFEN/ULI

Creating a Cohesive Mission

DEVELOPING A CLEAR MISSION can set the stage for increased coordination and communication among Pottstown’s community members. Through interviews and conversations, the panel found that key stakeholders, including political leaders and residents, are unable to effectively execute a coordinated approach to various economic development initiatives because no unified mission has been articulated to guide the borough’s economic direction and no organizational infrastructure exists to carry it out.

If the borough aims to become the primary hub of the region, then it must create a cohesive mission.

The following recommendations are discussed in this section:

- Create a mission.
- Use data to determine the market potential.
- Create a plan to achieve the mission.
- Expand the marketing strategy by dedicating additional professional time toward strategic implementation.

The Importance of Articulating a Mission

Pottstown needs to create a clear, cohesive mission reflecting the economic development needs of the community. To establish this mission, the borough should engage in a well-structured community process in the form of a needs assessment. The needs assessment should use both community experiences and data to guide the development of the mission.

The panel recommends that the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, in coordination with the borough of Pottstown, employ an outside institution to generate the

CREATING A COHESIVE MISSION IN ELKHART, INDIANA

Similar to Pottstown, Elkhart, Indiana, was an industrial manufacturing town that grew and thrived in the late 1800s. But as the nation's economy moved away from manufacturing, the small town east of Chicago recognized an opportunity for change.

Elkhart implemented a Vibrant Community Action Agenda, which prioritized projects, policies, and programs in line with the town's mission. The town also worked to design downtown walkable communities, invest in a new mixed-use River District, and add desirable amenities to create a new cultural experience for residents and visitors. Similar to Pottstown, Elkhart has three Opportunity Zone districts, which became the location of the newly planned mixed-use River District.

Elkhart also invested in technological infrastructure to attract a skilled workforce. The town allocated resources to public transportation and diversified housing, creative educational opportunities, and social services and family support systems.

Elkhart also took steps to move away from an economy concentrated on manufacturing, even though the city had primarily been known for the manufacture and supply of recreational vehicles. To make that shift, Elkhart, in partnership with other major cities in the South Bend–Elkhart region, created the Elkhart IT Sector Partnership, which includes flexible, grant-supported technical skills training for existing employees and community members, including promoting employer brand awareness and offering free tech talent recruitment at Elkhart Career Fairs.

The city came up with a marketing narrative to compete for industries using its existing assets, which are also similar

to those in Pottstown: roads, railway, and access to an interstate highway. Elkhart's narrative is that the city has a long history of being a strong contributor to regional and state economies and continues to be a viable place to do business as an alternative to the nearby, larger cities of Indianapolis or Chicago.

To learn more about the Vibrant Community Action Agenda, visit <https://vibrantelkhartcounty.org/about-vibrant-communities>.

To learn more about the Elkhart IT Sector Partnership, visit www.itsectorpartnership.org.



To attract a skilled workforce, Elkhart invested in technology infrastructure, including diversified housing and educational opportunities. Elkhart has existing assets similar to those in Pottstown—including roads, railway, and proximity to an interstate highway—that it used to market itself as a desirable place to live.

needs assessment. The panel suggests the borough consider partnering with a nearby university for this undertaking to reduce costs. Such an assessment will target businesses and institutions that generate desirability to live, work, and invest in Pottstown. Such an assessment will help the borough identify and fully leverage its assets.

The panel also recommends that PAID, Pottstown's economic development agency, be tasked with organizing groups that

directly reflect the community voice, political leadership, and institutional stakeholders. By focusing the efforts and designating one organization in charge of the effort, from hiring the professionals to setting up a calendar of events to implementing the strategies, Pottstown will be able to gather groups and information as well as have the accountability to make sure the tasks are accomplished.

Use Data to Determine the Market Potential

To become a marketable destination, job hub, and desirable place to live, Pottstown must establish its role in the region by gaining a crucial understanding of its market reach. To achieve this, the panel recommends that PAID, in partnership with the borough of Pottstown, gather comprehensive business and demographic data and conduct a thorough analysis of the borough's socioeconomics and real estate market to help determine its market competitiveness. With this information, Pottstown can then develop actionable and measurable goals that align with its mission.

To focus the borough's economic goals, the panel recommends that PAID, in coordination with the borough of Pottstown, identify three key economic pillars to focus on. The pillars represent the specific economic areas that Pottstown can collectively agree to put its energy into achieving as part of its new economic mission and identity.

Given Pottstown's accessible location to businesses, including retail, restaurants, and personal services, and to recreation, the panel recommends the borough choose pillars that are focused on defining the borough's status as a regional "hub." Possible areas of focus include the following:

- A regional health care hub;
- An educational hub;
- A recreational tourism destination;
- A tricounty retail and entertainment district; and
- A hospitality-focused visitor destination.

Identification of the borough's role in the regional and multistate marketplace should be determined through community planning and strategic thinking in addition to the recommended data analysis.

Create a Plan to Achieve the Mission

As Pottstown seeks to promote itself as a desirable place to live, visit, and invest in, the panel recommends keeping three questions in mind: Why does someone live here, why does someone want to visit, and how can they be enticed to spend their money? These three driving questions create a foundation for articulating a clear mission that can underpin a path forward.

The panel recommends that the borough of Pottstown take the time to articulate a mission based on the extensive

community engagement that has occurred thus far. The borough should also devise and document a tangible plan with concrete, actionable steps that serve the mission based on the opportunities identified through the market analysis and community goals. This plan, written to specifically achieve the mission developed through the efforts previously described, should address the wants of the community with clear action items, which include timelines for implementation. It should also include ideas for diversified funding streams, which are discussed in later sections of the report. The borough should include Montgomery County in this effort and inquire about potential funding available.

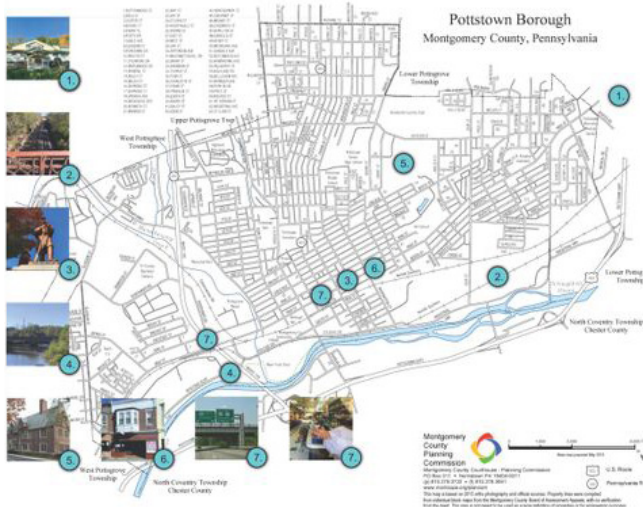
Expand the Marketing Strategy

The panel recommends that PAID expand its marketing program and hire professionals to assist with strategies and implementation centered on a unified message. PAID should coordinate with Montgomery County on this effort for potential funding and to incorporate opportunities to market the borough across the region. The proactive marketing strategy can include



The Pottstown water tower can be seen throughout the borough and should be considered as a potential location for future place branding.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION / FLICKR



DONNA SCHUMACHER/ULI

As Pottstown determines where to put signage, the panel recommends developing an asset map, like this one, to take stock of its best assets to attract visitors. Once the map is created, it could be distributed in the community to be used as a visitors guide map.

prominent markers for place branding in coordination with the gateway signage recommendations provided later in the report.

The panel recommends the following locations for place branding:

- Riverfront Gateway;
- The water tower, located on Jackson Street at Sheridan Street;
- Gateway Tourism and Recreation District (TRec District); and
- Circle of Progress Industrial Office Center.

Pedestrian-scale signage can also be used to communicate the brand at street level, such as banners for Main Street and small-scale signs to identify town assets. The panel recommends that Pottstown create a new asset map that focuses solely on the town assets that will attract visitors to the community. This asset map should be visually appealing, easy to read, and easily accessed by the public.

Proactive marketing can also be used to bolster annual events, such as Holiday Lights, Go Fourth!, and Oktoberfest.

Boosting Economic Development in Pottstown

POTTSTOWN HAS NO SHORTAGE OF PRIDE. Local businesses that have made Pottstown their home have strong ties to the community; however, the borough needs and wants to retain these existing businesses and attract new business to continue to grow its economy.

Several organizations are involved in economic development activity, but there is little coordination among these groups and no clear leader or point of contact. Current economic decisions are being made with imperfect data, and the borough, PAID, and other stakeholders need to do more to engage existing businesses in Pottstown. Moreover, information sharing and collaboration are inconsistent, leading to challenges in messaging, inefficient actions, and overlapping efforts. Similar to the challenges around mission and cohesion, no formal plan exists for business engagement and economic development, which must be addressed in unambiguous terms for Pottstown to reach its economic development goals.

