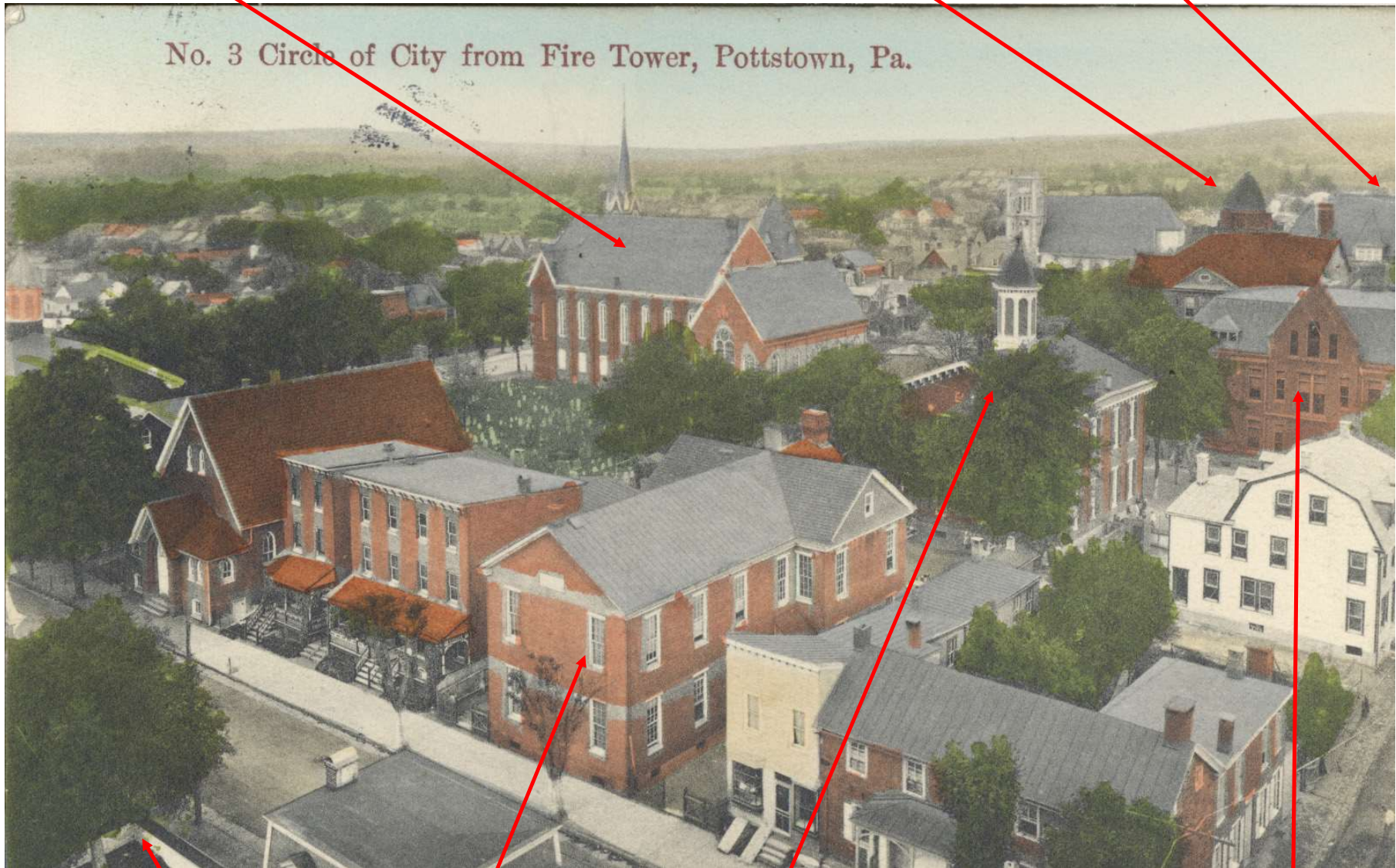


Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Washington School

High School



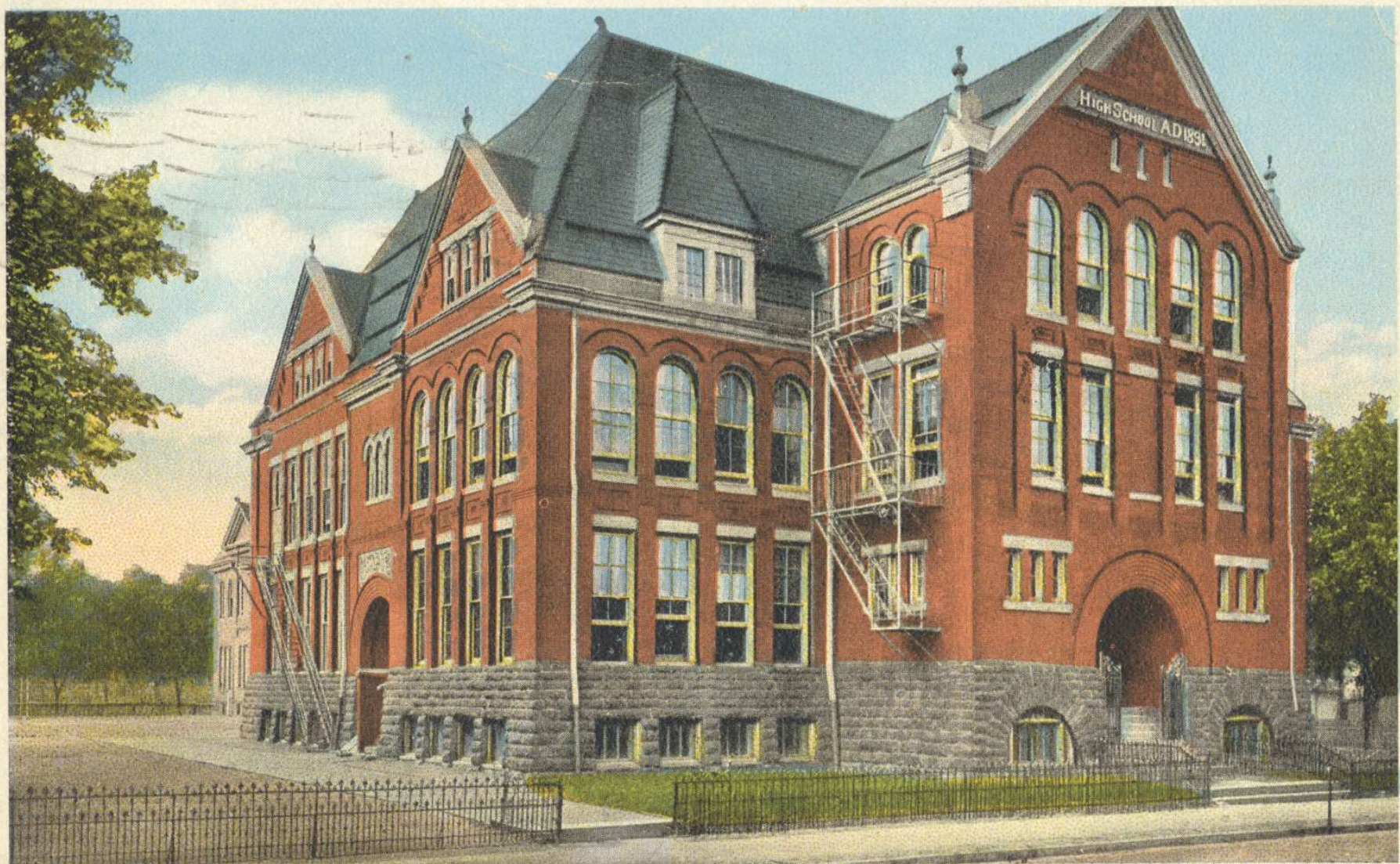
No. 3 Circle of City from Fire Tower, Pottstown, Pa.

Potts Burial Ground

Jefferson School

Streeper School

M.M. Richards School

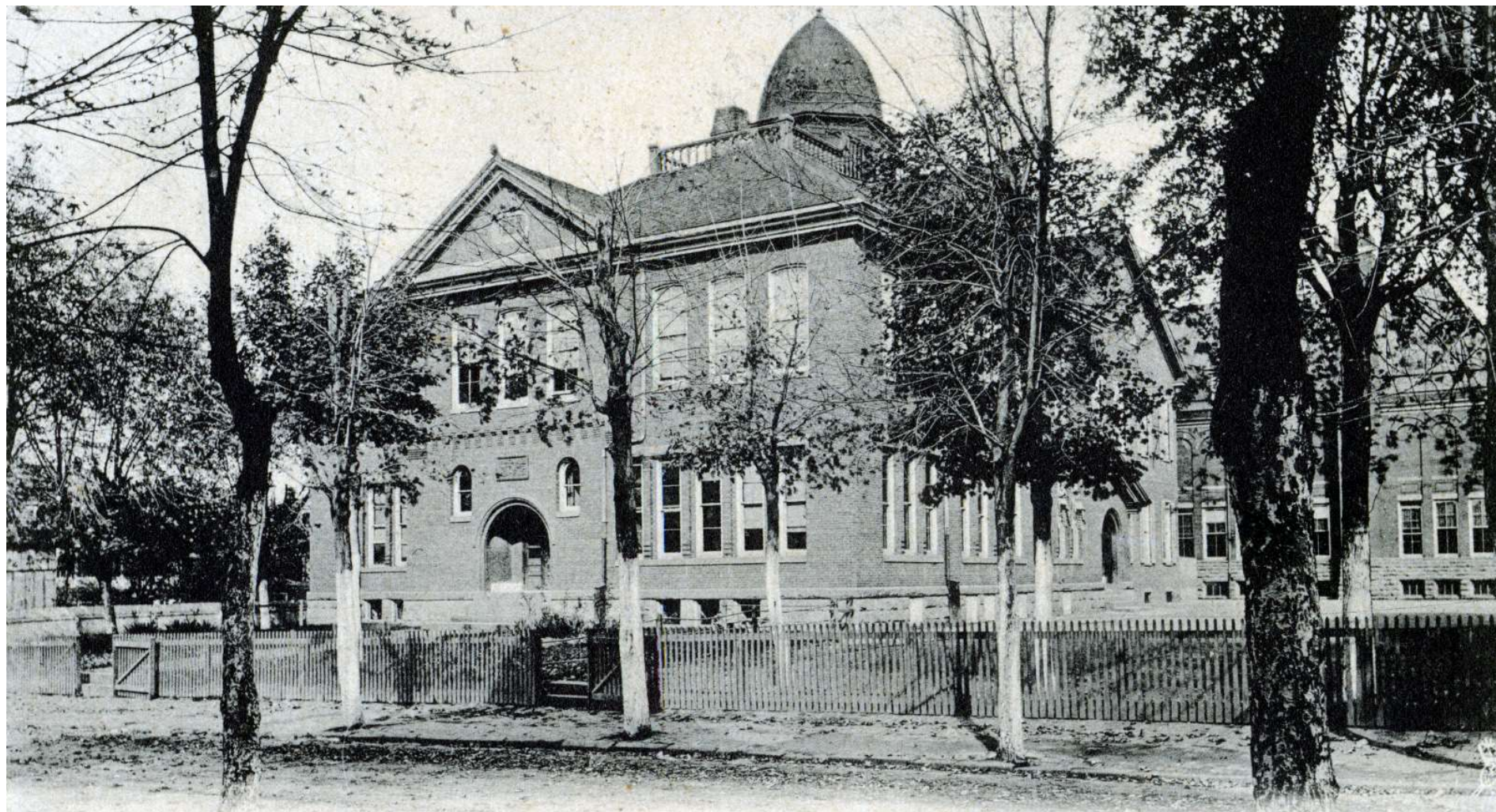


HIGH SCHOOL, POTTSTOWN, PA.

1891 High School – becomes junior high in 1926, burns down in 1932



1891 High School – becomes junior high in 1926, burns down in 1932



POTTSTOWN, Pa. WASHINGTON SCHOOL BUILDING.

