

# FOCUS ON POTTSTOWN REVITALIZATION

## Pottstown Area Economic Development (PAED) Celebrates 60th Anniversary: *Reimagining Pottstown Since 1965*

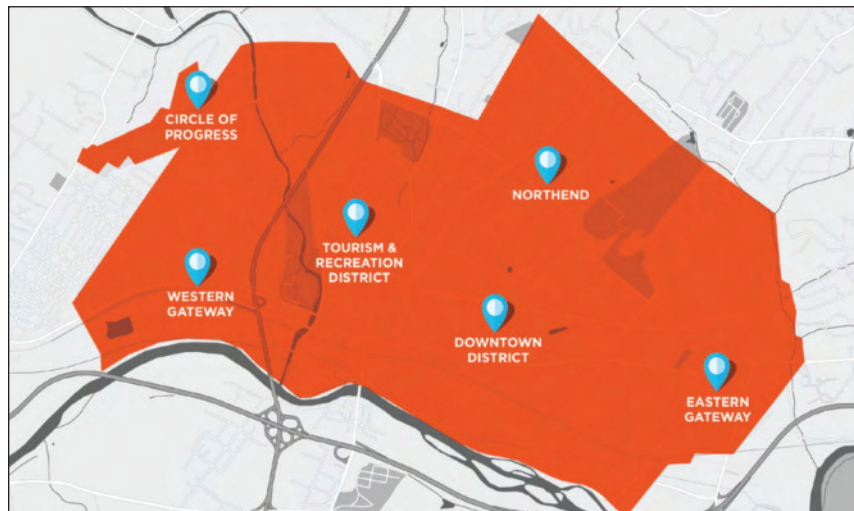
Since its founding in 1965 as Pottstown Area Industrial Development, Inc. (PAID), now known as Pottstown Area Economic Development (PAED), the organization has served as the lead economic development entity for Pottstown, PA, promoting commercial and industrial growth across the region. Established as a 501c (3) non-profit corporation, PAID was a regional organization, serving not only the Borough of Pottstown, but also surrounding townships including Lower Pottsgrove, Warwick Township, Douglasville, and Royersford. In 2010, PAID was reorganized so that there could be a focus on the “spine” of this multi-town area, with the Borough at its core. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was created between the Borough of Pottstown, Pottstown School District and the Redevelopment Authority of Montgomery County — to commit to the establishment of a leader for economic development in the Borough’s 5.5 sq. miles. PAED is governed by a Board of Directors,



with participation from key stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. For many decades, PAED has been leading Pottstown’s growth with a commitment to a diverse and responsible economic development strategy. As an independent non-government organization it has been and remains the “go-to” organization for the development community.

### 1950s - 1960s

Major industries were headquartered in Pottstown and the Borough was recognized as the economic engine for the region. Thriving larger employers included Bethlehem Steel, Mrs. Smiths’ Pies, and Stanley Flagg Brass. Although these iconic companies no longer physically exist, many businesses and organizations from that time, and even earlier, continue to be a part of the economic story in Pottstown today. These include Dana Inc., O’Donnell Weiss & Mattei P.C., and Picardi, Phillips & Ottaviano (formerly Yergey, Daylor, Allebach, Scheffey, Picardi).



### 1970s-1980s

A major economic shift began, forever changing the economic landscape of this post-industrial town. Pottstown was hit hard by the closure of major industrial businesses, leaving large, vacant buildings and environmental conditions in need of remediation.

In 1973, PAID worked with the Borough to acquire 85 acres, west of Route 100, which

would become Shoemaker Road, creating Pottstown’s first industrial park. Today this business area is home to businesses such as Eastwood and US Axle. Less than a decade later, in the 1980s PAID acquired 50 acres, establishing the Pottstown Municipal Airport Campus, also known as Circle of Progress. This second development has become home to a variety of businesses, including Aegis Technologies, ECT (Engine Cleaning Technology), Helwig Woodworks,

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Manatawny Stillworks, and Sly Fox Brewing Company. In 1984, after being closed for ten years, the majority of the Bethlehem Steel footprint was reimagined into *Pottstown Industrial Complex*. A private company acquired the property and committed to open Keim Street as a public thoroughfare and to preserve these industrial buildings for future businesses. Businesses that opened during these years, and are still thriving today, include Wolf, Baldwin & Associates, P.C., Precision Polymer, Fromm Electric, Cody Systems, Budget Maintenance Concrete, and Bause Catered Events.

This busy decade wrapped up when in 1989 PAID funded the Urban Land Institute Advisory Study, leading to the creation of a Plan for the new Borough Hall and town “park” — officially considered a Transportation Center, with its proximity to the Charles W. Dickinson Transportation Center. This garden courtyard, complete with abundant trees and a water fountain was named Smith Family Plaza, after one of Pottstown’s prominent families and today is the location of many events, including the annual Pottstown Fete En Blanc and the annual Santa Saturday Tree Lighting.