The following recommendations are discussed in this section:

- Define PAID as the point of contact and coordinator for all economic development initiatives.
- Coordinate and engage with implementation partners.
- Collect, process, and synthesize data.
- Create a business community outreach strategy.
- Provide assistance to existing companies.



TODD PALMER/VIRTUAL FARM CREATIVE

"I Pick Pottstown" is a campaign led by PAID that promotes Pottstown businesses and features success stories to attract new businesses.

Define PAID as the Point of Contact and Coordinator

Currently, several organizations are involved in economic development activities. Panelists observed little or no overarching coordination among these entities. Furthermore, panelists repeatedly heard from stakeholders that “it is hard to do business” in Pottstown. This is in part owing to contradictory policies and a general lack of clarity about which government entity—the borough, the county, or the state—is responsible for creating and enforcing regulations. Stakeholders specifically noted messy inspection processes and imbalanced enforcement procedures for landowners and developers. The panel therefore recommends that Pottstown clearly define

which entity is the single point of contact and coordinator for all economic development initiatives.

The panel recommends that Pottstown define PAID, and by proxy PAID’s executive director, as the primary point of contact for all business retention, expansion, and recruitment efforts. Proactive outreach to all partners and stakeholders should reinforce this decision and establish buy-in. All existing businesses, partners, and prospective business and project representatives can be directed to communicate with the PAID executive on all business retention, expansion, and recruitment efforts. PAID can document the reasons for choosing (or not choosing) Pottstown as a place to do business. Such information, when collected, can become a powerful data source for making future economic development decisions in the borough.

PAID is the logical choice to boost as a leadership entity to spearhead Pottstown’s economic development. However, the current organizational structure of PAID requires improvements, investments, and expansion to be set up for success.

The panel recommends the following actions to boost PAID’s role in the region:

- Increase staff capacity within specific disciplines: real estate development, development finance, housing, business retention and expansion, and research.
- Establish transparent accountability metrics for PAID as an organization, and align these with the five-year growth strategy and overall economic development mission and plan.
- Leverage PAID’s existing board by adding voices and representation from housing, workforce, and resident-led entities, ensuring always that the private sector retains a majority of seats.

GARY, INDIANA, PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO BUSINESS SCHOOL

Gary partnered with the University of Chicago Business School to create the UChicago-Gary Urban Revitalization Project. The project is structured to allow business school students to investigate and come up with solutions to address economic problems in Gary, such as neighborhood blight, cleanup, economic development, and future planning. This project benefits both entities. The city gets to take advantage of some of the top business students in the country, and the students get real-world urban planning experience, the opportunity to work with city officials, and a chance to put their education to use in a real-world setting. For more information, visit www.uchicago.edu/features/graduate_students_take_on_policy_challenges_in_gary.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION/FELICKR

Sly Fox Brewing has made Pottstown home with a brewery and restaurant located in the Circle of Progress business park. The brewery could be a key partner in promoting the borough and downtown to its regional visitors.

- Establish a five-year growth strategy for PAID.
- Maintain and strengthen the new contribution-based vested board.
- Approach local business schools, such as Wharton, and develop a formal partnership in which PAID can use the expertise of faculty and students to fill gaps at PAID.
- Connect with ULI Philadelphia members to bolster PAID's expertise.
- Continue to require that PAID board members are financially vested, as has been the practice since 2019.
- Conduct quarterly networking events for business owners and investors.
- Host an annual networking event for real estate investors and developers.
- Work with the Hill School and Hobart's Run to expand the Investor's Forum to include PAID and broaden the discussion to include economic development throughout the borough.

Coordinate and Engage with Implementation Partners

Pottstown suffers from inconsistent methods of information sharing and collaboration, leading to challenges in messaging and efficient action. With PAID firmly established as the borough's economic development leader, the panel recommends improving the proactive engagement of implementation partners at the local, regional, and state levels. In addition, PAID should increase engagement with real estate professionals operating in the marketplace; coordinate closely with the chamber of commerce on business retention, networking, and investor attraction; and establish project-specific working groups with implementation partners.

The panel recommends the following actions:

- Conduct quarterly and semi-annual coordination meetings with (a) economic development colleagues in surrounding municipalities and (b) staff that represent municipal planning and economic development for the borough.

Collect, Process, and Synthesize Data

Currently, economic development decisions are being made in Pottstown with imperfect data, and communication among stakeholders is fractured. Because some of the most critical and impactful decisions around Pottstown's economic future will be land-based, the collection and maintenance of accurate data about land and real estate transactions will be crucial for success.

The panel recommends that Pottstown implement specific procedures to collect, process, and synthesize data, and that PAID, in conjunction with the borough manager, lead this effort. Further, the panel recommends that the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation and the borough of Pottstown commit to a partnership with MCCC to hire students to track demographic, economic, and housing data longitudinally and maintain a shareable database of borough indicators.

The panel recommends the following specific actions to make data collection, processing, and synthesis as smooth as possible:



KELSEY STEFFEN/ULI

Rivsters on High is one of the newer businesses that has opened along High Street in downtown.

- Use local providers as well as national sources for socioeconomic data.
- Maintain for-sale and for-lease inventory, both at a physical location and online.
- Create a comprehensive list of real estate professionals and stakeholders, and then use proactive outreach to larger property owners and real estate brokers to spur connection and keep informed of economic development in the region.
- Pinpoint a lead in the borough to ensure all property data are current and accurate.

Create a Business Community Outreach Strategy

The panel recommends that PAID, the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation partner to create a comprehensive, consistent business community outreach strategy. Such a strategy will keep business leaders from feeling that the community only engages when asking for something specific. A communication strategy that creates a two-way structure will foster a stronger relationship between business leaders and local constituents and can help align the goals of the business community with those of the local residents.

The panel recommends the following actions to create that outreach strategy:

- Host annual town hall meetings.
- Use social media and other no-cost mediums to share community information.
- Create and distribute a monthly newsletter to track economic development events, successes, and challenges.
- Present to eight to 10 community groups each year on what economic development is, how it works, and community value; invite business owners to present stories on how they have benefited from economic development efforts or PAID assistance.
- Create an informational “Economic Development 101” video that can reach additional constituencies beyond the eight to 10 community groups identified above.
- Implement a volunteer development program to build capacity in advocates, ambassadors, and mentors as contributors to the efforts described, capitalizing on the existing spirit of volunteerism found throughout the borough. These community members can contribute to the overall mission of economic development, community improvement, or business health for Pottstown.

Provide Assistance to Existing Companies

Although business outreach is a core function of PAID’s mission, the borough, PAID, and other stakeholders must do more to engage existing businesses. The panel therefore recommends that PAID actively provide value-add assistance



DEB KERSON BLEKVULT

Many small and growing businesses have set up their storefronts in downtown Pottstown along High Street, bringing more eyes to the street and increasing local and regional interest in the unique downtown.

to the companies that already exist or are struggling to succeed in the borough. Panelists took note of the impressive spirit of volunteerism throughout Pottstown and recommend that peer-to-peer assistance and networking throughout the business community would be valuable both to assist struggling businesses and to create a wider network that promotes collaboration among business leaders.

The panel recommends that PAID implement an annual business survey and establish monthly business retention and expansion visit minimums. Given the wide availability of collaborative partners, such as MCCC, outreach efforts, liaison assistance, and technical expertise should be easily available, once the connections have been made.

The panel also recommends that PAID establish a part-time ombudsman position to assist in navigating the borough's approval and permitting process, thereby speeding the creation of new businesses and reducing hurdles to business growth.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION/FICKER

Catalytic Economic Development Opportunities

ULI WAS TASKED WITH IDENTIFYING a “catalytic, innovative economic development project that jump-starts growth.” Several factors influence what “catalytic” means in terms of the community’s economic development priorities. The panel learned that location within the borough affects which priority is most valued. In other words, the Advisory Services process revealed that no single project or location within the borough transcends other alternatives. As a result, the panel identified several opportunities that offer different benefits to the community.

When considering the sponsor’s questions related to catalytic investments, the panel considered the following parameters:

- What locations have the greatest market potential for (re) investment?
- What development options are viable within the borough?
- How are different areas of the borough best positioned in the context of the overall strategy?
- Which opportunities provide the greatest fiscal and economic benefits to the borough?
- How can environmentally sensitive areas be best activated?

- How can investment projects effectuate support activities to economic development (i.e., workforce development, aging in place, access to social services)?
- How can new investments benefit quality of life for all Pottstown residents and businesses?