H. A. Custer, Book, Stationery and Art Store, Pottstown, Pa.

Washington School



Washington School

1892 high school

Administration

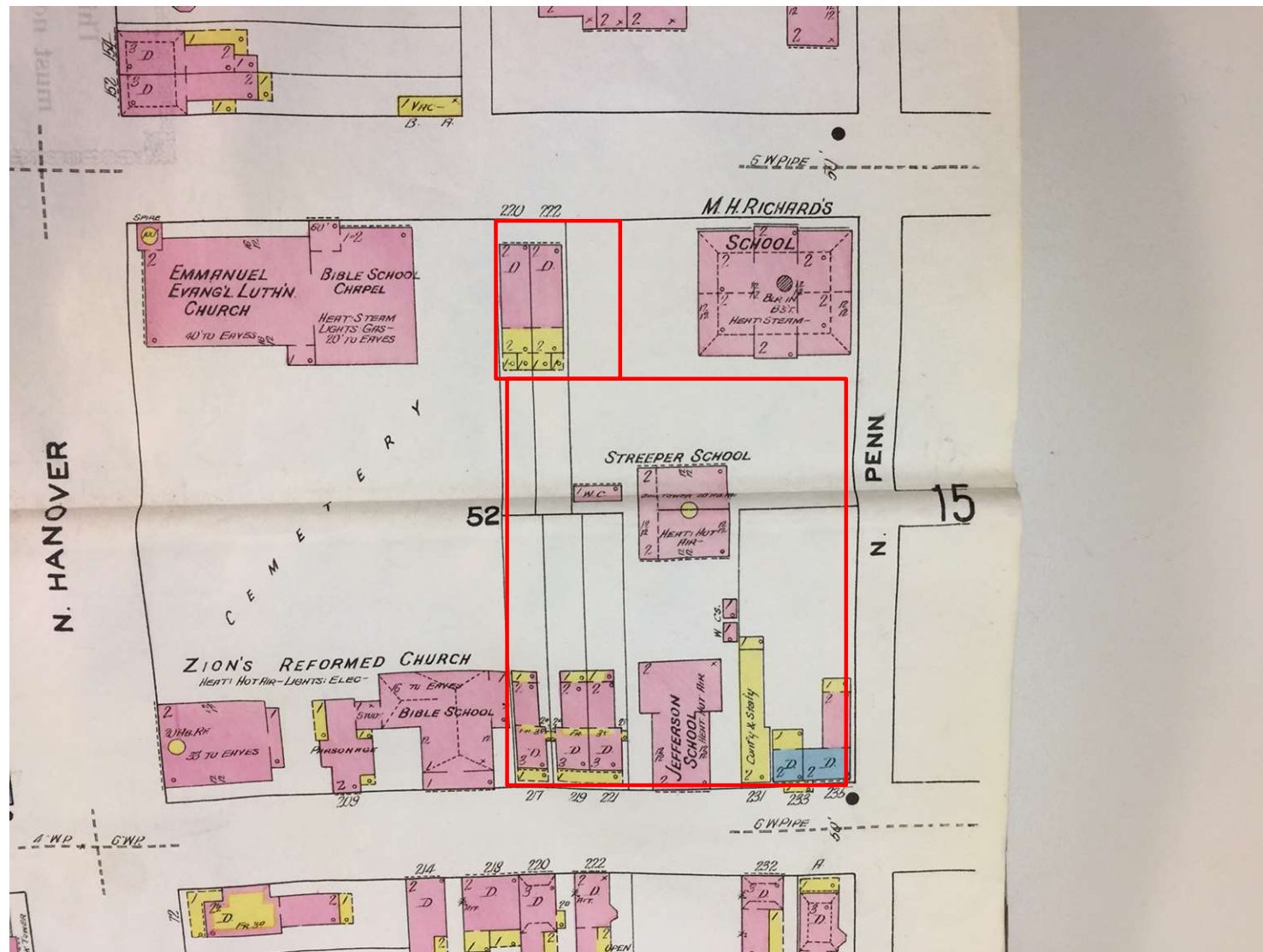
Jackson School



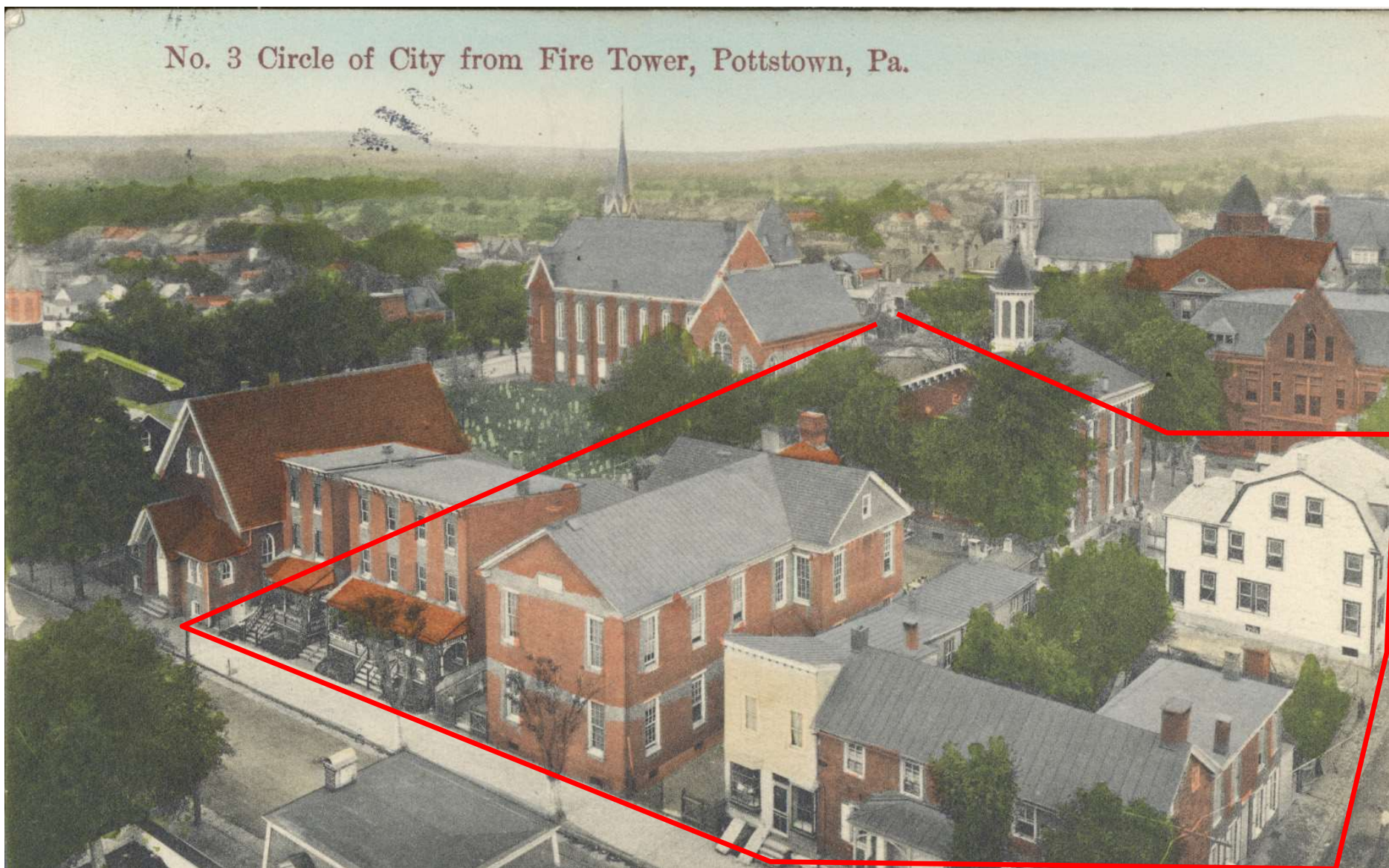
Washington School



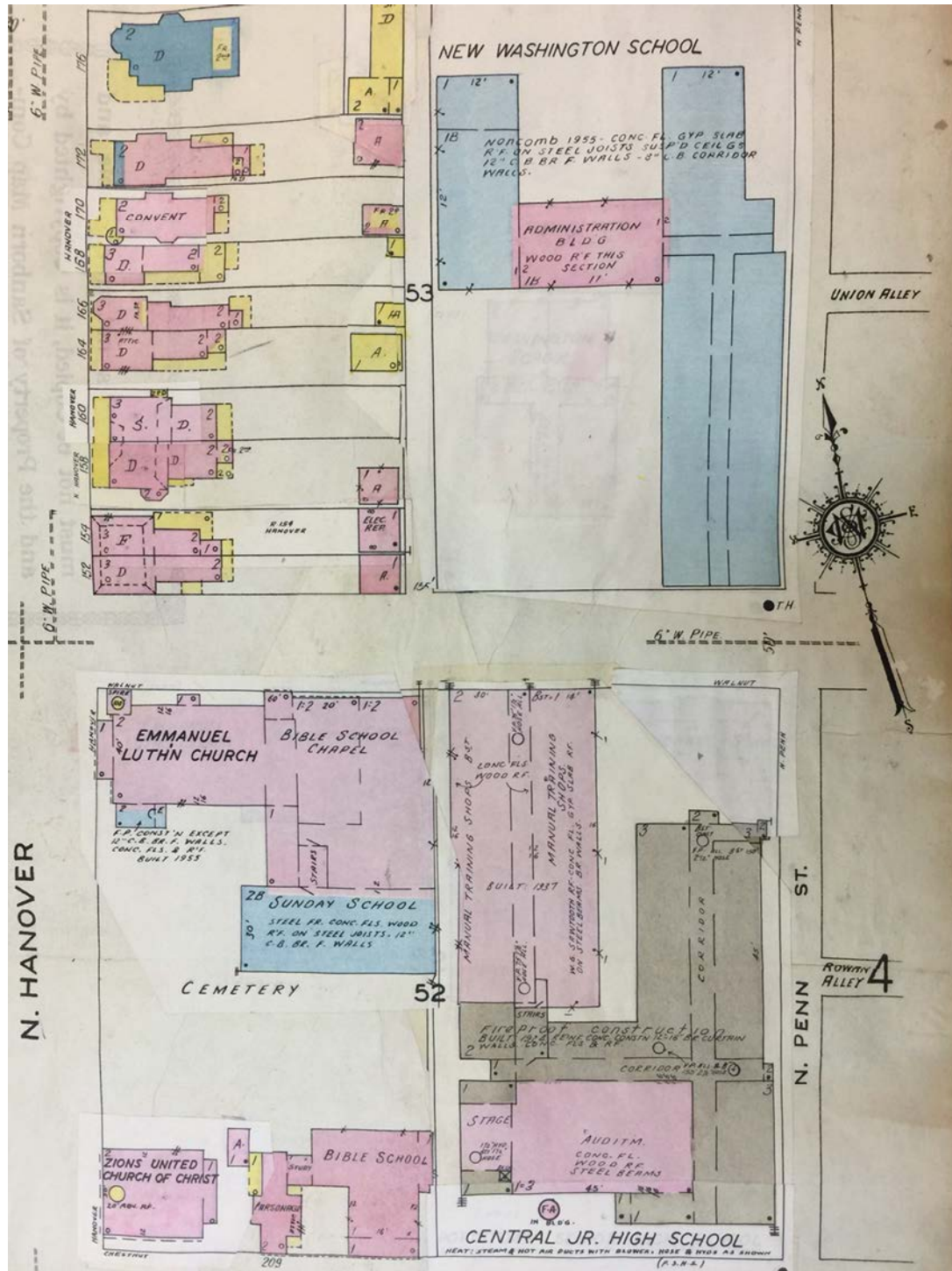
St. Paul's UCC, now across from Franklin School, this site now a parking lot

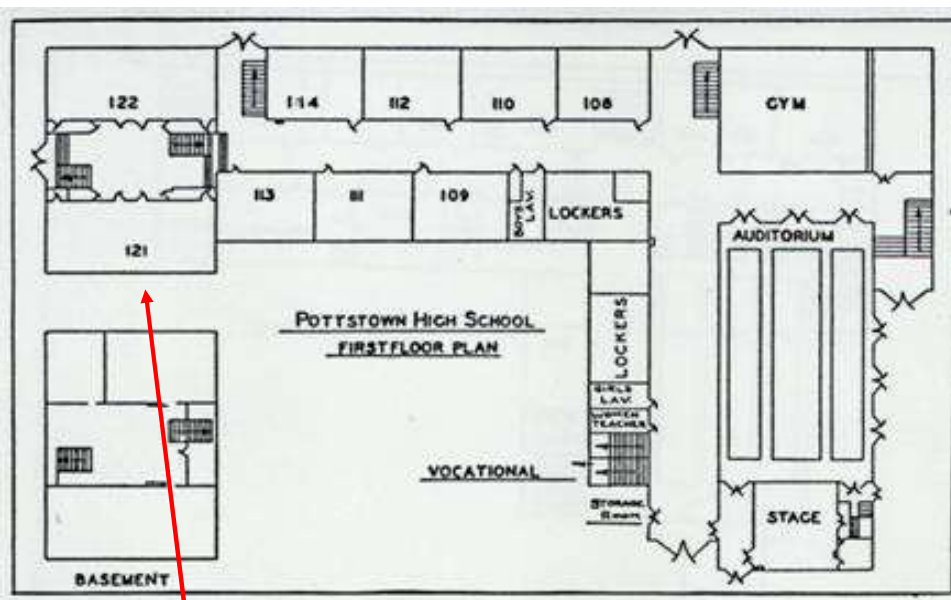


No. 3 Circle of City from Fire Tower, Pottstown, Pa.

