

# July Meeting

Good morning Commissioners -

My name is Savas Logothetides a resident of Pottsville. My family have been residents of Pottsville for nearly 60 years. Currently I own and operate 3 businesses within Schuylkill County, 2 in the city of Pottsville. I am on the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee and was the founding chairman of the Schuylkill Young Professionals. Finally, I am also the Executive Director of the Pottsville Area Development Corporation. As the executive director of PADCO I also have chaired the Pottsville Continued Progress Project since its inception in 2016.

As you know a 3<sup>rd</sup> party strategic development plan was completed in 2018. It outlined, with heavy public input, how Pottsville could redevelop and revitalize. This plan was paid for independently by stakeholders without any type of supplemental government funding. Since then we have outlined a plan for continued progress in the city of Pottsville, specifically in our downtown. As you know, redevelopment of a city does not happen overnight or over a few years. It is a process.

Aside from continuing to attract small business into the central business district of the City of Pottsville the results of the plan identified 3 main pathways to successful revitalization: downtown livability, Using Arts and Entertainment (events), and tourism.

This leads me to the reason why myself and many others have chosen to speak up regarding a planned purchase of the former Giant Super Market parcel right outside of the central business district and strategic planning area. This is especially so since investors have shown significant and conveyed interest in the property.

A planned prerelease center, while needed in the county, is a counterproductive and short sighted use for one of the few large and visible properties in our downtown. Over 2000 have signed an online petition in agreement. This type of use is the exact opposite of what our strategic plan has spelled out. It would have a negative impact and act as a deterrent when attracting small businesses to our downtown, when attracting residential investors, and when improving downtown livability.

According to the study 24% of downtown properties are already occupied for "institutional" use. This is a use that is tax exempt. Of those properties the county already owns at least 10 parcels within the city of Pottsville that are tax exempt. As of 2018 for those 10 properties the total tax loss to the City of Pottsville is \$124,753 annually or over the course of 10 years in excess of \$1.24 million dollars. The total assessed value of county property located in the city as of 2018 was \$6,407,000.

Currently as a private, tax paying entity, the property where Giant formerly resided generates \$32,608 tax dollars annually for the City, county, and a school district who is in a very important transitional phase for all taxpayers within the City. In addition to the \$32,608 the property as a business generated over \$17,000 in other taxes annually for the City of Pottsville.

If the former Giant parcel is replaced with a tax exempt entity the City of Pottsville stands to lose in excess of \$150,000 annually when being added to the other 10 county owned properties....over \$1.5 million every 10 years that will fall upon the tax payers and businesses of the City of Pottsville.

Pottsville is the county seat and entertains tens of thousands of tourists annually. Our small business climate in the downtown is growing- as we currently await two new microbreweries, a men's store, a BBQ restaurant, and the much anticipated expansion of one of the most popular restaurants in the downtown. This is in addition to a variety of businesses that have opened in the downtown over the

last 36 months. In short, as the county seat Pottsville reflects upon the whole county. Pottsville is the largest municipality in the county and our well-being affects other towns around it. As Pottsville grows, so does the county. Pottsville also employs nearly 25% of all employees in Schuylkill County. County employees who work in Pottsville or visit County offices benefit from a revitalized downtown – places to eat, shop and livability that feels comfortable.

Of the approximately 53 county owned parcels no other municipality has more than 1 or 2 county owned buildings. This does not count the numerous small vacant parcels that are county owned or the airport properties and agricultural preservation land uses.

One of the proposed elements that is most concerning regarding the Pre-Release Center is that COVID Relief Funds are potentially being allocated to the property. As a small business owner and director of economic development it surprises me that a more comprehensive and transparent plan still has not been conveyed regarding use of these funds for small business. Many of your peers in other counties have developed plans and are already integrating them into their small business communities- including Columbia County who is using \$3 of the \$5 million dollars they received for small business. Small business is the backbone of both our city and county economy. Instead we are talking about using relief funds to build something in a location that would inhibit small business growth. In addition, I like others are confused and question how COVID relief funds should be used to build a pre-release center.

I am fully aware of the current prison situation and our need for a supplemental resolution. I am in favor of this supplemental resolution. However, I, along with a multitude of business owners, residents, City and County officials are vehemently against transitioning a privately owned, large tax paying entity to an institutionalized tax exempt entity. I strongly urge you to review the Strategic Plan for Pottsville that was completed in 2018. It can be found at [www.downtownpottsville.com](http://www.downtownpottsville.com). At this site you can also find a copy of my remarks and citations regarding county property in the City of Pottsville. Other citations can be found within the study.

I strongly urge you to reconsider this course of action. Other sites within the county make more sense and are potentially more cost effective- ie) the former STS Building and Sands Ford property on Route 61 as examples. I also urge you to talk to your constituents, business owners, and other elected officials, especially the ones in the city of Pottsville who would be directly affected by a short sighted decision like this. Pottsville deserves better.