The following recommendations highlight both catalytic concepts and specific locations within the borough that offer unique opportunities to inspire additional investment. In certain cases, the catalytic project is partnered with a specific location. These instances reflect the panel’s perspective that certain locations are uniquely situated to accommodate specific uses. That said, each of the sites and concepts presented here reflect



The panel recommends catalytic projects throughout Pottstown to spur economic development.

the comprehensive work that the panel did across each of the focus areas detailed in this report. Thus, the entire Pottstown community should use these recommendations as a guideline to prioritize investment efforts and focus.

The following recommendations, including recommendations for each of the potential catalytic sites, are discussed in this section.

- Improve downtown Pottstown through continued investment.
- Enhance the recreation tourism market.
- Recommendations for the potential catalytic project sites.

Improve Downtown Pottstown through Continued Investment

The panel acknowledges that Pottstown has put a great deal of effort into creating an attractive downtown, with high-quality retail and dining options. The panel recommends that the borough of Pottstown, in coordination with a merchants association, build on this success and focus on filling existing vacant retail spaces in the 400 blocks of High Street and complete the retail corridor.

Pottstown can also improve the walking experience along the downtown corridor in several ways, such as the following:

- Bring businesses to the vacant retail fronts on High Street. These businesses should have “eyes on the street” through front-facing, transparent windows, allowing visitors to see in.
- Install temporary streetscape features to draw foot traffic to currently vacant locations, such as miniparks or outdoor activity stations. As businesses fill in these spaces over time, the temporary streetscape features can be removed.
- Continue efforts to improve the pedestrian environment, with street walls and wayfinding signage that naturally guide a visitor to the High Street corridor.

Currently, travelers could drive through Pottstown without learning that there is a vibrant downtown along High Street. The panel therefore recommends that the borough of Pottstown, in partnership with the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation and other private contributors, such as the Hill School or the Pottstown Hospital, invest in gateway signage that would strengthen downtown’s presence through



Businesses along High Street activate the streetscape and continue to bring new patrons to downtown Pottstown. Finding ways to temporarily activate spaces where vacant storefronts still exist is an interim solution to help bring eyes to the street and improve the overall pedestrian experience.

developmental gateways to guide people from the major state highways and routes to the downtown core. The gateway signage should communicate the brand of the town and be inviting. Pottstown should also consider the photogenic nature of the gateway signage, so that people can take photos and selfies of the signs with the option to share on social media, using the hashtag #IPickPottstown.

The panel recommends the installation of signage at the following locations:

- On or next to the Hanover Street bridge to welcome visitors to Pottstown and define the riverfront corridor;



By adding wayfinding signage, like this example in Augusta, Georgia, Pottstown can promote local areas of interest that might not be directly visible on High Street.



Consistent and coordinated branding efforts could help create a stronger identity for downtown Pottstown.

- Route 100 and King Street western downtown gateway—design and build a gateway element at the intersection that draws people into the downtown.
- Eastern downtown gateway—highlight the landmarks of the town with directional signage for major businesses or landmarks, such as SunnyBrook Ballroom signage on High Street, or the Hill School and Pottstown co-branding on the water tower.

The panel also recommends that the borough of Pottstown promote and partner with key local businesses, including Tower Health, the Hill School, and MCCC, and notable Pottstown attractions, such as the riverfront, carousel, and TRec District. As Pottstown works to create and attract new development, efforts should be made to create better visual and multimodal connections between the economic hubs and Memorial and Riverfront parks. The panel further recommends that Pottstown strengthen the connection between downtown and the Hill School and the Pottstown Hospital either by offering a shuttle service or by developing streetscapes to guide users of the school and hospital to the businesses downtown.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION/FLICKR

Memorial Park has many recreational amenities, including this splash park. The panel recommends that Pottstown create better visual and multimodal connections between the park and the borough's economic hubs.

Panelists heard that the current rear-in parking on High Street was unpopular and produced congestion, as people waited for cars to park before moving forward. Therefore, the panel recommends that the borough implement front-in angled parking on High Street. Front-in angled parking also allows for more spaces and will be better for drivers, bikers, and businesses. Pottstown should also aim to encourage visitors to downtown on any mode of transportation. Panelists suggest that the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation embark on a campaign to encourage residents to use multimodal transportation options to access downtown.

Enhance the Recreation Tourism Market

The panel recommends that Pottstown, and specifically PAID, consider the following options to enhance the recreational tourism market:

- Nurture and expand the entertainment and dining industry.
- Focus hotel development in a centralized lodging corridor.
- Consider a sports complex in the KEEP site east.

Nurture and Expand the Entertainment and Dining Industry

The panel recommends that Pottstown nurture and expand the entertainment and dining industry that has already blossomed in the area. Pottstown can do so by retaining and supporting the existing restaurants and entertainment venues through strategic marketing and encouraging the continued development of the entertainment and dining scene in downtown Pottstown. For example, the borough should market unique venues like the Blue Elephant and High Street Station, which have the ability to draw new patrons to Pottstown and provide an opportunity for



DEB KERSON/BILEK/ULI

The panel recommends that Pottstown switch its current parking from rear-in to front-in, which would reduce congestion and provide more parking spaces.

these new visitors to see and experience the other businesses emerging in the borough.

Focus Hotel Development in a Centralized Lodging Corridor

If Pottstown wants to attract tourists, it must provide more lodging options for visitors. The panel recommends that Pottstown focus hotel and hospitality development in the TRec District/western gateway to bridge gaps in the western gateway and connect the KEEP, U.S. 422, Route 100, and downtown.

Consider a Sports Complex in KEEP Site East

For a longer-term investment, the panel recommends that in developing the KEEP site, Pottstown should allocate 20 to 30 acres of the site for recreational tourism, such as box soccer/lacrosse fields or softball/baseball diamonds in the 100-year floodplain. Panelists acknowledge that Montgomery County's Tourism Board completed a feasibility study that identified the potential for a competitive athletic complex in Pottstown and support this use for the site.

The eastern portion of the site is a logical place for the fields, because it provides a connection to Riverfront Park, Memorial Park, and downtown entertainment and dining. The panel also recommends that Pottstown explore placing a lodging cluster on the western portion of the KEEP site, which could be connected to the western gateway area.

If Pottstown opts to invest in family-friendly tourism, the borough can also explore the feasibility of adding a children's museum to the area.

CASE STUDY: ERIEBANK SPORTS PARK, ERIE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Like Pottstown, Erie County, Pennsylvania, was seeking catalytic economic development projects to revitalize the region and looked to recreational tourism to achieve this effort.

To pursue the development of a sports facility that would ultimately generate revenue for the county by attracting sports-tourism-related events, the county created a nonprofit corporation for the sole purpose of developing a multisport complex in Erie. The nonprofit named G.R.E.A.T.T., which stands for Greater Regional Erie Athletic Team Training Inc., partnered with ErieBank to purchase an existing sports park and conduct a \$9.1 million renovation of the facility. The investment in the complex would not only serve local youth sports, but also elevate the facility to attract sports tourism through statewide and national-level tournaments, bringing visitors and tourism dollars to Erie County.

The renovated sports park includes a double-pad ice arena, eight natural and artificial soccer/lacrosse/football fields, a four-season indoor turf dome training facility, a four-court professional basketball and volleyball gymnasium, and a four-diamond baseball park with artificial infields.

ErieBank is supporting the park through financing as well as donations of funds to G.R.E.A.T.T. for the purchase and redevelopment of the sports park. In addition to the ERIEBANK funding, G.R.E.A.T.T. received a \$3 million grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and a \$500,000 grant from the Summit Township Industrial and Economic Development Authority. The Erie County Council approved loans of up to \$6.2 million to the organization through the Erie County Community Financing Authority. (For more information see www.eriebank.bank/Who-We-Are/news/g-r-e-a-t-t-completes-purchase-of-family-first;-f.)



GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

The ErieBank Sports Park provides an example of a recreational tourism investment project in Erie, Pennsylvania. The panel recommends that Pottstown explore a similar path to the development of this type of amenity and consider its placement on the eastern portion of the KEEP site.

Recommendations for the Potential Catalytic Project Sites

Following are discussions of the recommendations for each of the potential catalytic sites.

KEEP Site East

The panel recommends that in developing the KEEP site, Pottstown should allocate 20 to 30 acres for recreational tourism in the 100-year floodplain. The eastern portion of the site is a logical place for the fields, because it provides a connection to Riverfront Park, Memorial Park, and downtown entertainment and dining. The panel also recommends that Pottstown explore placing a lodging cluster on the western portion of the KEEP site, which could be connected to the western gateway area.