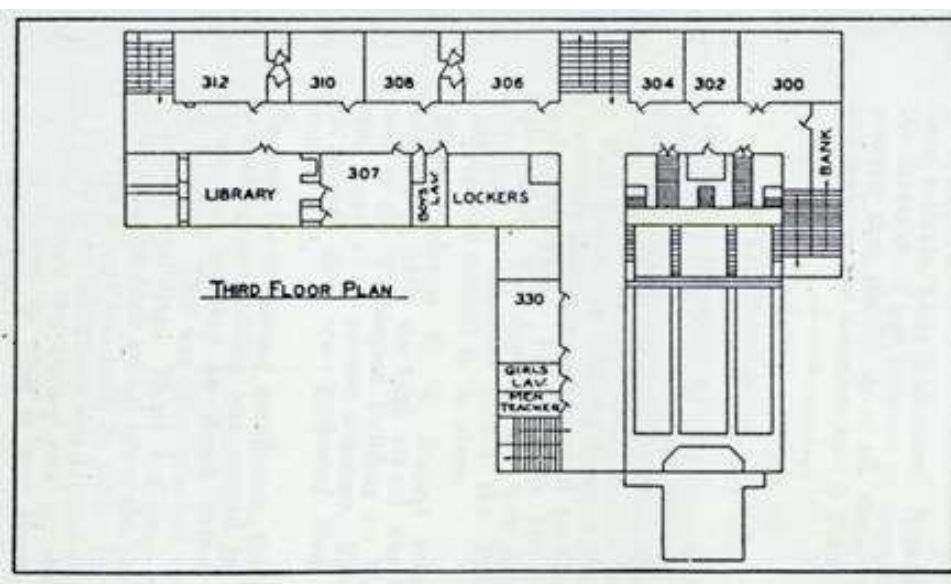


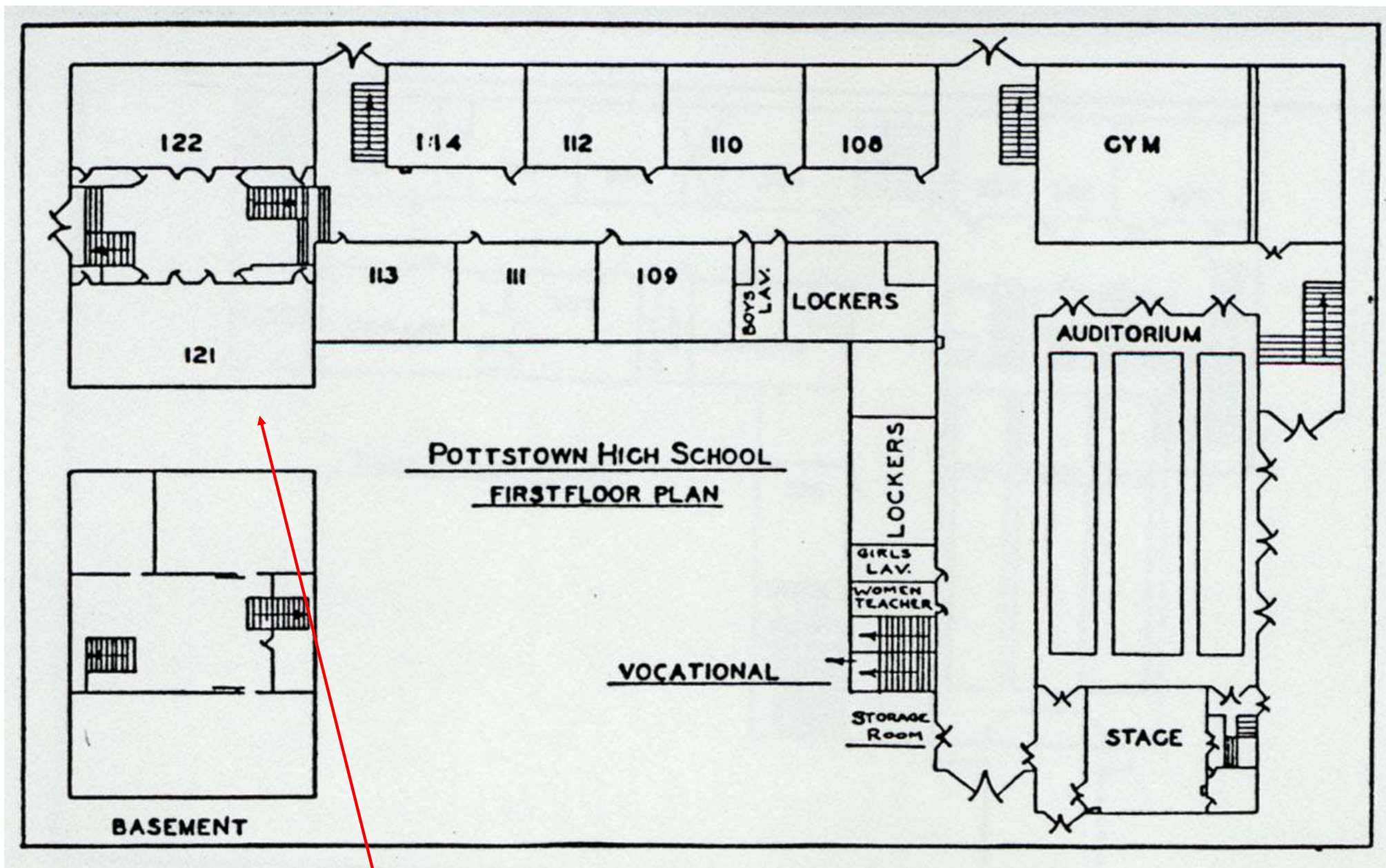




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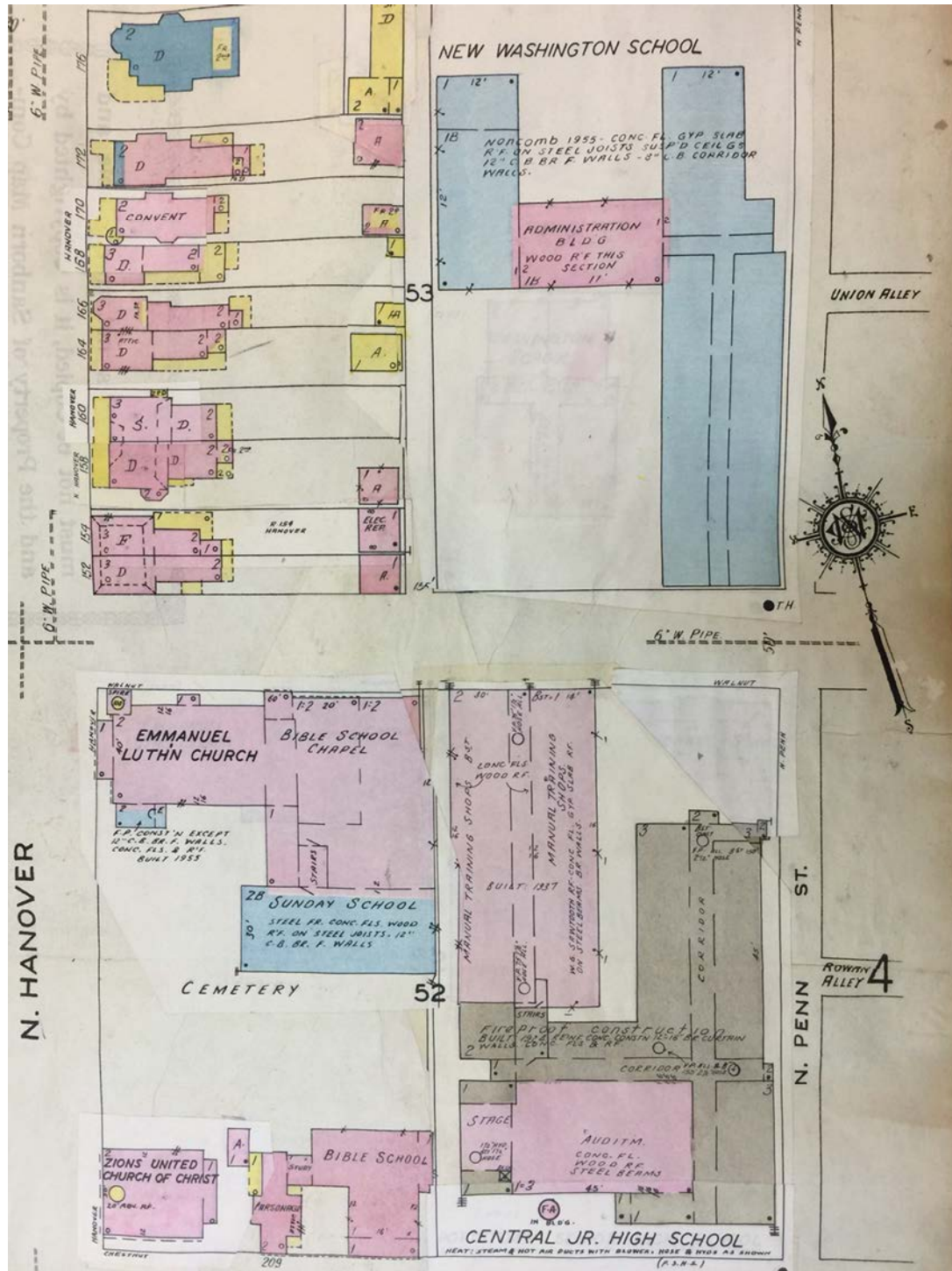
M.M. Richards School





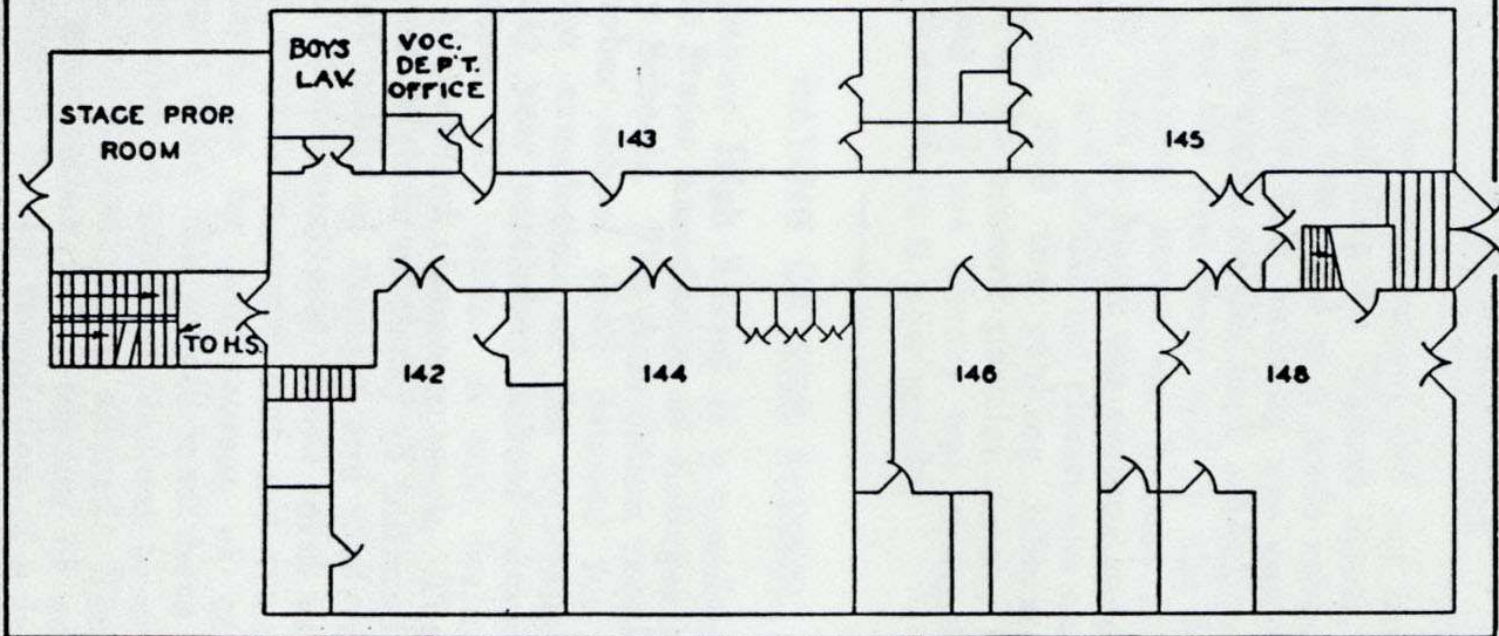
M.M. Richards School







VOCATIONAL ANNEX
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

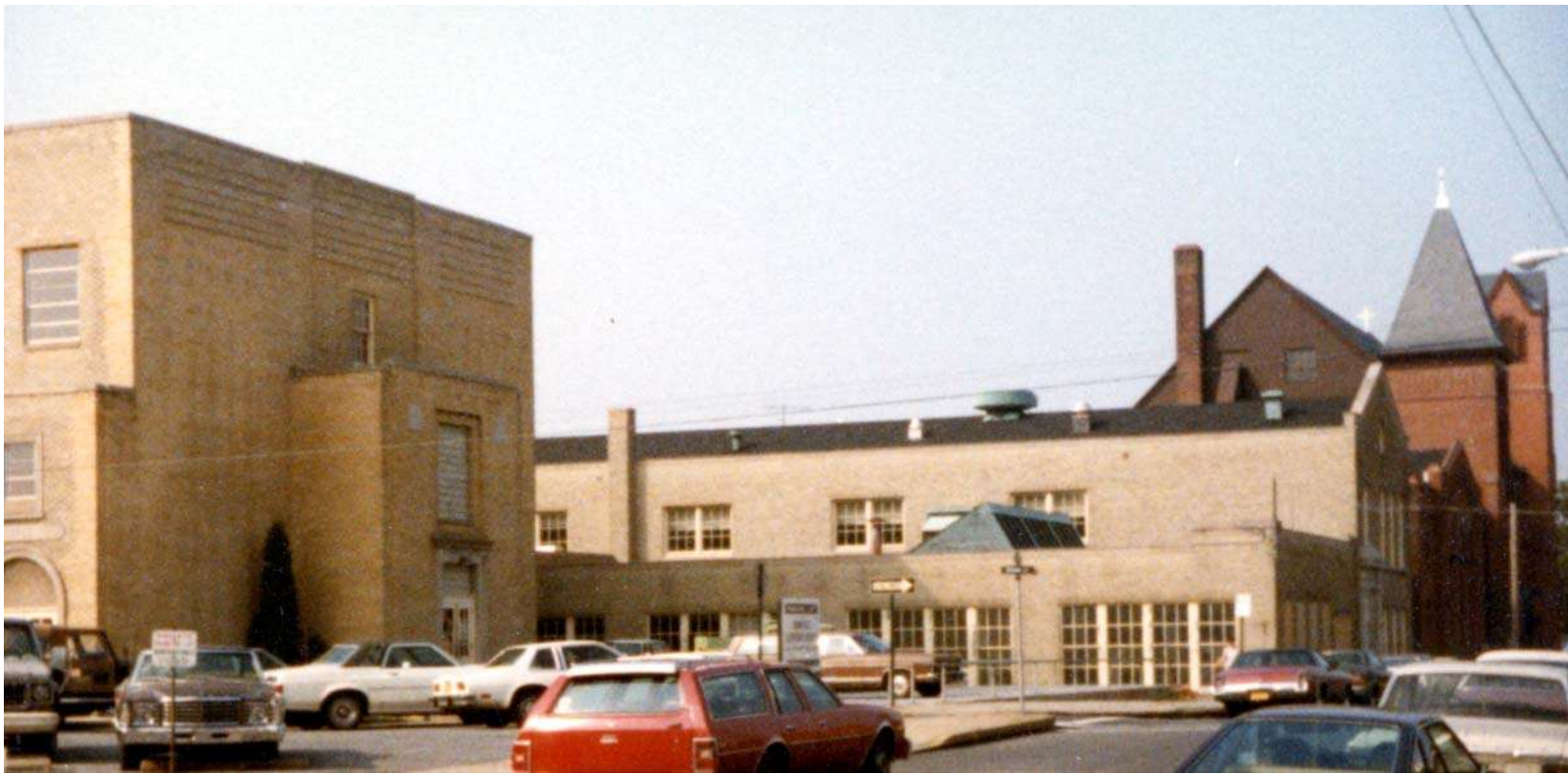




New Pottstown High School opens 1961



Pottstown High School becomes Central Junior High School 1961-1973 (7,8,9)
Intermediate School 1973-1976 (6,7)



The annex portion of the building was renovated in 1977 for five programs of Pottstown High School's vocational-technical school.



— AN INSIDE LOOK —

No way Pottstown can afford to save old school building

Pottstown Borough Council president Edmund Skarbek took an inside look at his old alma mater, Pottstown High School, for the first time Wednesday since he graduated more than 20 years ago.

Skarbek looked at the wires hanging from the walls and ceilings which had once housed light fixtures and switches.

He looked at the vacant spaces in the rooms where there were once radiators.

He looked at the ceilings in the halls where the tiles had been ripped away, and the missing doors and hardware, and he decided there was no way Pottstown Borough could afford to renovate the building.

"It would cost \$300,000 — or \$1 million — just to put it back the way it was when they closed the school," he said. "There's just no way we could afford to save this building."

Skarbek conceded that neither he nor anyone from council had looked at the school building two years ago when the school district offered it to the borough for \$1.

"I'm sure the borough manager looked at it," he said. "The architects and engineers looked at it, and they recommended that it just wasn't feasible. They were the experts, and we took their word for it."

The building was originally built as Pottstown High School in 1923. It served as the borough's high school until 1960, when the new high school was constructed. The building then served as Central Junior High School until 1972, when it was made into an Intermediate School. The Intermediate School closed in 1976, and one wing of the building was renovated to house vocation shops from the high school.

(Continued on Page 3)

"...the way it is now — there's nothing we could do with it. It's so stripped down. It's just a shell..."

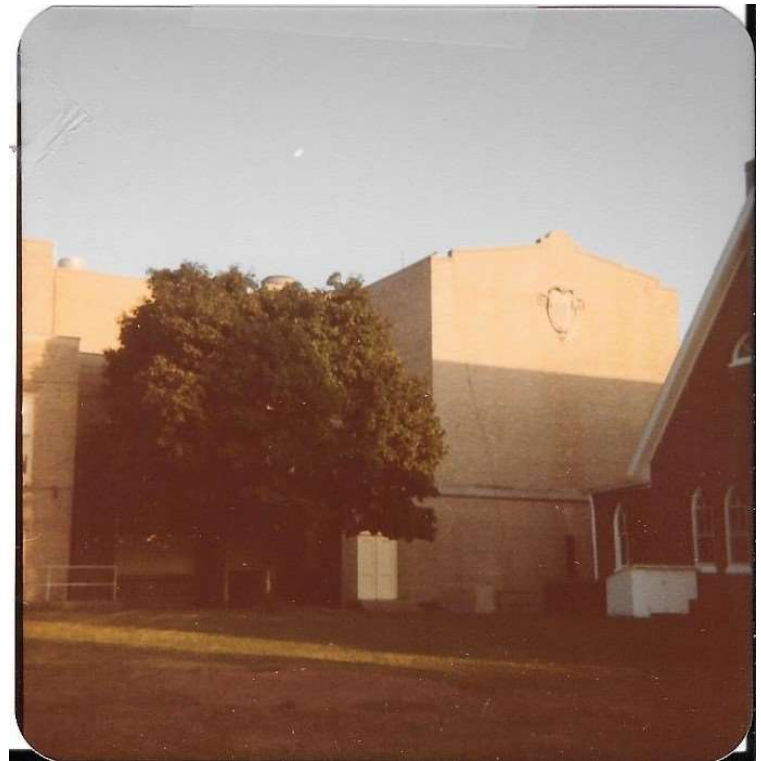
— Edmund Skarbek



AN ERA GONE BY — An old band uniform hangs from a group of broken desks on the floor of the original gymnasium in the former Pottstown High School. The high school building, constructed in 1923 by William Hampton, was completely stripped in the last two years in preparation for the demolition of the building later this month. For more pictures and a story about the man who built Pottstown High School, see page 11.

1982 school is
sold to Emmanuel
Lutheran Church
and torn down for
a parking lot.