#### 1990s - 2010s

Pottstown’s progress continued. PAID purchased two buildings in 1999, shutting down nuisance bars, one of which is now

home to Frida’s Mexican Taqueria. In the Early 2000s, PAID facilitated the renovation of the 1888 building Security Trust Bank at the corner of High and Hanover Streets. PAID owned the building while conducting a structural analysis and environmental studies, before it was sold again. The new owners, after significant renovations, transformed the ground floor into a restaurant and the upper floors into offices. Economic conditions continued to fluctuate, as many industries and businesses downsized due to the market conditions or closed completely. However, some new businesses were to become part of Pottstown’s future, including VideoRay and the High Street Music Company. In addition, the Steel River Playhouse relocated to the Downtown. During this time PAED formed the Tourism & Recreation District (TRec) to plan, market, and highlight unique assets that establish Pottstown as a regional tourism destination.

#### 2010s – Present

The reorganization of PAID in 2010 was a direct result of the 2008 financial crisis. After another visit from an Urban Land Institute (ULI) team, who issued a report indicating that a lead economic development entity, outside of government, was necessary for revitalization efforts. The creation of the MOU was for

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the purpose of identifying PAED to be the “single authoritative entity” to “facilitate, manage and implement” economic development efforts in the 5.5 sq. miles of the Borough.

In 2011, PAID hired and appointed its first Executive Director. During the mid-2010s many businesses were relocating, or undergoing construction, expansions, and renovations. In 2017, PAED launched “I Pick Pottstown!”, representing the positive activity of incoming businesses after decades of struggle for the Borough. In 2019, the Borough and West Pottsgrove Township adopted the *Keystone Employment & Economic Plan (KEEP)*, which established a vision for economic development, revitalization, and infrastructure improvements of the Keystone Boulevard area, along the 422 Corridor and Route 100 intersection. PAED led the effort towards creating a plan that would encourage development of un-utilized and under-utilized sites. Perhaps one of the most challenging but successful projects in recent history that PAED took on was 215 S. Washington Street, the site of the former Pottstown Plating Works. PAED successfully guided the property through environmental remediation, untangled and resolved a complex tax history inherited from the

previous owner, ultimately restoring the site to productive use and returning it to the tax rolls.

In 2020-2021, as the nation responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, PAID provided support to the business community by interpreting and disseminating critical government information, facilitating microgrants, and creating networks for financial and services support. In 2021, during the post-COVID recovery, PAID stepped in to fill the gap between local, county and state government and the business community. At the same time, PAED had already been poised to rebrand from “Industrial” to “Economic,” representing an alignment with the commitment to an innovative, diverse and responsible economic development strategy for Pottstown’s economy of tomorrow. This shift from the “I” to the “E” strengthened PAED’s strategy to tell the Pottstown story to a wider audience and create awareness of the organization’s purpose. PAED’s work, while historically project and property specific, evolved into a blend of bringing together resources that investors, business owners, and key stakeholders needed, while simultaneously engaging established businesses and attracting visitors.

(Continued on page 12)

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A focus on the Downtown resulted in this shift, bringing forth initiatives such as sidewalk cleaning (The Clean Team), the installation of a canopy of lights (Light up High Street), increasing branding and beautification efforts, the LSA (Local Share Account) Streetscape Design Plan, and the pursuit of a Main Street Designation and a Business Improvement District.

Today, PAED continues revitalization efforts through a myriad of activities such as managing grants for environmental remediation of properties to further commercial development projects and supporting small businesses throughout the Borough's entire 5.5 sq. miles. PAED administers the Land Bank for the Borough, successfully completing the sale of eight residential properties between 2022 and 2025.

Additionally, policy advocacy is an integral part of PAED's economic development efforts. In 2023, PAED convened a committee of municipal leaders, property owners and design professionals throughout Montgomery County, working with PA State Representative Joe Ciresi to introduce House Bill 1573. This legislation would create a pilot grant program for historic buildings, administered through the PA Department of Community and

Economic Development (DCED). Should this legislation be adopted in the Senate and signed by the Governor, it would help cover the high costs of modern mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems — all required to bring these beautiful old buildings up to code.

For 60 years, Pottstown Area Economic Development (PAED) has been reimagining Pottstown, providing services to businesses and organizations seeking to invest, expand or relocate including assistance with site selection, commercial and industrial real estate development, access to resources and workforce development. PAED's efforts have stimulated investment, helped maintain and enhance the tax base, retained and created job opportunities, and restored under-utilized buildings. To celebrate this incredible milestone for Pottstown, PAED will host a special 60th Anniversary luncheon event on **Thursday, November 13, 2025**. Sponsorship opportunities and tickets will be available starting July 15, 2025, via [ipickpottstown.org](http://ipickpottstown.org), and information is available by emailing [info@paedinc.org](mailto:info@paedinc.org).