KEEP Site West

The western portion of the KEEP site (including the portion in West Pottsgrove) is less affected by the 100-year floodplain and is closer to existing commercial/industrial uses. The western side is therefore more suited to additional mixed-use and traditional job creation uses and is also well suited to accommodate new business class and nationally flagged leisure hotels. This portion of the site's potential will be enhanced by completing Keystone Boulevard and connecting it to Grosstown Road and U.S. 422.

Hess Site

The Hess site is an ideal location for a larger mixed-use development to connect the Schuylkill River and Riverfront Park to downtown. As outlined in the Schuylkill River Greenway's master plan, the addition of commercial and residential development would complement the activity on the former Mrs.



KELSEY STEFFEN/WULI

The Schuylkill River trail runs along the KEEP site, a key redevelopment site that could provide increased connections between the riverfront recreational activities and downtown.

Smith's site. The site can catalyze greater investment between the Riverfront Gateway and downtown, particularly on the former train station site (currently leased by MCCC). The panel recommends that this project should clearly define the corner with the built environment (buildings or gateway feature to connect riverfront and downtown).

Circle of Progress

The Circle of Progress remains the prominent business/ industrial site within the borough. The panel recommends that Pottstown encourage continued marketing of vacant buildings and development sites within the park and target mid-level businesses in this effort. The borough should also continue to allow new and creative uses to utilize space within the Circle of Progress following trends such as the conversion of office buildings to other uses. In addition, highlighting existing businesses like Sly Fox Brewing, which has regional recognition, could attract future employers to the business/ industrial park as they create a potential amenity for employees.

East High Street

The panel recommends that Pottstown encourage greater activation of High Street from MCCC to the hospital. Stakeholders showed substantial interest in focusing on developing a strategy to reactivate the storefronts along High, encouraging business use to extend the pedestrian connectivity and commercial viability in the eastern portion of downtown. More strategically, activating the eastern half of High Street would improve connections between Pottstown Hospital/ Tower Health and the Sunnybrook event facility and the dining/ entertainment district.



MICHAEL STOKES/FICKR

Business Growth and Workforce Development

IF THE BOROUGH IS TO BECOME AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE FOR BUSINESS GROWTH, the workforce must be prepared for jobs that increasingly require digital skills and postsecondary training.

As in other postindustrial communities, many Pottstown residents are unprepared with the skills to compete for and fill jobs in the current and future economy. This challenge can be traced to longstanding trends in an underfunded school district as well as a transient population with lower educational attainment levels than elsewhere in the region. This is illustrated in Pottstown's current high school graduation rate, which sits at 67 percent, and reading and math proficiency at 55 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Current educational data show that in Pottstown, over 16 percent of residents 18 to 24 years of age do not have a high school diploma or GED, and the number jumps to nearly 25 percent for males.

The panel recommends that Pottstown focus on bridging the educational gap in the borough through workforce development initiatives that are focused on building the capacity of existing residents. The panel also recommends that the borough open its doors as a place that is friendly to entrepreneurs and provides supportive space and amenities to people looking to bring new business to Pottstown.

The following recommendations are discussed in this section:

- Create a community-wide workforce initiative, led by the TriCounty Community Network (TCN).
- Initiate an entrepreneurial development program.

THE WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITY

It is unlikely that Pottstown will be able to “grow its way out” of the challenges faced by its existing workforce. Jobs in the region are growing increasingly reliant on specialized knowledge and technological skills. The borough’s population growth has remained flat for at least a decade, and even with growth in the surrounding region, the panel believes that it is not realistic for Pottstown to rely on talent attraction alone to solve this systemic challenge. The good news is that innate talent is not determined by race, gender, or zip code, and a number of the recommendations outlined in this report will give Pottstown a plan forward to build and maintain a robust workforce and tax base by investing in its own residents and giving them opportunities to succeed in the future economy.

Create a Community-Wide Workforce Initiative

Pottstown’s most valuable asset is its people. Investing in its people to create a robust workforce is one of the best ways Pottstown can remain competitive in a 21st-century job market.

Through conducting stakeholder interviews, the panel identified the following gaps that must be filled to maximize workforce potential:

- Centralized recruitment, intake, and placement effort of Pottstown residents into the most appropriate service provider;



Pottstown Hospital is one of the borough’s major employers, with a consistently long list of job openings. The panel recommends that Pottstown focus on training programs to equip residents to fill jobs like those available at the hospital.



The Hill School should be one of the key partners in the development of a workforce initiative.

- Data collection and sharing; and
- Job coaching and postemployment services.

The panel recommends that TCN become the backbone organization of the workforce initiative. Working in conjunction with PAID, TCN should develop clear and discrete goals and metrics that address the gaps in workforce development. The goals can be big; however, the panel recommends that the initiative establish micro targets to track progress along the way. Input on the development of these goals and metrics should be made by collaborating entities through a formal, professionally facilitated process led by TCN. All entities in the workforce continuum must work toward these established goals to receive grant funding or other support from TCN or PAID under the workforce initiative. These entities should include the following:

- MontCoWorks: Montgomery County Intermediate Unit;
- Regional employers;
- Pottstown School District, particularly the career and technical sciences program;
- Montgomery County Community College;
- The Hill School;
- Nonprofit providers; and
- Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness (PEAK).

Initiate an Entrepreneurial Development Program

The panel’s assessment of Pottstown revealed that the community is best positioned to attract small to medium-sized businesses (i.e., 50 and fewer employees). This is in line

CASE STUDY: COLLEGE AND CAREER ACADEMY IN AKRON, OHIO

As part of an effort to connect high school students with meaningful educational opportunities that will prepare them for a career upon graduation, College and Career Academy programs have gained prominence in around the country, including Akron, Ohio.

In Akron, the College and Career Academy program connects students with opportunities to pursue their interests and passions related to high-demand careers, such as those in health care, information technology, or manufacturing. Students choose which area they want to study and then work collaboratively with business and education leaders to design an academic plan to pursue those interests. Lessons become relevant and directly linked to a student's postsecondary plan, which in turn increases academic achievement, attendance, and graduation rates.

General courses such as math, English, science, and social studies are still taught, but are done so through the theme of the academy (i.e., health care). The program begins as early as ninth grade, where incoming freshmen explore what their academy program options are, even visiting college campuses and local businesses to see what a good fit could be. During a student's freshman year, an academy pathway is chosen for the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade years, analogous to choosing a college major.

The smaller classrooms help foster a sense of community, and the focus on real-world life skills increases engagement and interest. The program also includes job shadowing and internships, better preparing students for their careers as they approach graduation. Focusing on real, high-wage job opportunities in the region will further help graduates of Akron Public Schools find a sustainable career, with opportunities for growth, whether in college or a career.

The Career and College Academy Support Network (CCASN), out of the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley in California, provides resources and programming for any school district to plan and implement a career academy of its own. CCASN's website offers guides, templates, a curriculum database, and videos that educators can access. CCASN has estimated its teams have worked with hundreds of thousands of students in over 20 states, improving high school outcomes and helping students, particularly low-income students and students of color, improve their career readiness upon graduation.

Visit <https://ccaa.akronschools.com> to learn more.

with historical successes, as both Pottstown and Western Montgomery County have a rich history of developing and nurturing home-grown businesses started by local entrepreneurs, such as Mrs. Smith's Pies.

The panel recommends that PAID initiate an entrepreneurial development program in coordination with a nearby university or the Hill School. The program's focus should be on entrepreneurs from any sector and not exclusively on a specific industry.

Pottstown has shown great initiative and insight into national trends by considering a life sciences incubator. However, the panel recommends against continuing such an exclusive approach, because it is more speculative and riskier than a more grassroots or catch-all approach to developing entrepreneurial talent. It will be people, and not industries, that propel Pottstown's economic growth forward.

Specifically, the panel recommends that the entrepreneurial development program focus on the following:

- Targeting young (under 40 years old) and minority entrepreneurs;
- Partnering with regional higher education institutions (i.e., institutions in Philadelphia and Wilmington) to market to recent baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate graduates;
- Building on the borough's existing strengths as a burgeoning downtown by identifying physical space to provide cost sharing (i.e., reception support) and idea sharing;
- Assessing the potential to expand to a more robust incubator or coworking space; and
- Developing a strategy to attract investors by tying into regional angel investor networks and/or local investors.