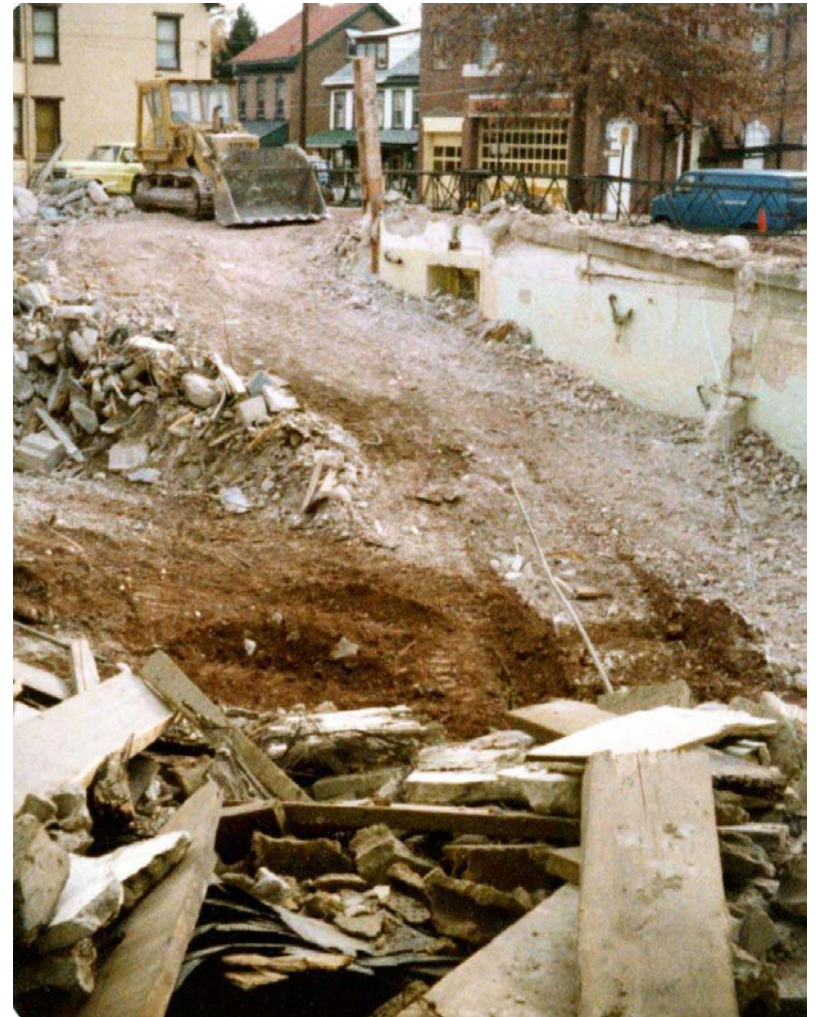






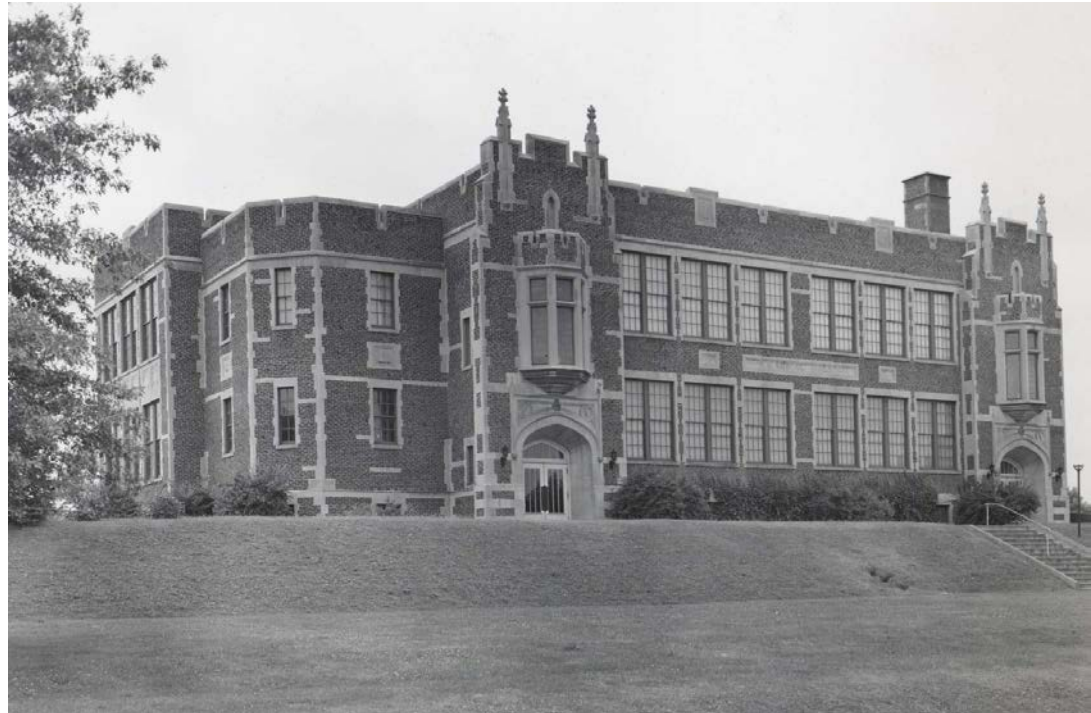








Franklin Elementary School



Rupert Elementary School



Jefferson Elementary School



Lincoln Elementary School



1953

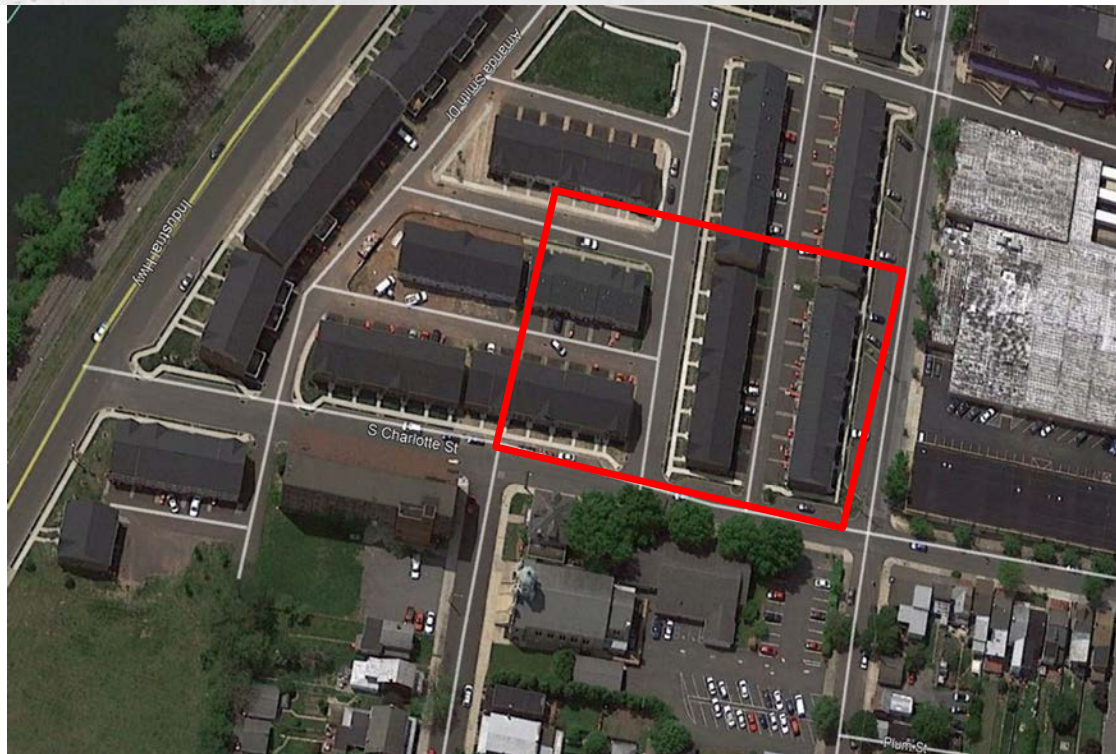
West End Elementary School

The West End Elementary School in Pottstown, PA, was one of the first of many local schools designed by Sanders & Thomas Associates, Sanders & Thomas' architectural engineering subsidiary. The 12-classroom school features an all-purpose room that was planned for maximum flexibility as either a gymnasium or as an auditorium.



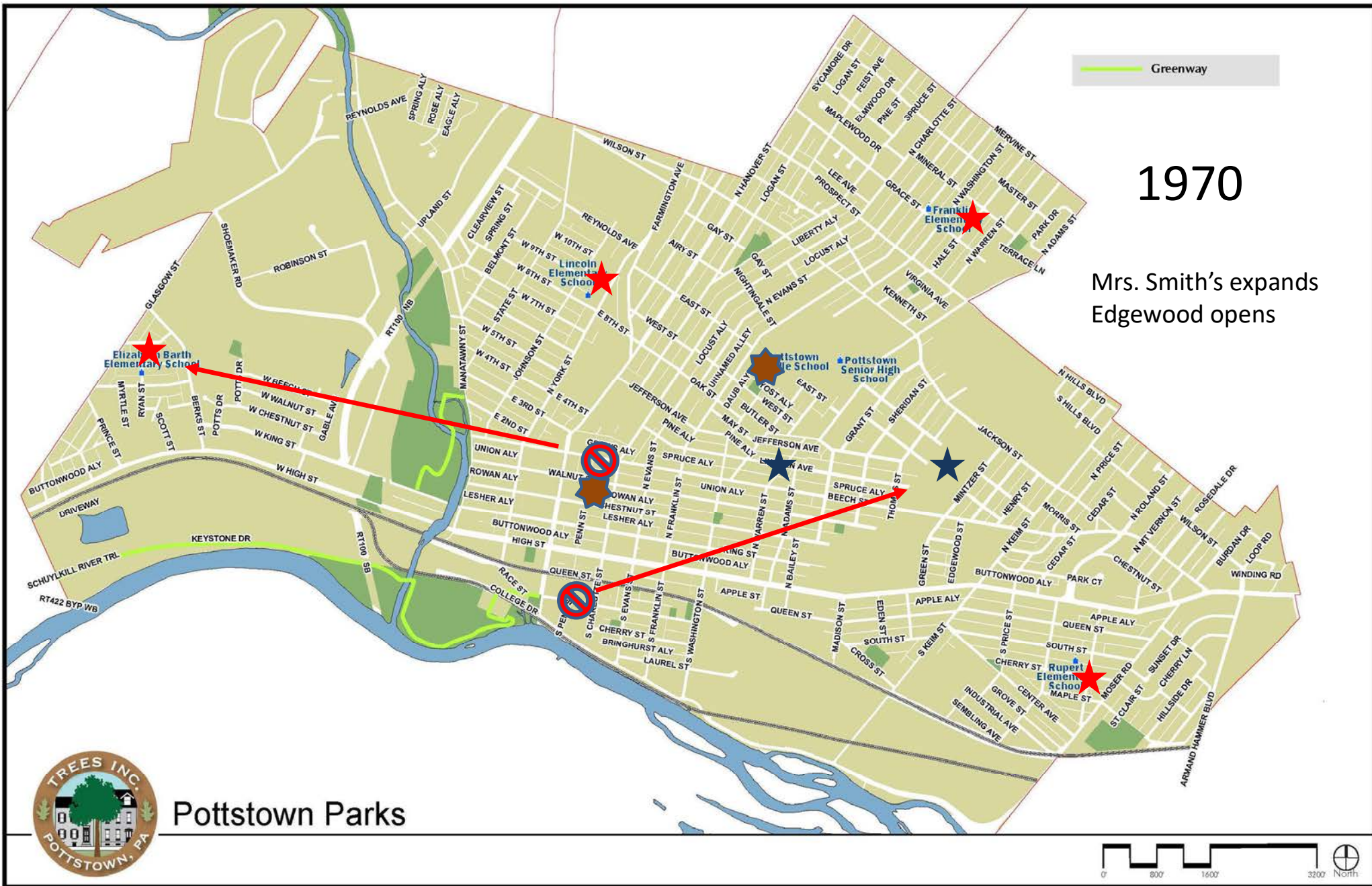


St. Clair Elementary School



1970

Mrs. Smith's expands
Edgewood opens



Pottstown Parks



1976
Intermediate
School (Central)
closes
9th grade to
high school



Pottstown Parks



Jefferson Elementary School closes 1980
District uses for storage and MELC until 2002,
sells for apartments in 2002 for \$400,000 to
Pennrose Properties for senior apartments





1980
4,000 students

Jefferson closes



Pottstown Parks



POTTSTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT ENROLLMENT HISTORY 1980 THROUGH 2010															
Building					1968-1969	1969-1970	1970-1971	1971-1972	1972-1973	1973-1974	1974-1975	1975-1976	1976-1977	1978-1979	1979-1980
Barth															
Edgewood															
Franklin															
Lincoln															
Rupert															
Elementary enrollment					2975	2899	2851	2731	2646	2177	2088	1941	2176	2091	
Intermediate school										721	687	655			
Junior High School					1142	1136	1168	1168	1177	718	700	725	619	655	
High School					982	999	1020	1069	1067	1059	1006	969	1324	1266	
District-wide 4K															
TOTAL ENROLLMENT						5,099	5,034	4,968	4,890	4,675	4,481	4,290	4,119	4,012	
Building	1980-1981	1981-1982	1982-1983	1983-1984	1984-1985	1985-1986	1986-1987	1987-1988	1988-1989	1989-1990	1990-1991	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994	1994-1995
Barth	361	386	369	364	368	379	402	361	313	304	326	327	302	350	320
Edgewood	282	242	253	256	253	230	269	264	253	224	252	244	250	287	295
Franklin	394	365	354	365	374	372	387	358	336	340	334	353	356	359	379
Lincoln	422	429	404	446	422	402	398	397	373	357	368	379	383	373	395
Rupert	282	276	283	285	297	301	283	277	247	241	262	263	276	279	289
Middle School	563	548	524	508	483	449	436	410	588	581	599	634	630	622	637
High School	1,155	1,077	1,043	969	985	919	867	809	769	687	663	655	676	689	648
District-wide 4K													159	152	179
TOTAL ENROLLMENT	3,459	3,459	3,230	3,193	3,182	3,052	3,042	2,876	2,879	2,734	2,804	2,855	3,032	3,111	3,142
Building	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000*	2000-2001*	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Barth	352	344	366	366	427	397	339	332	325	303	294	284	314	376	381
Edgewood	281	309	273	295	328	307	261	275	268	286	284	269	262	272	260
Franklin	384	396	415	413	439	427	381	325	350	311	305	302	290	270	279
Lincoln	400	385	383	386	436	471	395	398	394	360	341	337	327	343	349
Rupert	313	320	284	269	306	309	249	232	234	250	262	280	271	249	268
Middle School	662	714	745	742	476	484	754	758	744	734	721	726	679	665	618
High School	692	692	750	753	803	825	839	866	863	851	849	874	865	839	809
District-wide 4K	166	159	164	162	156	136	152	126	139	130	140	145	132	106	120
TOTAL ENROLLMENT	3,250	3,319	3,380	3,386	3,371	3,356	3,370	3,312	3,317	3,225	3,196	3,217	3,140	3,120	3,084

1976-1977
6th to
elementaries

7th to Jr High

9th to High

1988-1989

6th to
Middle
School

1999-2001

6th back to
elementary
schools
during
middle
school
renovations

March 1997
Hayes Large

TUESDAY

50°

The Mercury

MARCH 25, 1997

A PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING NEWSPAPER

POTTSTOWN, PA



Mercury Photo by John Strickler

The Pottstown Middle School is inadequate in many ways, according to the architect hired to assess schools in the Pottstown district. For example, the cafeteria, gymnasium and library are too small to serve the student population, and security needs to be improved.