# August Meeting

Good Morning Commissioners -

My name is Savas Logothetides. I am a lifelong resident of the city of Pottsville where I also own 2 businesses. I am also the Executive Director of the Pottsville Area Development Corporation. I am here again to voice on my own behalf and on the behalf of the Pottsville Area Development Corporation our vehement opposition of the county's proposed purchase of the former Giant property in downtown Pottsville.

I would like to start with comments that were made over the last few weeks publicly by some of the commissioners and also administrator Gary Bender. First, is in regard to the appraisal that has already been completed. While potentially legal, the fact that the appraised value is not being made public is a disservice to the taxpayers. The taxpayers of the county paid for the appraisal and should know the value so that they have an educated basis on whether this type of purchase makes sense for the county. The lack of transparency is becoming increasingly troublesome with regard to both this significant business transaction but a number of other items within the courthouse. A right to know will be filed within the next 48 hours. I hope that right to know is met with expedited transparency and without any type of stall tactics from courthouse leadership.

As you know the City last night passed a resolution in opposition to the purchase of this property. This is not the only notice from concerned constituents that you have received. This list includes but is not limited to; the Pottsville Business Association, Pottsville Commission on Tourism, Pottsville Area Development Co, Senator Dave Argall, State Rep Mike Tobash, and even Yuengling Brewery. In addition, Commissioner Hess has gone on record as adamantly opposing this non-sensical purchase for the county.

What is potentially most troubling about the purchase is your neglect for the City of Pottsville and also business owners throughout Schuylkill County. First, as you all are fully aware Pottsville is in a time of progressive transition. It would be largely and negatively affected with this hasty and shortsighted decision. In addition, you are now looking at hurting the city and its taxpayers in two distinct ways. Remember that Pottsville is the county seat.

1. Taking a taxable property that DOES HAVE private interest for a resale and turning it into a tax exempt institutional property.
2. Removing around \$50,000 from the Pottsville Parking Authority budget. Albeit, unpopular, the Pottsville Parking Authority is a municipal entity of the city of Pottsville. The county already receives a 40% discount on parking and this amount of revenue that would be lost makes up for about 10% of the PPA budget annually. Ultimately with this type of loss, once again, the shortfall will fall on both tourists visiting Pottsville, people looking to do business in Pottsville, and the taxpayers of the city of Pottsville.

While I understand you have a duty to the entire county- it should not continually be as the expense of the city of Pottsville

Second, the potential of CARES act money being attributed to this purchase is disheartening and downright irresponsible during a time where small businesses and municipalities are facing decreasing revenues across the board. The great majority of your peers throughout the state have enacted some type of business relief act- you still have not over 3 months later. As an executive committee member of the

Chamber of Commerce I think I can say without pause that your actions are disappointing and hurtful to the backbone of our local economy.

Lastly, the comments that have been made to the press recently are troubling and are only motivated by personal agenda on this topic. The reaction by the community "surprising". The fact that you note the courthouse is in walking distance, but restaurants or business are not in close enough proximity is a poor and inaccurate excuse. Your continued description of the property as undesirable is also inaccurate- as again there is private investment money interested in the property.

I ask you today to, again, reach out to the people this will directly affect- the people you were elected by to get a better feeling on if this type of purchase makes sense. On if the money you are using from CARES is what your constituents would want you to use the money for. I think you will find a resounding no from the large majority. Pottsville deserves better and I hope that you as elected officials will see through a short term solution for long term and progressive growth. Along with the 3<sup>rd</sup> party strategic plan my remarks will be available on [www.downtownpottsville.com](http://www.downtownpottsville.com).

Thank you.

### List of County-owned Properties in City of Pottsville

Tax Map #	Owner Name	House #	Street Prefix	Street Name	Assessed Value	City Tax Rate (2018)	Tax revenue foregone
68-26-0071.00	County of Schuylkill	0	-	Laurel St	\$ 8,945	19.47	\$ 174
68-20-0128.00	County of Schuylkill	0	N	Sanderson St	\$ 59,685	19.47	\$ 1,162
68-26-007.00	County of Schuylkill	0		Laurel St	\$ 5,800	19.47	\$ 113
68-20-0141.00	Schuylkill County Prison	0		Second St	\$ 2,591,990	19.47	\$ 50,466
68-20-0161.000	County of Schuylkill	439	N	Centre St	\$ 375,820	19.47	\$ 7,317
68-20-0144.002	County of Schuylkill	0		Sanderson St	\$ 59,710	19.47	\$ 1,163
68-20-029.0000	County of Schuylkill	410		N. Centre St	\$ 427,500	19.47	\$ 8,323
68-20-0158.000	Schuylkill County Courthouse	410	N	Second St	\$ 2,672,185	19.47	\$ 52,027
68-20-0310.001	Schuylkill County	317	N	Progress Ave	\$ 19,835	19.47	\$ 386
68-20-0311.000	County of Schuylkill	324	N	Centre St	\$ 185,965	19.47	\$ 3,621
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>\$ 6,407,435</b>		<b>\$ 124,753</b>

*Source: Schuylkill County GIS, 2018*