PAID, in partnership with the S.T.R.I.V.E. Initiative, should actively reach out to both young and minority entrepreneurs to bring their business ideas to the borough. The outreach efforts should include connecting and marketing to the higher education institutions nearby and providing physical space for cost and idea sharing, like many of the incubator or coworking facilities thriving around the country.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMM. / ISSOVI FICKER

Housing Strategies

A KEY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN POTTSTOWN lies in its ability to attract new residents, retain current ones, and provide homes for people that will allow for a broad, strong tax base to support the existing services. If the borough is to attract new residents, there must be a clear understanding of what the current housing inventory is. This will allow Pottstown to identify areas for rehabilitation and renovation, and opportunities for new construction that will complement the existing character of the community, while also providing new housing options that have not existed previously. Pottstown also has room to improve on its ability to market existing housing options, as well as identify the opportunities that exist for redevelopment to the surrounding region.

The panel made a series of recommendations to help Pottstown diversify its housing stock. The following housing-related recommendations are discussed in this section:

- Create a housing inventory plan.
- Grow the housing inventory.
- Create a housing resource center.

Create a Housing Inventory Plan

A full inventory of the existing housing, done in cooperation with a land planner, will help Pottstown determine which properties could be rehabilitated or renovated, which ones

should be given historic designation, and which should be considered for new development. Analysis of the inventory data can also identify which units would be ideal for auxiliary units, such as accessory dwelling units, and possible live/work units, which add to the variety of options.

The inventory should be coordinated with the newly formed Pottstown Housing Coalition. The group can establish and accelerate a development plan with this information. Such a plan can help protect key housing assets to ensure that as Pottstown renovates, inadvertent displacement of existing residents does not occur and a wide range of affordable options remains available.

Grow the Housing Inventory

Pottstown must grow its housing inventory, both through new construction and existing home improvements, to increase the number of residents in the borough. By increasing the number of Pottstown residents, the borough can increase its tax base, not only to support economic development and downtown retail, but also to fund support services that are needed by many residents. The panel identified several opportunity areas where new housing could be supported. Where vacant parcels, spaces over commercial development downtown, or housing units that could be rehabilitated exist, with a coordinated strategy, Pottstown could unlock underused assets to generate new housing opportunities.

The panel recommends that Pottstown use its acquired housing inventory data to identify and prioritize properties for rehabilitation, renovation, and construction and decrease the time for construction by making the process of obtaining permits and inspections easier and faster.

To address challenges associated with the existing housing stock, the panel recommends the borough accelerate the permit issuance and inspection processes to decrease construction time and costs, thus creating incentives for prospective developers, investors, and end users to pursue renovation and rehabilitation projects. This same notion applies to historic homes and homes of architectural significance. By creating incentives through reduced time and cost, the borough can increase the pool of potential developers and investors. One way the panel recommends reducing time is to create a guide tool to the permitting and development process that would be available online.

The panel also noted that renovation opportunities exist not only in the traditional neighborhood areas of the borough, but also in the commercial districts where several housing opportunities exist above commercial spaces. Encouraging the renovation of these units would provide additional diversity in the housing stock and increase population and walkability in a mixed-use setting.

The panel further recommends that the borough identify potential redevelopment sites for mixed-use residential projects. Mixed-use residential projects can increase density, which promotes walkability and keeps prices down to make attractive homes more affordable for new residents. The borough should encourage mixed-use buildings to provide a variety of housing

stock typologies to maintain diversity and address a variety of the housing needs identified in the recommended housing inventory plan.

Such housing typologies could include the following:

- Rental homes designed for seniors, with ground-floor retail, possibly a grocery option;
- For-sale condominiums, both new construction and conversions, that increase density downtown, and along High Street and the gateway site;
- Co-living, single-room occupancy units, and community housing—options that can increase residential density downtown and accommodate a variety of community needs, as they do in Washington, D.C., where they are common and prove very attractive to millennials; and
- Student housing, which, working in conjunction with MCCC, should also take into account transportation needs of students, including between campus locations.

Each of these housing units can be paired with amenities that will serve the property residents and the greater community. Such amenities could include a daycare, grocery center/food co-op that addresses food insecurity and the scarcity of retail grocery options, or other nonprofits offering supportive services to residents.

The panel recommends the following potential redevelopment sites for mixed-use residential projects: the dairy property (abandoned property near the YWCA); the KEEP site (which is further described in the previous section of this report); the site where Americas Best Value Inn Hotel currently sits; TRec District properties; and vacant church properties.

Create a Housing Resource Center

Currently, no central organizing entity exists to showcase the housing and real estate options for Pottstown. The panel recommends that Pottstown create a presence for market-rate and below-market-rate housing investment opportunities through the establishment of a housing resource center. This center should represent all housing entities and people in the community and be a collaborative effort among the borough, key stakeholders, major employers, the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, and the real estate community. The panel suggests that the Pottstown Housing Coalition take on the role of lead agency in the center's development.

This housing resource center would be housed in a storefront located downtown in a high-visibility area. The housing resource center should also have an active online presence. Real estate brokers, both locally and nationally, should be able to access it. The housing resource center would include blighted property, both foreclosed and abandoned, that people can buy and renovate. It would also connect contractors with potential construction opportunities. The housing resource center would also be a place where the borough could advertise itself as an affordable place to live. Pottstown has the lowest median home cost in the region at \$143,000. With a growing downtown and proximity to multiple job markets, Pottstown's affordability in the region should be marketed as an opportunity.

The housing resource center will need a full-time staff person, who can be supported by an intern. Panelists recommend partnering with a neighboring university, ULI, or other entity offering a master's in real estate program to establish a regular internship program that can support the housing resource center.

CO-LIVING AT COMMON IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Co-living options are on the rise in communities across the United States. Common, a co-living space in two of Washington, D.C.'s downtown neighborhoods, offers a fully furnished private living space with a shared kitchen, cleaning services, amenities, and shared space for lounging and working. In addition to taking care of the amenities, services, and furniture, Common fosters a community atmosphere, marketing the location as one where "like-minded people can thrive." For a place like Pottstown that is looking to attract more people to the area, many of whom may not be ready to purchase or rent a home, co-living can be an attraction to bridge that gap. To learn more, visit www.common.com/washington-dc.



Financing and Implementation

THE PANEL WAS ASKED TO FIND CREATIVE FINANCING OPTIONS for Pottstown to implement some of the recommended initiatives. The panel recommends that Pottstown explore the following options, discussed in detail below, for funding the recommendations outlined in this report.

Creative Financing Options

The following financing strategies are discussed in this section:

- Tax increment financing;
- Housing rehabilitation program;
- Using public land;
- Opportunity Zones;
- New Markets Tax Credits; and
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs).

Tax Increment Financing

Pottstown will see significant new investment in and around its catalytic sites over the next 10 years. This investment will result

in new housing units, commercial and industrial uses, hotels, and a downtown that continues to revitalize. Before this more visible wave of investment, Pottstown must upgrade costly infrastructure, conduct targeted land assembly, and in some cases, forge innovative public/private partnerships.

One of the more effective economic development tools for spurring private investment is tax increment financing. Authorized by the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and administered by Montgomery County's Redevelopment Authority, a TIF designation allows any additional property tax revenues generated within the TIF district to be set aside to pay for the public sector's upfront infrastructure investments within the area. A TIF district can be established for up to 20 years and will be guided by Pottstown's redevelopment and economic

development objectives; the bond revenues serve to improve infrastructure in the district for private investment, while the additional property tax “increments” serve to pay down the bond debt.

Housing Rehabilitation Program

This report identifies several housing program concepts to help mitigate the cost of rehabilitating older homes. Concepts like tax abatements, forgivable loans, and modernization grants are viable alternatives to catalyze housing rehabilitation. Pennsylvania has a historic structure tax credit program that pairs well with the national tax credit program. The borough could stack these funds to help reduce costs associated with renovating and rehabilitating historic or architecturally significant structures. Whichever tool (or tools) are utilized, the borough should tie the value/longevity of the incentive to the length of time the homeowner remains in the home. Typically, communities require a five-year occupancy to capture the maximum value of the incentive.

Using Public Land

The borough owns property that can be used to attract new economic investment to Pottstown. Most notably, the Hess site is owned by the borough. Regardless of location, the borough can create a preferred development strategy for a publicly owned site that could incorporate using the value of the land as an incentive to fund uses that adversely impact the financial pro forma. This approach could be combined with potential regulatory (e.g., rezoning) or policy opportunities as well.