School repairs: tens of millions

By ERIK ENGQUIST
Mercury Staff Writer

POTTSTOWN — Pottstown's public schools are outdated, poorly secured, and need extensive renovations to meet current educational standards and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, an architectural firm has determined.

Hayes Large Architects, hired by the school board to reorganize the district, found significant shortcomings at all eight of its buildings.

The firm made no cost projections, but it's clear that fixing all or most of the problems would require a significant tax increase.

"I think a lot of taxpayers are going to be upset," said school director Rose Marie Thees. "There has to be a limit to what we do."

Asked if her fellow board members would vote to do more construction than Pottstown needs, she said, "I'm sure

they're going to."

Richard Huss, chairman of the board's facilities committee, disagreed. "We're all taxpayers," he said. "I don't want to see my taxes go into either."

He assured, "We're very cautious with what we're thinking about doing."

Referring to the district's strategic plan, Brad Furey, Hayes Large Architects' director of education facility planning, warned, "You simply can't do

all five elementary schools. On the

Neighborhood schools endangered

By ERIK ENGQUIST
Mercury Staff Writer

POTTSTOWN — The very existence of Pottstown's five elementary schools is at stake as the district considers abandoning its neighborhood schools concept.

The average enrollment of the elementary schools, 381 students, is substantially less than modern elementary schools are built to accommodate.

Consolidating the small schools into, say, three larger buildings, each with a capacity of 650 students, would reduce administration, maintenance and other operating expenses.

It would also be cheaper than renovating all five elementary schools. On the

tipside, busing costs would increase. But the most significant change would be that of the district's philosophy of early education.

"We've always prided ourselves on having neighborhood schools," said school director Barry Haring, "but we may not be able to do that anymore."

That is, with the district all but committed to expanding and renovating the middle school, it might not be able to afford to do the same for its five elementary schools.

But at a recent school board meeting, Haring's comment immediately raised concerns among his colleagues. Both

(See CONSOLIDATION on A3)

New schools: Hefty taxes

(SCHOOLS from A1)

it in the buildings that you have today.

Officials from the firm detailed findings for each of the district's buildings at a public meeting last week. The high school is faring well compared to some of the elementary buildings, while the middle school requires the most work, the architects said.

At the high school, security should be addressed and Pottstown Community Television operations should be consolidated, said Hayes Large's Bill Zinner. He said the library and media center is too confined and should be enlarged and relocated, the cafeteria is too small and its kitchen needs new equipment, and the auditorium needs modification — possibly a balcony.

The middle school should be reconfigured to accommodate its school-within-a-school educational program, though Zinner said, "That will be somewhat possible but not completely possible."

The middle school's cafeteria is too small and "needs to be replaced. It's just not working," said Zinner.

He added, "This is a building that has security problems because of the number of entrances." Only the nurse is positioned to monitor the main entrance, which, Zinner noted, is not handicapped accessible.

Here's more, said the architect. Many classrooms are smaller than the modern state standard of 650 square feet, reducing formal building capacity from 829 students to 473. The gymnasium is too small and should not be on a different floor from the locker rooms. And storage space is so lacking that wrestling mats are rolled up in front of a fire exit. "You're really not supposed to do that," Zinner said.

He called the library's proportions "unfortunate," explaining it is too small to accommodate books, computers, other elec-

tronic media and students. The science rooms at the middle school are also too small, Zinner said.

The district's five elementary schools were found to be cramped, poorly secured, and with second floors and bathrooms inaccessible to the handicapped. At Barth Elementary, the library ceiling is "atrocious" and must be replaced, and elsewhere in the building water runs down an interior wall, Zinner stated.

School administrators also lack control over the main entrance, and security is compromised by "doors all over the place," he said. But the fire code requires the doors be usable, the architect noted.

The study found the communal rooms at Edgewood Elementary too small to accommodate any more students, making the school a poor candidate for classroom expansion.

At Franklin Elementary, similar to the other elementary schools, "You're out of room," Zinner said. Security is again compromised by the separation of administrators from the main entrance, he added.

Rupert school was judged a candidate for replacement. Zinner called the building "fairly difficult to administer and keep control of," noting, "People can get into the building in any number of locations without anyone seeing them."

The architect likened Rupert's main entrance to a loading dock, and said the art and music room lacks storage space and the library and two special education rooms are too small.

The Jefferson building, which the district leases to several programs, "is generally pretty tired, inside and out," Zinner reported. Aware that several school directors favor renovating the building rather than constructing a new one, Zinner added, "We're keeping an open mind about the building."

Neighborhood schools in town may be history

(CONSOLIDATION from A1)

Judith Zahora and Joni Breidenbach questioned whether parents would approve of sacrificing the neighborhood schools concept for the sake of physical improvements and lower expenses.

One board member questioned whether changes should be made to the elementary buildings at all. "Can we afford it? No, we can't," said Rose Marie Thees. "The only dire need we have is the middle school at this point."

Indeed, while most of the elementary schools are near or above student capacity, their enrollments are projected to slowly decrease over the next 10 years.

Board president Mark Lawler predicted an influx of young families into Pottstown.



1999-2002
\$40 Million

Pottstown

**SCHOOL DISTRICT
FACILITY STUDY**



MAY 9, 2001



**GILBERT
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POTTSTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM FACILITY OPTION ANALYSIS



January 27, 2005



Crabtree, Rohrbaugh & Associates
Architects

January 2006

The Mercury
Sunday
January 8, 2006
www.pottsmmerc.com
A Pulitzer Prize-Winning Newspaper
Pottstown, Pennsylvania

A \$54 MILLION PLAN

"The people in this community are vitally concerned with what these plans will mean for them."

— Jack Wolf, president, Pottstown Borough Council, on plans to revitalize the Washington Street neighborhood



John Stricker/The Mercury



Kevin Hoffman/The Mercury

Top, a view of row homes in the 500 block of Walnut Street in Pottstown that have been identified as properties that could be acquired and demolished to make way for new residential development as part of a redevelopment plan. Above, an aerial view of High and Washington streets, which is the focus of the redevelopment plan.

Pottstown council to hold vote on Monday

Mercury Staff Report

POTTSTOWN — More than \$54 million is the initial estimate for revitalizing the neighborhood surrounding Washington Street.

That figure includes the estimated \$11 million cost of the early childhood education center that is being called the project's "centerpiece," around which this project has grown.

The Borough Council was briefed on the plan Wednesday.

Edward F. Guehrter, a partner in the Jamieson-based consulting firm of Mullin &

Leongran Association Inc., which created the plan's first draft, called the early childhood education center "the start of the snowball."

Although that snowball is predicated on the assumption that the early childhood education center the school district has been pursuing for more than a year will be built, Guehrter, in response to a question from Councilman James Vlahos, conceded that the footprint for that building could be used for something other than a school.

Nevertheless, on Thursday the school board began consideration of a second re-

development plan for the early childhood education center as it relates to the "Washington Neighborhood Initiative," as the project is now being called.

A school board vote on that resolution is expected later this month while the Borough Council's vote on whether or not to proceed with the next step of the revitalization project is scheduled for Monday night.

Three-phase project
The area identified for redevelopment is roughly bordered by Chestnut Street on the west, Birch Street on the north, High Street on the south and the Hill School on the east.

Man accuse in drug deal speaks out

By Carl Hessler Jr.
chessler@pottsmmerc.com

NORRISTOWN — To his neighbors and acqu David Francis Downey, according to testimony, he is known as a Navy SEAL or a CIA agent who is the Middle East to hunt for Saddam Hussein American prisoners of war.

However, the Limerick business man, who is accused of providing a fatal dose of cocaine to a 17-year-old female escort, admitted Friday that he never served in the military.

According to Downey, he didn't even complete the ROTC program he joined at Penn State University, where he was a student in the 1970s.

Testifying for the first time during a bail hearing, Downey did not dispute the allegations against him, but he provided a Montgomery County judge with some biographical information. It was time he spoke since his Dec. 23 arrest in connection with the Aug. 1 death of Ashley Burg, of Wilmington, The 52-year-old divorced father of two said he and raised in Baltimore, and moved to the Ph area at age 4. Downey testified that he attended F

(The DOWNNEY as 4)

Philly man plead not guilty to charges of lying to police

By Carl Hessler Jr.
chessler@pottsmmerc.com

NORRISTOWN — A Philadelphia man has pleaded guilty to charges he lied to detectives investigating August murder of a 15-year-old Pottstown boy.

William Clarke, 23, of the 5600 block of Sam was waived his arraignment in Montgomery County.

Authorities Hinton lied to police, Clarke was charged with perjury. Clarke was charged with perjury. Clarke was charged with perjury.

By waiving his arraignment, Clarke did not have to appear before a county judge for a final reading of the charges against him. His case will now be listed for trial.

The arraignment marked the first opportunity had to enter a plea to the charges. Clarke, who is charged with perjury, was charged with perjury.

(The LYING CHARGES as 4)

Pottstown council to vote on \$54M revitalization plan

(REDEVELOPMENT PLAN AS 1)

west, Birch Street on the north, High Street on the south and the Hill School on the east. The project, as currently envisioned, would be broken up into three phases, with the first phase being the largest and most costly. About \$44 million would be spent on the first phase, Guehrter said.

Efforts would be concentrated in the first phase on the Washington Street area roughly bordered by Franklin Street on the west, the alley between Birch and Walnut streets on the north, High Street on the south and Warren Street on the east.

Much of the money in the first phase would be used to acquire properties, demolish them, build new housing, renovate existing housing and improve sidewalks, streets, streetlights, and water and sewer lines, Guehrter said.

The goal, in terms of housing, is to reduce the density of that neighborhood somewhat and facilitate new residential development, all of which is designed to increase the value of the housing at Pottstown's core.

Who's paying for this?

The study the council reviewed Wednesday identifies a number of potential funding sources for the project, each tailored to a specific activity. For example, acquiring properties, relocating the occupants and replacing housing could all be funded by a variety of state programs through the Department of Economic and Community Development, as well as a tax increment financing program run by Montgomery County.

When Gov. Ed Rendell visited Pottstown in December 2004, he pledged to bring additional money to the Washington Neighborhood Initiative.

Guehrter and Jerry Nugent, who is with the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority which is shepherding this project through the redevelopment process outlined by the state, said recent meetings with Rendell and his staff have confirmed that commitment.

Nugent also noted that in the past four or five years the county has lost more than \$4 million on projects in Pottstown, which in turn leveraged another \$10 million in outside financing.

Guehrter said a meeting with several area banks resulted in all of them expressing an interest in being involved with financing some of the project.

Will locals have to pay?

The cost estimate for the early childhood education center, which stands at about \$11 million, was arrived at through a simple formula of multiplying the estimated cost per square foot by the amount of square footage needed for the facility, said school board President Barry Robertson.

The study identifies the Pottstown School District as the source of funding for the center, but Superintendent David Kerm re-affirmed Friday that it remains the school district's intention to obtain those funds from sources other than local taxpayers.

"All that means is that we are in charge of providing the funding for that project, and we continue to look for ways that will not require local taxpayer dollars," said Kerm.

Another concern about cost was raised by Vlahos and fellow Councilman Mark Gibson, both of whom noted that current ordinances would require homeowners to pay for sewer water and sewer laterals if the pipe work uncovered problems, an observation confirmed by borough solicitor Charles D. Garner Jr.

"If you don't say anything now to those folks, and then they get hit with a bill once this project gets started, there's going to be trouble," Gibson warned.

"Well, people's property value would be higher as a result of the project," noted council Vice President Stephen Torosky.

"If they're not able to afford the cost, it might as well be \$1 million for all the good it would do them," said Councilman Mike Wenzel. "Not everyone has \$1.5 million lying around."

But Nugent said the idea is to find funds that would delay or eliminate costs for that work which would normally be the responsibility of the property owners.

"The cost to replace any laterals will be incorporated into the costs for the project," Nugent said. "We want to find a way to get that funded up-front, so we do not have the residents of their neighborhood bearing an undue burden for the cost of this plan."

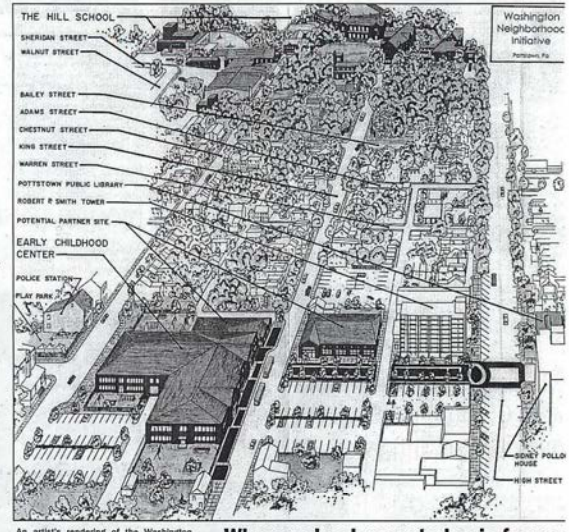
That also goes for the acquisition of properties, said Nugent.

Official: Utilities unlikely

Although the Pottstown Planning Commission designated the core area of Pottstown as a lighted several years ago, giving the government legal authority to take properties through eminent domain, Nugent predicted that would be unnecessary.

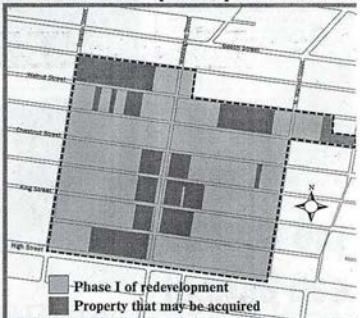
"In all my two decades' of experience being involved in redevelopment projects, there is only one property that we ever had to obtain through eminent domain. All other properties, we were always able to come to an amicable agreement with the property owner."

Input outlined
Amicable agreement is something the plan's supporters hope to receive from those who live in



An artist's rendering of the Washington Neighborhood Initiative.

Where redevelopment plan is focused



the neighborhood where this effort is focused.

In the several months it has taken to develop the plan, many publicly minded groups have been involved, said Guehrter. Nugent and former Councilman Harry Price, who chairs the borough's economic oversight committee, the lead agency in the effort. That has included involvement of local businesses which have paid the \$30,000 cost of the study to date, ensuring no taxpayer money has been spent in developing the plan up to this point, said Robertson.

While Robertson promised Wednesday to provide to Vlahos a list of those who contributed toward the cost of the study, it has not yet been made public. A request for that information was made Friday by The Mercury was rebuffed by school officials.