For more information about Pottstown Area Economic Development (PAED), please contact Peggy Lee-Clark, Executive Director at 610.575.7233.

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## Progress Continues in Pottstown: PAED Issues RFP for Pottstown's Streetscape Design Plan

Pottstown Area Economic Development (PAED) is accepting proposals for the development of a comprehensive Streetscape Plan and Design for Pottstown's Downtown, Western Gateway, and Circle of Progress. This initiative aims to elevate the perception of this district, highlight its aesthetic appeal and walkability, and enhance cohesive branding for the Borough.



"This is more than beautification. It's about shaping a downtown experience that attracts people, supports local businesses, and reflects Pottstown's evolving identity," said Peggy Lee-Clark, Executive Director of PAED. "We're excited to take this step for the LSA Grant Streetscape Plan, as we support the Borough's long-term vision for revitalization."

Funded through a 2024 LSA (Local Share Account) upon PAED's application, the project seeks to unify the Borough's visual identity while celebrating the distinct character of each area. "(LSA) is a program funded by a portion of the gaming revenues generated in Pennsylvania... to support projects in the public interest, improve the quality of life for citizens and foster economic development within Pennsylvania communities." The Plan will provide a strategic vision for improvements including uniformed branded signage, outdoor street furniture & gathering spaces, planters and landscaping, public art, lighting, trash receptacles, bike racks, traffic calming methods, and more. The full Request for Proposal (RFP), including design guidelines, boundary maps, and FAQs, is now available on the PAED website at <https://ipickpottstown.org/2025/04/21/streetscaperfp2025>.

The project aligns with strategic recommendations from the Urban Land Institute's (ULI)\* 2019 Advisory Services report, which emphasized placemaking efforts such as temporary parks, outdoor activities, wayfinding signage, and photogenic gateway features to help activate underutilized spaces and support local businesses. This report builds upon ULI's previous work in Pottstown in 1976, 1989, and 2009.

Once a thriving heavily industrialized community, Pottstown experienced a significant decline when those industries closed and left behind environmentally challenged properties. As the leading economic development organization since 1965, Pottstown Area Economic Development (PAED) was established to stimulate investment, which helps maintain and enhance the tax base, retain and create job opportunities, and restores, utilizes or removes under-utilized buildings.

\*THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE (ULI) "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." To learn more visit [Uli.org](http://Uli.org).

For more information about Pottstown Area Economic Development (PAED), please contact Peggy Lee-Clark, Executive Director at 610.575.7233.





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North End Florist is well known for their ability to create custom designed arrangements. Although their work is always on display in the glass cooler cases, the pieces that usually are not seen are for funerals. Our designers have been asked to incorporate quite a variety of items and mementos into these pieces. Some of our best remembered pieces included a Firestone tire; a pair of Harley Davidson boots; and a pair of fireman's boots.

See our ad (above) and let us become your go-to place for flowers and gifts.

### A brief history of North End Florist

Donald and Jill Conner wanted to open a second location to accompany their well-established business at 300 High St, Pottstown Florist. North End Florist first opened its door in August 1985, at 453 N. Charlotte St. In 2003 they expanded into an adjoining storefront at 451. This expansion also allowed Donald to operate a wholesale floral supply business out of a warehouse in the rear of the building. Eventually, due to various reasons, the business had to downsize, and subsequently relocated to its current location at 403 N. Charlotte St. Even with this move, North End Florist has been at the same intersection of N. Charlotte & Oak Streets for 40 years. Quite the achievement. It was also the beginning of what would become a multi-generational business.

In 2014 Donald decided to retire and in 2015 his granddaughter, Krystal Steele, took



over ownership and operation of the shop. Krystal took the business in a new direction with the incorporation of social media and donations of arrangements, gift baskets, and gift certificates to local fundraisers.

In 2025 Krystal decided to take a sabbatical and the shop is now in the hands of her daughter, Hailey Lettich. Hailey will continue the tradition of offering beautifully arranged flowers for every occasion, along with other locally sourced types of gift merchandise.

Finally, we'd be remiss if we failed to recognize the recent retirement of two of our long-term designers. Sherry McMichael, our former manager and lead designer with 30 years in the industry, and Lori Davis, designer of 14 years. We wish these ladies a long and happy retirement.



## Vlahos Dunn Agency Offers Liquor Liability Insurance for Fellow Hospitality Industry Entrepreneurs

Vlahos Dunn Insurance Agency has been an integral part of the Pottstown community for over two decades, skillfully navigating the changes that have influenced the area, including its recent revitalization. As our agency grew, we took the opportunity to acquire a prime location in the town center. A friend's suggestion inspired us to convert the space at 230 E. High Street into a lively Beer Garden. After conducting thorough research, we proudly launched the "Iron Gate Biergarten," which is now open for public enjoyment.

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