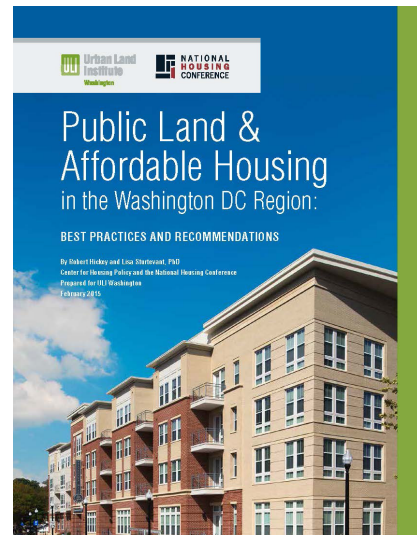
Opportunity Zones and Creating an Opportunity Fund

Qualified Opportunity Zones were created by the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. These zones are designed to spur economic development and job creation in distressed communities throughout the country by providing tax benefits to investors who invest eligible capital into them. Taxpayers may defer tax on eligible capital gains by making an appropriate investment in a Qualified Opportunity Fund and meeting other requirements. The federal Opportunity Zone offers financial incentives to potential investors seeking to defer and reduce existing capital gains while building new equity (for their Opportunity Zone investments) free of future capital gains. Investors can access Opportunity Zones through designated Opportunity Funds.

Pottstown has three federally designated Opportunity Zones (Census Tracts 2090, 2089.04, and 2088.01); however, the panel noted that it is unclear how well the zones will benefit Pottstown. The panel therefore recommends that Pottstown

BEST PRACTICES FOR PUBLIC LAND AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Successful examples of best practices and recommendations for developers, advocates, and local governments for effectively using public land to expand housing opportunities have been researched extensively by ULI Washington. A 2015 report on the research, *Public Land & Affordable Housing in the Washington DC Region*, is available at https://ulidigitalmarketing.blob.core.windows.net/ulidcnc/2019/03/ULI_PublicLandReport_Final020615.pdf.



establish its own opportunity fund and engage with financial institutions to focus on future redevelopment of the three Pottstown Opportunity Zones.

New Markets Tax Credits

Residents and developers in Pottstown should look into creating a partnership between developers and the local housing organizations and applying for New Markets Tax Credits. This is a federal program through the Department of the Treasury that allocates tax credits to governments and community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and sells them to create equity in projects. New Markets Tax Credits can be used for mixed-use development and housing—both of which the panel recommends Pottstown invest in. The panel also recommends New Market Tax Credits for initiatives surrounding workforce and education.



MIKE HIGBEE/ULI

Pottstown has three federally designated Opportunity Zones, which promote real estate development in economically distressed communities through private investment and capital gains tax incentives.

Community Development Block Grants

Panelists recommend that Pottstown apply for CDBGs through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These grant dollars can be used to improve homes, subsidize rents, or go directly to the homeowners. The panel further recommends that Pottstown’s Housing Coalition or housing nonprofits work with a redevelopment authority to create an application. Individual homeowners can also apply for funding, and the Pottstown Housing Authority should promote these opportunities widely.

Suggestions for Future Study

The panel recommends Pottstown pursue a deeper understanding of the creative financing options identified here by conducting the following additional research:

- Conduct a case study of cities that have successfully collected developer fees or contributions for the purpose of housing rehabilitation or other programs.
- Conduct a case study of other cities that have started their own opportunity fund. Panelists suggest exploring how the city marketed and managed these funds and identifying successes that have been achieved and where issues have arisen.

- Identify which CDFIs that offer New Markets Tax Credits would apply to Pottstown.
- Study the possibility of Pottstown applying for CDBGs on its own, outside the umbrella of Montgomery County. If feasible, determine if this would increase funding opportunities for the borough.

Innovative Implementation Recommendations

The leadership structure in Pottstown is amorphous, and a culture of silos prevents coordination. Panelists repeatedly heard from stakeholders that it is hard to do business in Pottstown. Though this situation may not be intentional, it is owed, in part, to contradictory policies and a general lack of clarity in business affairs. Stakeholders note onerous inspection processes, significant wait times for plans and permitting approvals, and an imbalanced enforcement procedure for landowners and developers. Pottstown has an opportunity to become the “Borough of Yes,” and in doing so, can become a desirable place for businesses to thrive.

The following Implementation strategies are discussed in this section:

- Create a development toolkit and hire an ombudsman.
- Conduct a Lean Six Sigma Kaizen event.
- Align available resources to fund critical priorities.
- Seek external funds.

Create a Development Toolkit and Hire an Ombudsman

Pottstown needs to create an efficient and transparent experience for those who are willing to do business or invest in the borough, including businesses, property owners, and investors. The panel recommends that Pottstown create a development toolkit that maps who to call and how to invest and build there. It should be easy to know who to contact, where to find them, and what someone needs to do to initiate any type of redevelopment effort.

The panel notes the importance of an ombudsman as part of this development toolkit. An ombudsman can serve as a liaison to the business community and help shepherd development applications through the permitting process. The panel recommends that Pottstown also consider implementing concurrent review processes and explore the option of offering expedited reviews or approvals for an additional fee, which would create an easy way for the borough to generate extra revenue.

Conduct a Lean Six Sigma Kaizen Event

The panel recommends that Pottstown eliminate inefficiencies and inconsistencies from its planning and permitting process and bring clarity to all regulations affecting development. The borough of Pottstown, through a potential sponsorship from the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, should conduct a Lean Six Sigma Kaizen event, which would map the current plans and permitting process and then come up with recommendations to streamline them. A Lean Six Sigma Kaizen event can be done through Villanova University or another nearby college or university in the area.

Align Available Resources to Fund Critical Priorities

The panelists heard from critical anchor institutions in Pottstown about budget challenges related to meeting their mission. Many of the nonprofit organizations in Pottstown compete for the same pool of dollars, rather than working together toward a shared mission and priorities to seek money for the borough. The panel recommends that Pottstown define its critical priorities, based on the stated mission, and align the available resources to fund those critical priorities. Doing

so creates a culture of collaboration—rather than a culture of competition—for limited funding opportunities.

Prioritizing needs will not be easy; however, Pottstown must have hard conversations about how to redeploy limited resources. One of the first steps the borough must take is to track current dollars, identify how they are being used, and examine whether the outcomes are meeting these critical priorities.

Thoughtful, evidence-based recommendations will require significant resources, and tough decisions must be made to decide the priority and weight for each priority. However, by understanding how current dollars are spent and how best to meet Pottstown’s goals, the borough can better align what current funds are available to meet its desired, agreed-upon needs.

Seek External Funds

In addition to bolstering the leadership capacity of PAID, the panel recommends that PAID aggressively research and apply for external grants, including from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Commonwealth Financing Authority, and the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority.

The panel also recommends that Pottstown add a grants manager position within PAID to facilitate and complete grant applications or investigate new development financing methods. This position is essential in ensuring that PAID is competitive at seeking grant opportunities.

Approximate Project Costs

	Estimated total	\$61,000,000
Physical improvements	Local funds	\$25,010,000
	External funds	\$35,990,000
One-time expenses	Estimated total	\$740,000
	Local funds	\$495,800
	External funds	\$244,200
Ongoing expenses	Estimated total	\$520,000
	Local funds	\$239,200
	External funds	\$280,800

If all the recommendations are followed, Pottstown will realize significant private and public investment. The panel prepared a “high level,” for-discussion-only estimate of the potential investment associated with the recommended projects and programs. This is intended to be a rough estimate but helpful in understanding the challenge and opportunity; not all the funds will need to be local. With a coordinated set of goals and a streamlined approach, the borough will be able to raise external funds through partnerships, available public dollars, and private investment.

MIKE HIGBEE/JULI

Summary of Key Recommendations

The following table summarizes the panel’s key recommendations, along with recommended key players and a suggested sequencing for implementation.

A Cohesive Mission

	Key players	Suggested sequence
Recommendation: Create a mission		
Employ an outside institution to conduct a needs assessment to inform the mission	Foundation, Borough	Phase 1
Organize groups that reflect the community voice, political leadership, and institutional stakeholders to develop the mission	PAID	Phase 1
Recommendation: Use data to determine the market potential		
Collect and analyze demographic and real estate data to determine Pottstown’s market competitiveness	PAID, Borough	Phase 1
Identify the borough’s three economic pillars	PAID, Borough	Phases 1–2
Recommendation: Create a plan to achieve the mission		
Draft a plan that outlines why to live, visit, or spend money in Pottstown based on the goals set and the community input on the desired mission	PAID, Borough, Montgomery County	Phase 2
Recommendation: Expand the marketing strategy		
Hire consultant to create a formal marketing program focused on place branding and annual events specific to Pottstown and incorporate opportunities to market the borough across the region	PAID, Montgomery County	Phases 1–2
Create a new asset map that illustrates borough assets that can be used to attract visitors to the community and is publicly accessible and easy to read	PAID, Foundation	Phases 1–2

Economic Development in Pottstown

	Key players	Suggested sequence
Recommendation: Define PAID as the point of contact and coordinator for all economic development initiatives		
Increase staff capacity within specific disciplines: real estate development, development finance, housing, business retention and expansion, and research	PAID	Phase 1
Establish transparent accountability metrics for PAID as an organization, and align these with the five-year growth strategy and overall economic development mission and plan	PAID	Phases 1–2
Add voices to PAID’s board from housing, workforce, and resident-led entities, ensuring always that the private sector retains most of the seats	PAID	Phases 1–2
Establish a five-year growth strategy for PAID	PAID	Phase 1
Maintain and strengthen the new vested board	PAID	Phase 1
Approach local business schools, such as Wharton, and develop a formal partnership in which PAID can use the expertise of faculty and students to fill gaps at PAID	PAID	Phase 1
Connect with ULI Philadelphia members to bolster PAID’s expertise	PAID	Phase 1

(continued next page)

Economic Development in Pottstown (cont.)