"There will be ample opportunity for public input. We're very conscious of the need to have interaction between the residents, the people involved and

The next phase would include specific property would be Guehrter said. take about four to complete it

Another hero goes to heaven

Unlike too many people today, including a younger generation disillusioned by professional athletes and their million-dollar contracts and traveling upon my



right, no one will ever, ever change those feelings. But recently I added a whole lot of other people to my revered list of heroes — those fighting cancer. Every day of the week, often for months and months, and sometimes for years, they battle an enemy that has no

TODAY'S FORECAST

Partly cloudy and milder. High of 4

INSIDE

Business CI Living EI State C

February 2007 School district administrators and select board members visit Avon Grove School District

Avon Grove School District
southern Chester County
67 square miles



Penn London Elementary School
K-2 877 students



Avon Grove Intermediate School
3-6 1,504 students







Books, Bricks & Mortar

Pottstown School District's Elementary Redistricting Newsletter

SUMMARY

THE CHALLENGE:

Pottstown School District has five elementary schools, all in need of major renovations and expansions.

- The buildings are located mainly on the perimeter of town, with children bussed from the highly populated center of town. 35% of students are currently bussed.
- The five buildings are old.
- The cost to renovate and expand all five buildings would be too great a burden for taxpayers.

THE SOLUTION:

Two solutions are being considered:

1. Close two schools and renovate and expand or rebuild the remaining three.
2. Close all five old buildings and construct three new elementary education centers on one campus in a central location.

THE BENEFITS:

Both solutions offer benefits and challenges.

The **First Solution** has the benefit of reducing the cost to the taxpayers while allowing some families to attend a school that is currently located close to their home. However, even families living near a school still may be required to bus their children.

The **Second Solution** has the benefit of reducing the cost to taxpayers, while attracting additional public and private redevelopment funds. It eliminates the perception that some elementary schools are "better" than others and offers unique educational opportunities to all students.

THE CHOICE:

The Pottstown School District has produced this newsletter to inform residents about the challenge our District now faces. The solution we choose will be of great importance to our students, our families, and our community as a whole.

"The soft-minded man always fears change; he feels security in the status quo. For him the greatest pain is the pain of a new idea."

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Why must Pottstown's elementary school system change?

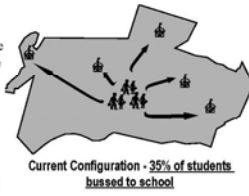
Over the past few years, you may have heard or read in that the Pottstown School District is looking to change its elementary education system. You may have questions as to why we need to consider change and how the changes will affect your children, your community, and your taxes. The goal of this newsletter is to educate you on the background, objectives, and alternatives of this endeavor.

Pitfalls of the Current System

Our current elementary school system features five buildings, located mainly on the outside perimeter of town. Maintaining five separate buildings is very expensive. Basic facilities maintenance in these buildings alone costs Pottstown taxpayers more than \$670,000 per year, 5% of our total school budget. This situation is expected to get worse every year until the buildings are either replaced or corrected through major renovation and expansion.

All five buildings are old by public education standards. The oldest was built in 1927, and the newest in 1969. There is overcrowding in all five buildings, with many children being taught in modular classrooms set up on school property.

In the current configuration, about 35% of our students are bussed. Bussing is necessary not only to transport children who live too far from their designated school, but also to meet court-mandated racial and ethnic diversity, to serve special education needs (more than 18% of our students are special education), and to redistribute students from the densely populated center of town to the five buildings on the perimeter.



Current Configuration - 35% of students bussed to school

How We Got To Where We Are

Elementary Redistricting Committee - In 2005, recognizing the need to change our elementary building system, the Superintendent of Schools created an Advisory Committee for Elementary Redistricting. This committee was comprised of parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. The Committee studied the issue, looking at population, geographical location, cost, bussing, and more. The Committee recommended that Pottstown change from a five building to a three building elementary system. The Committee did not recommend which, if any, of the current schools should be maintained and redeveloped or closed.

Discussion of a Downtown School - Concurrent with the Committee's work, there was much discussion in the press and among the Board of Education about construction of a downtown school. This idea was first suggested several years ago. The School District began to look at sites near the center of town. The District needs to avoid using a prime commercial site, as such sites ideally will be used for commercial development that will increase our tax base, thereby relieving some of the residential tax burden, and spur revitalization of the downtown retail district. Because our goal is to improve the tax base, we looked specifically for a site where property values are currently low. This offers maximum potential so we may see our investment in new bricks and mortar create simultaneous increases in the values of property surrounding the site. All of this will improve the tax base and reduce the burden on our overtaxed homeowners.

Selection of a Site and Center Concept - The suggestion of a site near the intersections of Chestnut and Washington Streets made the downtown school project so attractive that private partners as well as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania stepped forward and offered to commit additional investment dollars in the area surrounding the new school. The District quickly determined that the school should be an Early Childhood Learning Center, because studies show that an early investment in education (grades K-1) pays the greatest dividends to students and society.

As we explored the benefits of an Early Childhood Learning Center, we continued to explore options for our second grade through fifth grade buildings. One concept that emerged was the idea of concentrating the three buildings recommended by the Committee on one central campus in the heart of town. Architects were engaged to determine if a three-building campus of school "centers" could be built at the Chestnut and Washington Streets site. The answer was yes. (Please see related article on page 2.)

The Options Being Considered

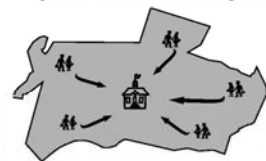
Two options for Elementary Redistricting are currently under consideration:

Option A - 1. Eliminate three existing schools; 2. Renovate and expand two existing schools to serve grades 2 through 5; and 3. Build the Early Childhood Learning Center to serve grades K and 1.

Option B - 1. Eliminate five existing schools; and 2. Build three new Centers (the Early Childhood Learning Center for grades K and 1, a Grades 2-3 Center, and a Grades 4-5 Center).

Both of these options will allow redevelopment of existing school land into taxable property. This will improve the tax base and take some of the burden off the backs of current homeowners. For example, if the site of Lincoln School was redeveloped into 100 houses valued at \$200,000 each, those homes would generate \$328,000 of additional revenue for the School District, reducing the burden on current taxpayers by that same amount, every year. (Please see related article on page 2.)

Both options involve roughly the same amount of bussing in the early stages of redevelopment. If Option B is selected, the District could expect to see some reduction in bussing in the long term.



One Proposed Configuration - Option B, Centers Campus - 35% of students bussed to school

Books, Bricks & Mortar

Winter 2007

How property taxes work: Why Pottstown homeowners pay such a high price....

It's a mystery to many. Why do Pottstown homeowners pay such high school taxes when our District spends less per child on education than most surrounding districts?

The answer is complex, but it is worth trying to understand. Only by understanding the way a School District (or any public entity) gets tax dollars to spend can you participate in the process of reducing your own tax burden.

Property Taxes

The School District taxes REAL property. That means houses, stores, businesses, and vacant land. It taxes that property based on its assessed value. The tax is in the form of mills. One mil is equal to one-tenth of one percent of the property value.

If your house is assessed at \$100,000 and the District school tax is 5 mills, then your school tax would be \$100,000 x .001 x 5 or \$500.

If the property within a District is assessed for a lot of money, no single taxpayer has to pay too much. Let's say Town A and Town B both have 5,000 taxable properties.

In Town A, the properties have an average assessed value of \$200,000. The School District in Town A needs \$5 million to operate per year. Based on the average property value and the needs of the District, the average homeowner in Town A would pay 5 mills (.5% of his home's value) for public education.

Town B is not as fortunate as Town A. Average property value in Town B is worth only \$85,000. Town B also needs \$5 million per year to operate its schools. Based on the average property value and the needs of the District, the average Town B homeowner would pay 11.8 mills (1.18% of his home's value), more than twice the Town A rate.

Pottstown is currently a Town B. We have low average property values. We also have:

- A large percentage of renters (44% of our school students live in rental housing).
- Many senior citizens and others living on fixed incomes (an estimated 25% of our taxpayers), and
- A high percentage of special education students, who cost on average two and a half times more to educate than non-special education students.

Increasing the Tax Base

The School District can reduce the burden on homeowners two ways: It can reduce school expenses (by consolidating five elementary schools into three, for example). And it can increase its tax base.

Increasing the tax base involves maximizing the tax-earning potential of every piece of real property in the town. The construction of 125 new townhouses at the old Mrs. Smith's factory site, for example, will add about \$400,000 new dollars to the district's tax base.

Financial experts from University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School are currently studying the potential to expand our tax base using the two Elementary Redistricting options. Look for details on their findings in a future edition of *Books, Bricks & Mortar*.

If the five elementary school sites — which currently provide no tax revenue to the district at all — can be redeveloped into upscale housing, the positive financial impact on borough taxpayers has the potential to be tremendous.

If at the same time we can increase the value of existing properties located in the center of town by spurring private investment and further public investment, Pottstown could change from a Town B to a Town A.

Only by working together to achieve such a goal can we make it happen.

Project History

The Pottstown School District first began to look at changing our educational system in 1996, when it ordered an architectural facilities feasibility report on the district's five elementary buildings. What follows is a list of some of the fact finding and information sharing activities that have taken place since then.

- Public meeting held at Rupert Elementary to discuss the 1996 Facilities Feasibility Study.
- In 2005, School Directors and Administrators began presentations to parents, teachers, civic organizations, potential partners, and other interested parties.
- The District requested conceptual drawings of an Early Childhood Learning Center which were published in The Mercury, posted on District website, discussed on WPAP and PCTV, and aired on CH8 Newsmakers program.
- Mr. Jeff Sparagana formed a committee of kindergarten teachers, administrators, and concerned citizens to study the educational programming and facilities needs of an Early Childhood Learning Center.
- District hired architects to explore building options regarding the existing five elementary buildings.
- Mullen & Lonigan was commissioned by the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority to study the possibility of neighborhood redevelopment in association with an Early Childhood Learning Center in the Chestnut and Washington Streets area.
- Presentations were made to Borough Council.
- The Mercury covered extensively the Early Childhood Learning Center proposal and the Elementary Centers concept.
- Early Childhood Learning Center presentations were made to the Chamber of Commerce Executive Board and its general membership, including over 200 attendees.
- A committee of potential partners in the Early Childhood Learning Center was formed to discuss continuity of curriculum.
- A committee was formed to apply for a \$600,000 kindergarten implementation grant.
- Superintendent David Krim produced a video concerning the community schools centers concept. This video was shared with parent groups and the staffs of each of our school district buildings and it aired on PCTV and is posted on the school district website.
- The Superintendent appointed a commission to study redistricting. Subsequently, a report was made to the board. That report was covered in The Mercury and is posted on the District website.
- Mr. David Lawrence, a nationally recognized early childhood education advocate, was invited to Pottstown to present his views on early childhood education to school officials, staff, and the public.
- A public forum was held to answer questions on the Early Childhood Learning Center and Elementary Centers concept. The questions posed and answers are posted on the District website.
- A joint task force, including representatives of Borough Council and the school district, has met to discuss placement of the Early Childhood Learning Center and the redevelopment of the Washington Neighborhood area.
- The Superintendent appointed a Facilities Committee of parents, teachers, administrators, and concerned citizens to study the issues of Early Childhood Education Center and community schools centers concept.
- The district began working with Dr. Harris Sokloff, Executive Director for the Centers for Schools Study Council of the University of Pennsylvania, to develop a study of the Early Childhood Learning Center and Elementary Centers concept.
- A preliminary report from Dr. Sokloff concerning educational best practices and school restructuring was made to the School Board in August 2006. That draft report aired on PCTV and was posted on the District website.
- Dr. Sokloff and Dr. Ross Koppel, also of University of Pennsylvania, reported to the Board in December 2006 on Dr. Sokloff's final findings and Dr. Koppel's summary of focus group discussions.
- An upcoming written survey is set to be distributed to approximately 1,700 residents.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN OF ELEMENTARY CENTER



Five Facts About the Centers Proposal:

1. Rehabilitating and maintaining the existing elementary schools will cost as much or more than building new centers. Keeping our current buildings safe and functional is extremely costly, and the situation will only get worse as the buildings grow even older.
2. By making the current elementary school lots available to reputable developers, we could dramatically increase Pottstown's tax base, providing relief to current taxpayers.
3. Net bussing costs could be the same as, or lower than, current bussing costs.
4. Student safety would be improved by a centralized security design, well-planned student pickup and drop-off points, and facilities with modern security features and equipment.
5. Resident homeowners in the redevelopment area could have their homes improved at little or no cost or might have the opportunity to move into the new, quality homes that could be built on the current elementary school sites at special reduced prices.

Books, Bricks & Mortar

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www.pottstownschooldistrict.com

Comments or questions?
Call: John Armato
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May primary 2007

Results of school board race will likely determine course of single-campus idea

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — The vital question facing the Pottstown School District will not be found on today's ballot, despite the fact that the results of today's vote hold the potential to determine the district's direction and fortunes for the next decade.

The question, of course, is whether to retain the district's five elementary schools or consolidate them into a single campus along the Washington Street corridor.

While that question is not being asked of voters directly, the positions being staked out by the two opposing camps of candidates are so closely identified with each choice that the results of the election will likely determine whether the proposal moves forward.

The choice is fairly simple, although the issues involved certainly are not.

A vote for the incumbents — Barry Robertson, James Smock, Cathy Skitko, Philip Thees and Bonita

(See SCHOOL BOARD RACE on A3)

Voters say no to 'mega-campus'



Kevin Hoffman/The Mercury

Pottstown School Board challenger Michele Pargeon, above, greets voters in front of a sign telling voters to stop the \$54 million proposed mega campus in Pottstown. At right, the five challengers celebrate their victory. From left are Richard Huss, Julia Wilson, Nat White, Dennis Wausnock and Michele Pargeon smile and talk about the favorable results as they come in.

Daniel P. Creighton/The Mercury



Challengers overwhelm incumbents to win seats on Pottstown School Board

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — Voters swept from office Tuesday the incumbent school board team that had advocated closing the borough's five elementary schools.

Instead, voters chose by a roughly 4-to-1 margin the team that championed saving those schools.

Unofficial results tabulated at Republican campaign headquarters showed a whopping 78 percent of the voters favoring the challengers — Dennis Wausnock, Julie Wilson, Michele Pargeon, Rick Huss and Nat White.

They handily defeated the team of one-term incumbents led by Barry Robertson, James Smock, Philip Thees, Bonita Barnhill and Cathy Skitko.

Both teams "cross-filed" for both the Republican and the Democratic line on the November ballot. The challengers' overwhelming majority on both ballot lines makes the November election a foregone conclusion.

"I got fired, I understand that," Robertson said from his home after the results had become obvious.

"Of all the elections I've been in, this is the most exciting," said Huss, a former school board member who "came out of retirement because the issue meant so much to me" to run for a fourth time.

"It was exciting because the people spoke," Huss said.

What they spoke about was the rejection of the

(See POTTSTOWN SCHOOL BOARD on A3)

October
2008

School board will fix-up four schools

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — The number is four. That is the number of elementary schools a divided school board decided Thursday that Pottstown will renovate and expand.

The deciding vote in the 5-4 decision was cast by school board member Robert Hartman, who paused for a full two or three minutes before casting his vote.

Of course the next obvious question — which school will be closed? — was left to a subsequent board meeting.

However after the meeting, Hartman said that very question was crucial to his decision.

"All the previous studies have pretty much concluded that Lincoln and Franklin are the ones we would keep no matter how many buildings we have," Hartman said.

Hartman has argued that Rupert's location, amid a heavily populated residential area, makes it an obvious choice for elementary school, even if the old building is torn down.

Should his argument prevail, a three-school option would have meant closing Edgewood and Barth, Hartman reasoned.

And he said he did not feel right about depriving the neighborhood served by Barth of its much-needed stabilizing presence.

"When you consider the requirements we're under

(See SCHOOL FIX-UP on A3)

**Will new
elementary
schools be
'green'?**

See more on
pottsmmerc.com at
Evan Brandt's blog



The Mercury



Monday, October 20, 2008

PottsMerc.com

Local

School board will fix up four schools

(SCHOOLS FIX-UP from A1)

from No Child Left Behind and how the test scores might change from those kids not being close to their school, I just can't see closing that school," Hartman said.

The first motion, which was to keep five schools and was not made until 10 p.m., failed by a 4-5 vote, with Hartman joining Board Vice President Michele Pargeon and members Judyth Zahora, Edwin Edwards, and Amy Bathurst-Francis in opposing the renovation of all five.

But when a motion was made to fix four, Hartman switched, joining Board President Rick Huss and members Nat White, Julia Wilson and Dennis Wausnock, who had all voted for five as well.

Edwards, Pargeon and Zahora made no attempt to hide their dismay at the decision.

"I'm pretty disappointed by the vote," said Edwards. "This was not a fiscally responsible decision you guys made tonight."

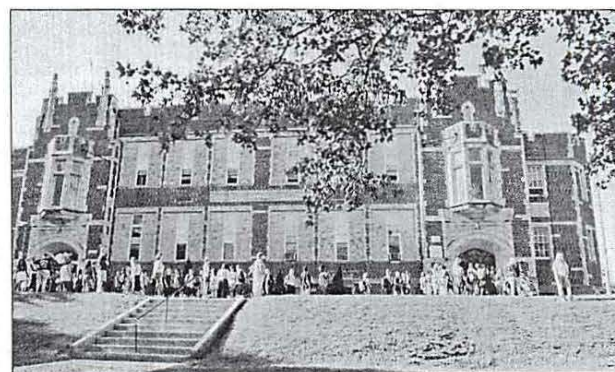
"I agree," said Zahora. "I don't think it was good for the taxpayers, but the board has spoken and we will move forward. That's the way it works."

"I think the fiscal and educational ramifications will be great," said Pargeon. "It's not much improvement with four or five schools."

That was certainly the feeling expressed by two former school board members — Robert Morgan and Philip Thees — who both spoke twice before the vote, urging the board to exercise fiscal restraint.

Morgan said the financial collapse on Wall Street will have far-reaching ramifications, including higher costs to make employee pensions whole and less assessed value in town from which to draw tax dollars.

"This is not the time to take on any more debt than you absolutely have to,"



Mercury File Photo

The Pottstown School Board voted to renovate four of its schools at a recent meeting, meaning one school, possibly Rupert Elementary, above, will not be updated.

he said.

Thees, who was among the previous board majority voted out of office on the heels of their support for a proposal to close all five schools and build a single campus downtown, quipped "one school sounds better to me all the time just on an economic basis."

An analysis performed earlier this month and presented by Business Manager Linda Adams predicts the cost of renovating four schools will cost between \$46 million and \$50 million, depending on whether the board decides to build additional classrooms to allow for smaller class size — another decision the board put off until a later meeting.

The impact of this decision, again depending on the class size question, on the average taxpayer ranges from an additional \$940 to \$1,400 over the first five years after the money is borrowed, according to her analysis.

Thees predicted that between delays, change orders and the ever-escalating cost of building materials, the cost could

go as high as \$71 million.

But the cost estimates are based on the idea that the district would decide on every extra, said Hal Hart of the architecture firm of Crabtree & Rohrbaugh who provided the estimates on which Adams' estimate was based.

"It's a worst-case scenario, as if we were building a Taj Mahal," said Edwards, who has a background in construction.

Hart said it's easier to take things away than to add them, noting that over the months he would work with the board to whittle the costs down as the board sees fit.

The vote moves the long-simmering issue of how many elementary schools one step closer to conclusions, although many steps still remain.

Kathy Marchek, representing the Pottstown Federation of Teachers, thanked the board for making a decision.

The next board meeting at which public comment will be accepted is Thursday, Nov. 13.

November
2008

Monday, November 3, 2008

For Home Delivery, call 610-970-4500

Pottstown, Pennsylvania

Pottstown school board backtracking on renovation plan

By Evan Brandt
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POTTSTOWN — Remember just two weeks ago when the school board voted to renovate and expand four out of Pottstown's five elementary schools? Well, now they're not so sure they made the right decision.

"It was a bad vote, made without thoroughly discussing the impacts," said board member Amy Bathurst-Francis.

It was with those impacts in hand that board

member Edwin Edwards pleaded with his peers to revisit their most recent vote.

Both Edwards and Bathurst-Francis voted against the four-school option.

Not considered when the board voted 5-4 to choose the four-school option was the added operational costs, said Edwards, who asked Business Manager Linda Adams to make up a spreadsheet on the subject, which he subsequently shared with his fellow board members.

"We never knew there was going to be additional staff and salaries" with the four-school option, Bath-

urst-Francis said. "The taxpayers need us to consider all these things."

Superintendent David Krem explained that with five smaller schools, certain staff members, such as art teachers, can be split among two schools.

"But when you have four buildings, you have four just big enough to require one (art) teacher in each school," Krem said.

"I'm confused about how a decision could be made on a plan with so little information," Bathurst-Francis said. "We should have had a more thorough discussion of four schools because it will drastically

impact our community financially."

The cost spreadsheet, which Edwards provided to The Mercury, shows a tax hike of nearly \$3,700 for a homeowner with an \$80,000 assessment, the district average, by 2013, when the cost of the construction is combined with the additional operating costs.

According to an earlier calculation by Adams, the impact on the average taxpayer of the construction costs for four schools would have been between \$940 to \$1,400 over the next five years. That figure,

(See POTTSTOWN SCHOOLS on A5)

November
2008

IN POTTSTOWN

School plan dropped for new alternative

11.16.08

By Evan Brandt

ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — In a table-pounding turnaround, the Pottstown School Board voted 6-2 Thursday to ditch its previous decision to renovate four of the five current elementary schools and strike out on a completely different course.

The board decided Edgewood Elementary School will become an "early childhood learning center" housing all the district's pre-K and kindergarten classes.

The remaining grades will be taught in two schools — Lincoln and Franklin — that will be renovated and expanded.

Further, the board decided, it will close the current administration building on Beech Street and the annex building on Franklin Street. Those offices will be moved into one of the two remaining elementary schools, which will also be renovated to house the district's alternative education program, which is currently held at night.

The reversal came in the wake of yet

"The worst-case scenario is you spend no money on Edgewood and have an early education program."

— David Krem,
Superintendent, Pottstown
schools

another analysis by the district's architect. This latest, an analysis of how much "bare bones" maintenance work on all five would cost, was a sobering experience for the board.

Conducted by Hal Hart of Crabtree Rohrbaugh, the architect's analysis had a \$30 million price tag.

Part of the problem, Hart said, is that the state will not reimburse a school district for a construction project and allow them to keep modular classrooms on site. So in order to do basic repairs on the buildings, the district would, at a

(See SCHOOLS PLAN on A3)

Pottstown School District



POTTSTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Franklin Elementary School**
- Lincoln Elementary School**



School Board Meeting
January 8, 2009





Franklin Elementary School

Site Concept Plan

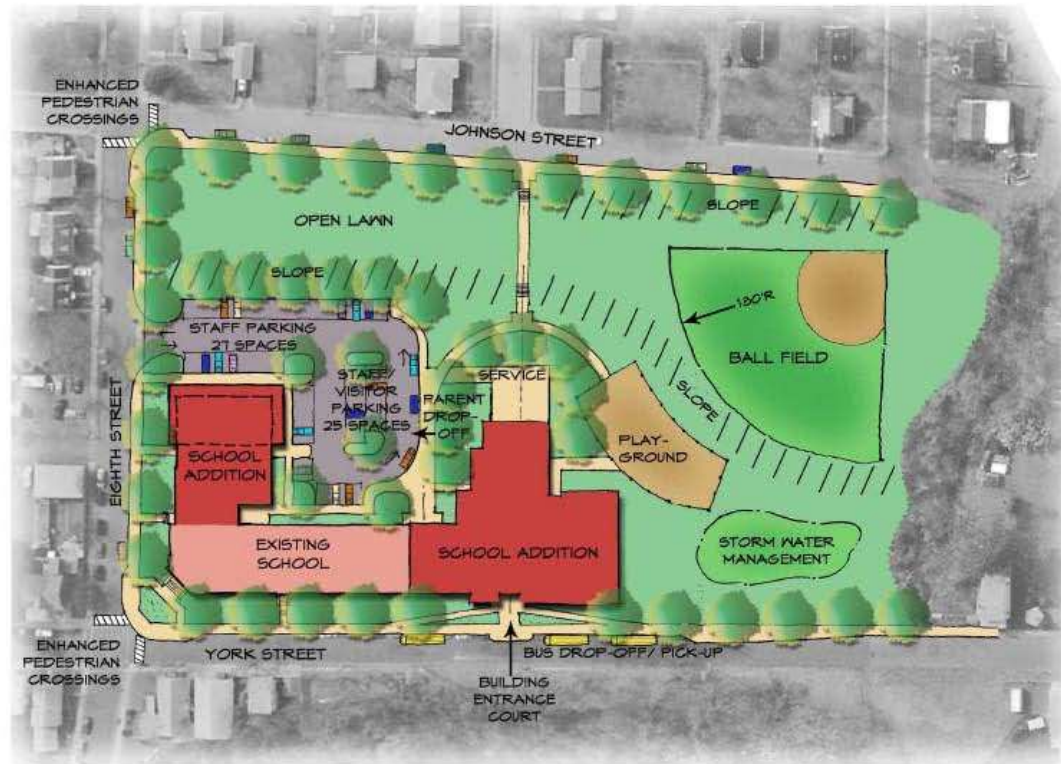


CONCEPT PLAN



Lincoln Elementary School

Site Concept Plan



CONCEPT PLAN



Sunday, January 25, 2009

January
2009

School board may reverse course on Edgewood

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — Eleven of 12 speakers spoke out Thursday against the Pottstown School District's plans to consolidate elementary education into three schools and convert Edgewood Elementary into an early childhood learning center.

And, in a turn of events that was unexpected but not unprecedented for this school board, it looked like they might get their wish.

The majority of the speakers were parents of Edgewood students, while two were parents of Barth Elementary students.

Parents from both schools, which both bus about half their students to school, spoke of how important those schools were to their neighborhood and their children.

Under the current proposal, Barth is being considered as a new administration building and would no longer be a school building.

However, the current proposal may not remain current for long.

Toward the end of the board meeting, five members forced a vote that will put the matter of how many elementary schools the district will maintain back onto the table at a meeting next month.

Board member Nat White made a motion, seconded by Rick Huss, to return to the four-school configuration adopted three months ago by the board. One month later, a 6-2 vote ditched that plan in the face of a \$50 million price tag.

Instead, the board opted for the current option, which the district's architect

has estimated to cost \$23 million.

However, White's motion was sidelined by procedural questions about whether the board could vote on a matter that was not on the agenda.

School Board Solicitor Stephen Kalis said it was up to the board president, Judyth Zahora, to determine if the matter could be added to the agenda for the next board meeting in February.

Although she opposed it, Zahora said she had pledged when elected board president to be ruled by the majority and five board members then voted to take the matter up yet again at the board's next committee of the whole meeting on Feb. 5.

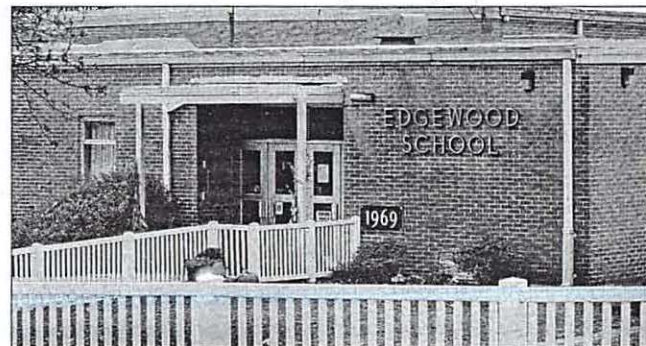
White and Huss were subsequently joined by board Vice President Robert Hartman and members Julia Wilson and Dennis Wausnock in supporting the motion.

Zahora, who called White's motion "an unbelievable waste of time," said she was "disappointed with the turn of events."

Superintendent David Krem noted that on the very same evening as that vote, the district's architects, who have already drawn up plans for expanding Franklin and Lincoln schools to accommodate larger student populations, were before the borough's planning commission.

"You're well into PlanCon," he said, in reference to the state procedure for school construction projects. "You've encumbered costs."

"Once we've made a decision that starts spending money, we should go forward with that decision," said Zahora.



John Strickler/The Mercury

The Pottstown School Board, which had voted to turn Edgewood Elementary into an early childhood learning center, could reverse that decision next month after the issue was put back on the table.

"We can't continue to make a decision and then turn around and make a different one. If we can't make a decision and stick with it, that to me, is the sign of an ineffective board."

"You've heard the outcry of the community here tonight," said White.

"We can't keep making new decisions every time someone comes to talk to the board," Zahora said.

But those who came to speak to the board felt differently and applauded at the outcome of the vote.

Angela Alberto said converting Edgewood to an early learning center is "not in the best interests of our students. You're hurting our kids' education and they will lose the personal attention they need" in a larger school, she said.

Kia Bennett, president of the school's

volunteer organization, said the board had done enough to inform parents.

"You have flip-flopped with this decision; when do you inform the parents?" she asked, further noting that "we were the ones who voted you in. We can vote you out."

A petition with nearly 50 signatures has been circulated via the Internet, she said, noting that it is signed by those who are "deeply opposed to what you're doing to our school."

Sharon Fowler said the change would be a "big disaster," noting, "It's a proven fact that children in small schools get a better education."

Maia Bursey of Myrtle Street told the board that Barth helps to stabilize the Bright Hope neighborhood. Barth's proximity to the subsidized housing

project "helps because it's a school zone," she said. "If you take Barth away from Bright Hope, crime will increase."

Gwendolyn Swinehart, who has two children at Barth, said "uprooting these children will do damage to these children that we as parents will not be able to repair, and I think it's a disgrace."

She added that the nation had just participated in the swearing in of President Barack Obama "and his big thing is to further education. You're taking away what the president wants to give us. As Americans, you're not showing the president support. I hope you didn't vote for Barack Obama."

Former school board member Robert Morgan was the one speaker to take to the floor in support of the board's three-school option, saying, "Obviously, it is the best thing for the students because it gives the district enormous flexibility and will stabilize taxes to be as low as they can be."

He said the establishment of an early learning center "is an outstanding opportunity for economic growth. I'm just sorry the board has to take the criticism from Mr. (Tom) Hylton," he said in reference to paid advertisements that have been published on The Mercury's editorial page.

The potential for the board to reverse course yet again on the elementary schools leaves in limbo personnel changes that were announced Thursday night—primarily, Barth Principal Robert Giering's new position as principal of the Edgewood Early Learning Center and Edgewood Principal Angela Tuck's new position as principal at Barth, both effective July 1.



75¢

The Mercury

A Pulitzer Prize-Winning Newspaper

Serving Montgomery, Chester, and Berks Counties

Saturday, February 21, 2009

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February
2009

5-school vote follows public outcry

By Evan Brandt
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POTTSTOWN — The school board reversed course for the third time Thursday, rescinding with a 5-4 vote its November decision to consolidate elementary education into three buildings and returned to the concept of keeping all five elementary schools.