	Key players	Suggested sequence
Recommendation: Coordinate and engage with implementation partners		
Conduct quarterly and semi-annual coordination meetings with economic development colleagues in surrounding municipalities and municipal planning and economic development staff	PAID	Phase 2
Conduct quarterly networking events for business owners and investors	PAID, Chamber of Commerce	Phase 1
Host an annual networking event for real estate investors and developers	PAID, Chamber of Commerce	Phase 1
Work with the Hill School and Hobart's Run to expand the Investor's Forum to include PAID, and broaden the discussion to include economic development throughout the borough	PAID	Phase 1
Recommendation: Collect, process, and synthesize data		
Use local providers as well as national sources to gather socioeconomic data	PAID, Borough	Phase 1
Maintain for-sale and for-lease inventory, both at a physical location and online	PAID, Borough	Phases 1–2
Create a comprehensive list of real estate professionals and stakeholders, and then use proactive outreach to larger property owners and real estate brokers to spur connection and keep informed of economic development in the region	PAID, Borough	Phases 1–2
Pinpoint a lead in the borough to ensure all property data is current and accurate	PAID, Borough	Phase 1
Recommendation: Create a business community outreach strategy		
Host an annual town hall meeting	PAID, Chamber of Commerce, Foundation	Phase 1
Use social media and other no-cost mediums to share community information	PAID, Foundation	Phase 1
Create and distribute a monthly newsletter to track economic development events, successes, and challenges	PAID, Foundation	Phase 1
Present to eight to 10 community groups each year on what economic development is, how it works, and its community value	PAID, Foundation	Phases 1–2
Create an informational "Economic Development 101" video	PAID, Foundation	Phases 1–2
Implement a volunteer development program to build capacity in advocates, ambassadors, and mentors	PAID, Foundation	Phase 2
Recommendation: Provide assistance to existing companies		
Implement peer-to-peer assistance and networking throughout the business community to create a wider network that promotes collaboration between community business leaders	PAID, Borough, Chamber of Commerce	Phase 1
Implement an annual business survey and establish monthly business retention and expansion visit minimums	PAID	Phase 1
Establish a part-time ombudsman position to assist businesses with navigating the borough's approval and permitting processes, reducing hurdles to local business growth and attraction	PAID	Phase 2

Catalytic Economic Development Opportunities

	Key players	Suggested sequence
Recommendation: Improve downtown Pottstown through continued investment		
Bring businesses to the vacant retail fronts on High Street to provide eyes on the street	Borough	Moving forward
Install temporary streetscape features to draw foot traffic to the currently vacant areas, such as miniparks, outdoor activities, or other gathering places	Borough	Phases 1–2
Continue efforts to improve the pedestrian environment, with street walls and wayfinding signage that naturally guide a visitor to High Street corridor	Borough	Phases 1–2
Invest in gateway signage that is photogenic and mission/brand based	Borough, Foundation	Phase 2
Partner with key local businesses and entities to attract new development through better visual and multimodal connections between the economic hubs and Memorial and Riverfront parks	Borough, Foundation	Moving forward
Improve connections between the Hill School and Tower Health to downtown with a shuttle service, streetscape improvements, or encouraging downtown businesses to relate to the institutions	Borough	Moving forward
Implement front-in angled parking along High Street	Borough	Moving forward
Embark on a multimodal transportation campaign focusing on getting residents downtown	Foundation	Phase 2—moving forward
Recommendation: Enhance the recreational tourism market		
Nurture and expand the entertainment and dining industry	PAID	Phase 1
Focus hotel development to a centralized lodging corridor	PAID	Moving forward
Consider a sports complex in KEEP site east	PAID	Moving forward

Business Growth and Workforce Development

	Key players	Suggested sequence
Recommendation: Create a community-wide workforce initiative		
Designate the TriCounty Community Network (TCN) the backbone organization and facilitator for the initiative in coordination with PAID	TCN, PAID	Phase 1
Conduct a professionally facilitated process, led by TCN, to develop the goals, metrics, and targets for the workforce initiative that includes involvement of local programs and partners	TCN, PAID	Phases 1–2
Recommendation: Initiate an entrepreneurial development program		
Initiate an entrepreneurial development program in coordination with a nearby university or the Hill School	PAID	Phase 1
Reach out to both young and minority entrepreneurs to bring their business ideas to the borough, and offer low-cost space for coworking	PAID, S.T.R.I.V.E Initiative	Phases 1–2

Housing Strategies

	Key players	Suggested sequence
Recommendation: Create a housing inventory plan		
Develop a housing inventory through data collection	Foundation (planner)	Phase 1
Analyze the data to determine which properties/structures should be rehabilitated or renovated, given historic designation, or considered for new development	Foundation (planner)	Phases 1–2
Identify properties where auxiliary units, accessory dwelling units, or live/work units could be permitted	Foundation (planner)	Phase 2
Create a housing inventory development plan, led by the Pottstown Housing Coalition	Housing Coalition	Phase 2
Recommendation: Increase the housing inventory		
Use the housing inventory data to identify and prioritize properties for rehabilitation, renovation, and construction	Foundation (planner)	Phase 2
Accelerate the permit issuance and inspection processes and develop other incentives for redevelopment and renovation	Borough	Phase 1
Encourage redevelopment of residential units above commercial spaces where they exist and require renovation	Borough	Phases 1–2
Identify redevelopment sites for mixed-use residential projects	Borough, Foundation (planner)	Phase 1
Recommendation: Create a housing resource center		
Create a housing resource center to advertise market and below-market housing and investment opportunities	Borough, Housing Coalition	Moving forward

Financing and Implementation

	Key players	Suggested sequence
Recommendation: Use creative financing options		
Designate a tax increment financing district	Borough	Moving forward
Develop a housing rehabilitation program using tools such as tax abatements, forgivable loans, or modernization grants	Borough	Moving forward
Create a preferred development strategy for publicly owned land	Borough	Moving forward
Create an Opportunity Fund	Borough	Moving forward
Apply for New Markets Tax Credits in partnership with a developer or housing organization	Borough	Moving forward
Apply for New Markets Tax Credits for workforce and education initiative funding	Borough, PAID	Moving forward
Apply for Community Development Block Grants	Borough, Housing Coalition	Moving forward
Create an application for Community Development Block Grants for individual owners		Moving forward
Recommendation: Use innovative implementation techniques		
Create a development toolkit	Borough	Phase 1
Implement concurrent or expedited review options	Borough	Phases 1–2
Conduct a Lean Six Sigma Kaizen event with a nearby university	Borough, Foundation	Phase 1
Align available resources to fund critical priorities	Borough	Phase 1
Hire a grants manager to seek outside funds	Borough, Foundation	Phase 2



Conclusion

POTTSOWN IS A UNIQUE COMMUNITY that has a lot to offer the rest of the region. History has dealt Pottstown a tough hand, but that does not mean the borough will stagnate or fail to thrive.

The recommendations in this report are designed to spur economic innovation in Pottstown. To do so effectively and with lasting value, Pottstown must decide how to allocate its resources and align its leadership entities. Traditional silos must be broken, and enhanced communication among the governing entities must occur to enact real change. Coordinated community building, branding, and messaging are key to any economic development action. In Pottstown, growth and change must be led by a unified group, not a fragmented one.

The panel urges the people of Pottstown to embrace the discomfort that comes with change. Hard decisions, including funding and resource allocation, must be made to make room for large projects and initiatives to come forward. Although this shift is not easy, other communities have found renewed economic success that offers road maps for Pottstown to follow. By looking to these examples and digging deep into the recommendations provided by the panel, Pottstown can flourish through reinvestment in itself and its people.

About the Panel

Mike Higbee

Panel Chair
Indianapolis, Indiana

Higbee, vice president, economic development and community resiliency, at Thomas P. Miller and Associates (TPMA), focuses on development and redevelopment, implementation, and public/private partnerships. He has helped create plans and developments that benefit cities in the United States and abroad.

Before joining TPMA, Higbee was the president of Development Concepts Inc., a development planning and real estate consulting firm he founded in 1991. He also served as the director of metropolitan development for the city of Indianapolis from 1985 to 1991, where he oversaw the city's economic development and affordable housing initiatives. Some of the premier projects he facilitated for the city were the Circle Centre Mall development, the Lower Canal Improvement Project, Pan Am Plaza, and negotiations for the United Airlines Maintenance Facility at the Indianapolis International Airport.

He has recently served as a faculty member for the Rose Center for Public Leadership and is often invited to participate in or chair panels in cities across the country, such as ULI's Advisory Services panels "Strategies for Reusing a National Historic Landmark" in Buffalo, New York, and "Equitable Economic Development" in Sacramento, California.

Brittany Campagna

Nashville, Tennessee

Campagna dedicates her research and professional work to life in inner-city urban enclaves. She looks for places and spaces a city chooses to invest its money. She questions what the city's economy is built from; and from what commerce the city thrives. Who is thriving? Where are the people that built the founding structure? More important, where are the hidden communities that "tarnish" the city's image? Who are the people? How are they surviving with the existing business and from what is their community economy built?

The historical memory of cities, city focus, and people enthrall her. Her professional work is greatly informed and guided by urban sociological studies and research. Her original vision was conceived and birthed as a graduate student at the University of Memphis in 2015. During her time in the soul-filled city, she learned a heartbeat never forgotten. It was the grit and grind of the economy, culture, and regional identity.

Her background in political economy and urban sociology provided a springboard into her research in urban food deserts and the disparities faced without access or availability of basic living needs. The experience gained as a student of research and witness of a community abandoned was the driving force carving the model for Inner City Investments. She continues to seek a life of service and research in building strong business and economies that work for the people and by the people of those communities and neighborhoods.

James Hardy

Akron, Ohio

Hardy serves as chief of staff and deputy mayor for integrated development at the city of Akron, Ohio. As chief of staff, he manages the Mayor's Cabinet, policy development, and strategic planning. In his role as the city's first deputy mayor for integrated development, he oversees the Office of Integrated Development (OID). OID houses the departments of Planning, Development, Business Retention and Expansion, Development Engineering, and Public Life.

Previously, Hardy served as assistant director of community health at Summit County Public Health. There he led the Health Equity and Social Determinants Unit, managing a diverse portfolio of community-based programs and public health services.

Before that, he served as special assistant to the president and board of trustees of Kent State University, as a regional director for Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, and as an executive office intern for former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

In 2005, Hardy was elected to the Akron Public Schools Board of Education. During his six years on the board he served as

chair of several committees, including the Joint Board of Review and the district's Finance and Capital Management Committee, which oversees Akron Public School's \$313 million general fund budget. In 2009, his peers elected him as board president.

Hardy holds a bachelor's degree in political science-criminal justice from the University of Akron and a master's in public health from Kent State University with a concentration in health policy and management.

A lifelong resident of Akron, he is involved in various community organizations including service on the board of Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative, Downtown Akron Partnership, and the Akron Civic Theater. In 2017, and again in 2018, he received a Chris Traeger Award from Engaging Local Government Leaders as being among the top 100 influencers in local government nationwide.

Jeremy Hurlbutt

Upper Marlboro, Maryland

Hurlbutt has more than 14 years of public-sector planning experience, including 10 years with the city of Rockville, Maryland, and four years in La Plata, Maryland, as the director of planning. His current role focuses on guiding development in Prince George's County, Maryland.

As master planner for Prince George's County, Hurlbutt reviews high-profile development applications, forms department policies, and helps implement the county's vision. Prince George's County, which borders Washington, D.C., and is just 37 miles south of the city of Baltimore, is a fast-growing and diverse community with a wide range of communities that include everything from urban to rural environments.

His previous work experience includes four years as planning director for the town of La Plata, Maryland, which is located about 30 miles southeast of Washington, D.C. As director of the town's Planning Department, he oversaw all development within the town limits, including planning, building inspections, and code enforcement. While director, he was able to revamp the development review process, implement a permit tracking

software system, implement a new sign code, complete a comprehensive zoning code update, and begin a comprehensive plan update.

Hurlbutt spent almost a decade as a planner for the city of Rockville, Maryland, where he guided and managed the largest and most complex development projects, which included King Farm, a new urbanist master planned community, and Twinbrook Station, a transit-oriented and LEED ND development.

He earned a bachelor's degree in environmental design from the University of Colorado, Boulder. He later completed a master's degree in urban and regional planning at the University of Colorado, Denver. Hurlbutt is president-elect of the National Capital Area Chapter and volunteer for the Urban Design and Preservation Division of the American Planning Association.

Emma Littlejohn

Charlotte, North Carolina

A senior-level real estate professional with over 25 years of comprehensive, client-centered experience in every segment of residential and mixed-use housing, Littlejohn is known for creative solutions in directing the development of homes, neighborhoods, and communities through consumer and market insights combined with financial modeling to meet revenue goals. Innovative marketing strategy integrated with marketing and sales processes from concept to completion. Her expertise is in workforce and affordable housing with a focus on healthy living and responsible sustainable development, creative and market-driven commercial, lifestyle, and alternative use assessment. Assignments include specialty attached product (condominium and townhouse), master-planned communities, and resort attached and detached product programming and community planning initiatives, as well as transit-oriented development.

Her client base includes national developers, national homebuilders, and local and national developers' groups including residential and commercial developers as well as municipalities, non-profits and the lending community. She

has worked in Boston, Chicago, Denver, Dallas, and Miami as well as urban centers and coastal and mountain communities through the Southeast.

Littlejohn is a disruptor, visionary, and leader, all of which is made possible by her natural curiosity and creativity. As president of emma + co, she actively uses her artistry to solve complex problems and create sustainable solutions that change lives.

She is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and attended Harvard University School of Design for postgraduate studies.

Donna Schumacher

San Francisco, California

Schumacher is the founder and creative director of Donna Schumacher Architecture, a commercial and residential architecture firm in San Francisco. She earned a master's degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania and a master's in fine arts in sculpture from the California College of the Arts. She is a registered architect in California, Massachusetts, and New York, and is LEED AP certified. Schumacher is a member of the American Institute of Architects.

Her 30-year professional career spans the fields of design, architecture, art, professional writing, editing, and teaching. Schumacher helps creative professionals, arts organizations, and families create built environments that express their unique stories through a collaborative and inclusive process.

Residential projects range from designing entire homes to smaller remodeling projects. Her work in the commercial sector includes design work for the following Bay Area businesses: Stearns Consulting Headquarters, Rolex Repair SF, San Francisco Camerawork, San Francisco Art Commission Gallery, and Works/San Jose.

Schumacher has exhibited her art locally, including public art works such as Re-Tale in Union Square, funded by San

Francisco Art Commission Cultural Equity Grant. Her art works have been displayed internationally with the Royal Institute of British Architects in London and in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Since publishing *Architecture, the Ideal and Marilyn Monroe: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic in Architecture* in 1993, Schumacher has contributed numerous articles for art and architecture publications, notably *Flash Art* and *Sculpture* magazines. She served as the regional editor for *Art Papers*, and she is presently the editor of the *VIEW*, a quarterly newsletter for the professional organization Commercial Real Estate of Women, San Francisco. Schumacher has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in both architecture and art at the University of California, Berkeley; California College of Arts; and Roger Williams University in Rhode Island.

Kyle Talente

Alexandria, Virginia

Talente is a vice president and principal with RKG Associates, having been with the company for over 21 years. He brings an extensive background in client and community engagement and has technical expertise in all facets of real estate, economic development, and market analysis. Talente has led hundreds of consulting engagements during his tenure at RKG Associates, specializing in economic development strategic planning, housing market and affordability analysis, local and regional real estate market analyses, downtown and urban revitalization strategies, financial feasibility and economic impact analyses, and target industry studies.

His expertise is bringing his clients real-world, market-driven recommendations that are founded in current market realities and projected conditions based on sound economic fundamentals. Talente's work has led several clients beyond the visioning and assessment phase and into successful implementation. He has learned that this grounded approach positions his clients to achieve success more consistently, particularly when implementation requires or seeks a public/private partnership.

Talente is a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he received his bachelor's of science in architecture and his master's in city planning. He has used his professional expertise in volunteer roles to improve his community as well. Most notably, he served on the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation (SFDC) board of directors for 10 years (three as chair). He received the Special Gratitude Award from the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations and was selected as Lord Fairfax for Lee District (a community service award) in Fairfax County, Virginia, for his efforts with the SFDC.



Urban Land Institute
2001 L Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-4948
uli.org