The vote came near the end of a volatile four-hour meeting in the auditorium of Pottstown Middle School which filled with roughly 200 people passionate, judging by the tenor of the 41 public speakers, both about keeping five elementary schools as well as the consolidation plan.

Both sides laid claim to their favored course of action as being for the benefit of both the borough's school children and its overburdened taxpayers.

Dominating the public's participation was a red-shirted contingent of parents whose children attend Edgewood Elementary School and who have only lately entered a debate which School Board President Judyth Zahora observed has been going on for some 12 years now.

With little variation, those parents opposed the conversion of Edgewood into an early learning center and argued for keeping it in its current configuration of a pre-K to grade five facility.

Several individuals, primarily among the contingent supporting the consolidation option, took specific aim at activist, author and tentative school board candidate Tom Hylton, whom they accused of overtly influencing some school board members and working against Pottstown's future.

Hylton, for his own part, drew applause from the Edgewood contingent when he offered comments designed to imply that the district's administration had pursued the early learning center option with a focus that ignored the results of the last election in which five candidates pledging to save all five schools were overwhelmingly elected.

And, when the time came for the



Courtney Douglas of North Evans Street addresses the Pottstown School Board.



Photos by Kevin Hoffman/The Mercury
Pottstown School Board members listen to residents' comments at Thursday night's meeting.



Edgewood Elementary School supporters showed up sporting their red T-shirts. Standing is Denise Rubach of East High Street.



Lisa Schada, the district's supervisor of transportation supported the three-school option.

board members themselves to speak, it was impossible to miss the sniping tone and veiled accusations that preceded the split vote.

"You need to deflate your egos and think about the children, not yourselves," said North Adams Street resident David Wallace, who supported

keeping Edgewood as a K-5 school.

"If something is not broken, why change it?" asked Edgewood parent Denise Rubach, a resident of East High Street. "Edgewood is a school that works."

South Hills Boulevard resident and Edgewood parent Angela Alberto called

the plan to convert her son's school to an early learning center "absolutely ludicrous." She disputed Zahora's previous characterization as "an inconvenience" of the changes it would mean for Edgewood families. "This is not inconvenience, this is total chaos."

(See SCHOOLS on A3)

November 2009



Kevin Hoffman/The Mercury
Owen J. Roberts High School to
for the highly contested school

Perkiomen Valley Schools bid good-bye to union jobs

By Mercury staff

Perkiomen Valley School District were on
ix reform Tuesday, as a referendum to
tional assessment tax was on the way to
action returns.

Do you favor eliminating the Perkiomen
District's Occupational Assessment Tax by
a neutral action of increasing the rate of
to a maximum 0.9%? — had 1,457 yes
es with six of the district's 12 precincts

ville, Trappe, Schwenksville and Lower
and Perkiomen townships had the referen-
dum ballot.

The district's occupation tax has been criticized for
being on the category of their job regardless
of income. In 2001, a ballot referendum failed

(A3)

Harris, Hartman, Hylton top 3 for school board

Zahora losing seat to Weand

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — The three
"H's" did it again, and threw a
"W" into the mix as well.

The three candidates whose
last names begin with the letter H
— Valerie Harris, Robert Hart-
man Jr. and Thomas Hylton —
who won both Republican and
Democratic lines in the spring
primary, repeated their success
in the general election Tuesday
night.

The real battle was for the
fourth seat and was between in-
cumbent School Board President
Judyth Zahora, 49, who ran on
the Republican line, and chal-
lenger Polly Weand, 59, who
won the Democratic line in the
primary.

The fourth seat was won by
Weand, according to unofficial
(See SCHOOL BOARD on A3)



Pottstown School Board candidate winners Valerie Harris, left, and Thomas Hylton, right, look at results as Dan Price tabulates results at the Elks Lodge on High Street.

Phoenixville man killed in East Vincent crash

By Brandie Kessler
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EAST VINCENT — A Phoenixville man was
killed in a one-vehicle crash on Route 724 in the
area of Stony Run Road around 11:30 p.m.
Monday, officials confirmed Tuesday.

The man, the driver and sole occupant of the

vehicle, was identified by Chester County Cor-
oner Dr. Robert O. Satriale as Eric J. Smith, 26,
of the 200 block of Gay Street, Phoenixville.

Satriale said Smith was traveling west on
Route 724 in the area of Stony Run Road when
it appears he lost control of his vehicle. Satriale
said an autopsy performed Tuesday night re-
vealed the cause of death was head injuries. Sa-

triale said the manner of death has been ruled
accidental.

East Vincent Police responded to the crash and
handled the investigation. However, the investi-
gating officer could not be reached Tuesday.

Smith was transported to Phoenixville Hospi-
tal by Phoenixville Ambulance where he died,
officials said.

March 2010

Board president responds to protesters

3.18.10

Huss to form task force
on school renovation

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — Pottstown School Board President Rick Huss might have been a bit surprised when he looked out his front window Wednesday morning.

What he saw was a handful of protesters opposed to what they see as a rush to judgment on how to renovate the borough's five elementary schools.

And so Huss told them what they wanted to hear, that he will be announcing the formation of a task force at tonight's school board meeting.

That task force, which will examine the future of the elementary schools, will include school board members, members of the administration, teachers and members of the community.

"I'm really glad to hear that," said pro-



Photo by Tom Kelly III

Pottstown School Board President Rick Huss, left, greets picketers from Pottstown Code Blue who were picketing in front of his house Wednesday morning.

tester Amy Francis, who was among the protesters and is a member of the school board watchdog group called Code Blue.

"That is exactly what we wanted to hear," she said.

The meeting was already shaping up to be a humdinger, although you might not have known it from looking at the agenda.

In addition to Huss's announcement, which is not on the agenda, is an item in which district Solicitor Stephen Kalis will report on recent questions about the "Sunshine Law."

This report grew out of the March 2 revelation that school board member Thomas Hylton had met with the two other members of the Neighborhood Schools Committee he chairs to discuss a proposal he formally made public later.

Hylton does not deny the meeting and said it is not a violation of the state's open meetings law, often called the "Sunshine Law," because the three members of his committee do not comprise a quorum of the school board.

(See POTTSTOWN on A4)



Go to
www.pottsmmerc.com
to see video of the
protest in front of
Rick Huss' house.

Board president changes course on schools' plan

3.20.10

By Evan Brandt
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POTTSTOWN — Pottstown School Board President Rick Huss announced Thursday that he will appoint a task force to examine the question of what to do with the district's five elementary schools and that the results of its deliberations may not break ground "for two or three years."

Huss did not name the members of the task force, although he promised it would include representatives from the teachers union, the board, the administration and the community at large.

He also said he had a specific person in mind "who has nothing to do with the Pottstown School District," but he declined to identify that person "until I've had a chance to talk to him."

(See POTTSTOWN on A3)



Kevin Hoffman/The Mercury

Pottstown School Board President Rick Huss addresses the crowd at Thursday night's meeting.

July 2011

POTTSTOWN

Task force recommends 3-school plan

By Phil Ellingsworth Jr.
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POTTSTOWN — A task force studying the future of Pottstown schools made its long-awaited recommendation to the school board Tuesday, backing a scenario that moves toward a three-elementary-school approach and possibly shutter others in order to fix the district's aging facilities.

(See SCHOOLS on A4)

Enlarge
Barth
Lincoln
Edgewood

Close Rupert, Franklin



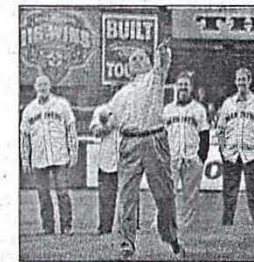
NFL OWNERS OK DEAL; WAIT
ON PLAYERS VOTE — B1

THE MERCURY

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HALL-BOUND GILICK'S IMPRINT
REMAINS ON PHILS — B1

BOARD VOTES TO KEEP 5 SCHOOLS



HOT TOPIC

5-4 majority rejects motion to put borrowing on the ballot

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN — Setting aside a year's worth of deliberation by the president's task force, the Pottstown School Board Thursday night voted 5-4 to renovate all five elementary schools.

The vote was one among many as the divided board offered motions and counter-motions in an effort to control the future direction of the elementary school projects.

First up was a motion, made by School Board President Rick Huss, to accept the task force's recommendation to close Rupert and Franklin elementary schools and expand and renovate the remaining three.

Since last March, the 30-odd-member task force has been meeting with administrators and visiting schools in an effort to craft a solution to this 14-year-old debate.

There was no clear consensus at the end of the task force's deliberations and they used weighted voting — with first second and third choices getting decreasing weight in a count — to arrive

(See SCHOOLS on A3)



November 2011



John Strickler/The Mercury
Pottstown School board winners
are left to right, Judyth Zahora,
Beth Lydon and Andrew Kefer.

New and old faces to serve on Pottstown School Board

By Evan Brandt
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POTTSTOWN — A split result Tuesday put three Democratic candidates and two Republicans on the Pottstown School Board.

Former incumbent Judyth Zahora, running on the Democratic line, was joined by first-time candidates Mary-Beth Lydon and Andrew Kefer in taking three of the five open seats.



Incumbent Dennis Wausnock and W. Ronald Williams, both of whom won both Republican and Democratic ballot lines in the spring primary, easily took the other two seats.

According to unofficial results calculated at Republican headquarters at Cutillo's, Williams was the top vote-getter with 2,203 votes, closely followed by Wausnock, who got 2,185.

(See SCHOOL BOARD on A4)

January 2012

POTTSTOWN SCHOOLS

Board takes another look at other school options

1.22.12
By Evan Brandt
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POTTSTOWN — Just when you thought the Pottstown School Board had finally settled on what to do with its elementary schools, a new set of seven options has been presented which may result in the board altering course once again.

Although presented with newer and more detailed estimates, the options presented will seem familiar to those who have been following this story for the past 14-plus years.

In many ways, it is really only four options, one set which has the district building 15 new classrooms, and one without building 15 new classrooms.

In every option but the one in which all five schools are renovated, the current Rupert Elementary School building would be closed.

The newly considered options are:

- Three schools, closing Franklin and Rupert;
- Three schools, closing Franklin and Edgewood and building a brand-new Rupert;
- Four schools, closing Rupert;
- Renovating all five elementary schools.

At the heart of the discussion is the fact that no matter which option is chosen, the use of state reimbursement money requires that the district get rid of the 20 modular

Please see **SCHOOL PROPOSALS** on A4

February 2012

POTTSTOWN

Board nears vote on four-school elementary plan, closing Edgewood

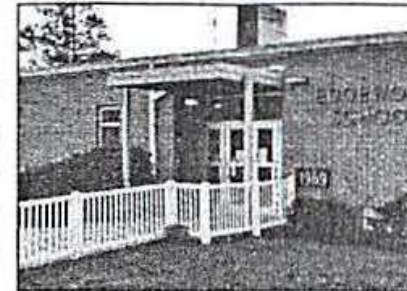
2.8.12

By Evan Brandt
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POTTSTOWN — The school board fell one vote short Thursday of making a decision on refurbishing and, perhaps, expanding its elementary schools.

As part of another presentation on options, the administration formally recommended the board vote to close Edgewood Elementary School and build enough additional classrooms on the four remaining schools to prevent the need for putting the fifth grade into the middle school, which is currently under-capacity.

The administration explored the option of moving the fifth grade into the middle school and showed the board how it could be done, but instead appeared to favor moving administrative offices into the high school and the middle school and shutting down the administration building at Beech and Penn streets, which needs a new roof.



John Strickler/The Mercury
**View of Edgewood
Elementary School.**

After some discussion, Board Vice President Robert Hartman Jr. made a motion to follow the administration's recommendation, but a motion by board member Thomas Hylton to table a vote until the next meeting, Feb. 16, was carried by a 5-4 vote.

Voting in favor of the delay were Hylton, Valerie Harris, Andrew Kefer, Dennis Wausnock and Ron Williams. Opposed to the delay were Hartman, who waited a long time before voting no, Mary-Beth Lydon, Polly We-

Please see **SCHOOLS** on A5

February 2012

POTTSTOWN SCHOOLS

Board votes to close Edgewood over parents' protests

2.18.12

By Evan Brandt
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POTTSTOWN — Facing a decision Superintendent Reed Lindley described as “gut wrenching,” the school board voted 8-1 Thursday night to close and explore the sale or lease of Edgewood Elementary School,

to redistrict attendance areas in the borough accordingly, and to move the fifth grade into the middle school.

School board member Valerie Harris cast the sole vote against the motion, which was made at the beginning of the meeting, but was not voted on until almost three hours later.

In between, a line of parents, residents and students spoke out against the move, saying it is wrong for their children and wrong for the taxpayers.

“I would not have moved into this district if I was not going to send my children to Edgewood,” Katrina Blakey-Bearden, wearing a red shirt worn by Edgewood

parents as a sign of solidarity, told the board.

“I understand you’re thinking about closing Edgewood school, I wish you wouldn’t. We’re a family,” said third grader Nicole Rubach. “I do not want to go to another school for fourth and fifth grade.”

The directive to move all Pott-

stown fifth grade students into Pottstown Middle School will not occur prior to the 2013-14 school year in order to give the administration time to plan for the transition.

That element of the plan also drew criticism.

Please see **EDGEWOOD** on A3

Lindley resigns as Pottstown schools chief

By Evan Brandt

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POTTSTOWN — Reed Lindley stunned the school board and the community Thursday night by resigning as superintendent, effective immediately.

Lindley, who was not present for the regular board meeting, submitted his letter of resignation to the board, citing only "personal

reasons" for his decision.

Following a 30-minute closed-door executive session at the opening of the meeting, a somber-faced school board returned to the meeting room and unanimously accepted his resignation.

The resignation comes on the heels of community outrage



Reed Lindley

over a three-hour assembly at Pottstown High School in which a speaker extolling the virtues of entrepreneurship also challenged students to sell coffee to compete for an iPad.

The speaker, K.J. Andrews, uses materials from the Napoleon Hill Foundation and the "Think and Grow Rich" books from the foundation were to be distributed to each high school student, and study groups

set up, at a cost to taxpayers of \$28,000.

It is unclear if the concerns raised about this assembly and Lindley's abrupt resignation are directly related.

School Board Solicitor Stephen Kalis told The Mercury the board decided to release Lindley from any "prior notice" provisions of his contract, which was set

Please see LINDLEY on A4

MAKING THEIR MOVE

Nov. 9, 2014

At right, Rupert Principal Matt Mayer greets visitors at Wednesday night's open house. Below, it was moving day for the newly renovated Rupert Elementary School. Furniture, computers and boxes of equipment and books were loaded into tractor trailers and hauled from the former Edgewood school to Rupert Elementary. The completed Pottstown School District building opens for students Monday.

PHOTOGRAPHS
JOHN AND
JOHN AND
JOHN AND
JOHN AND



Edgewood Elementary emptied as Rupert readies for Monday opening

By Ryan Smith
rsmith@pottstown.com
@PottstownNews on Twitter

Tomorrow's The youngest elementary building in Pottstown was finally put into mothballs Friday as its contents were moved across town to the district's oldest building, which is in the final stages of starting a new life as the latest school to be

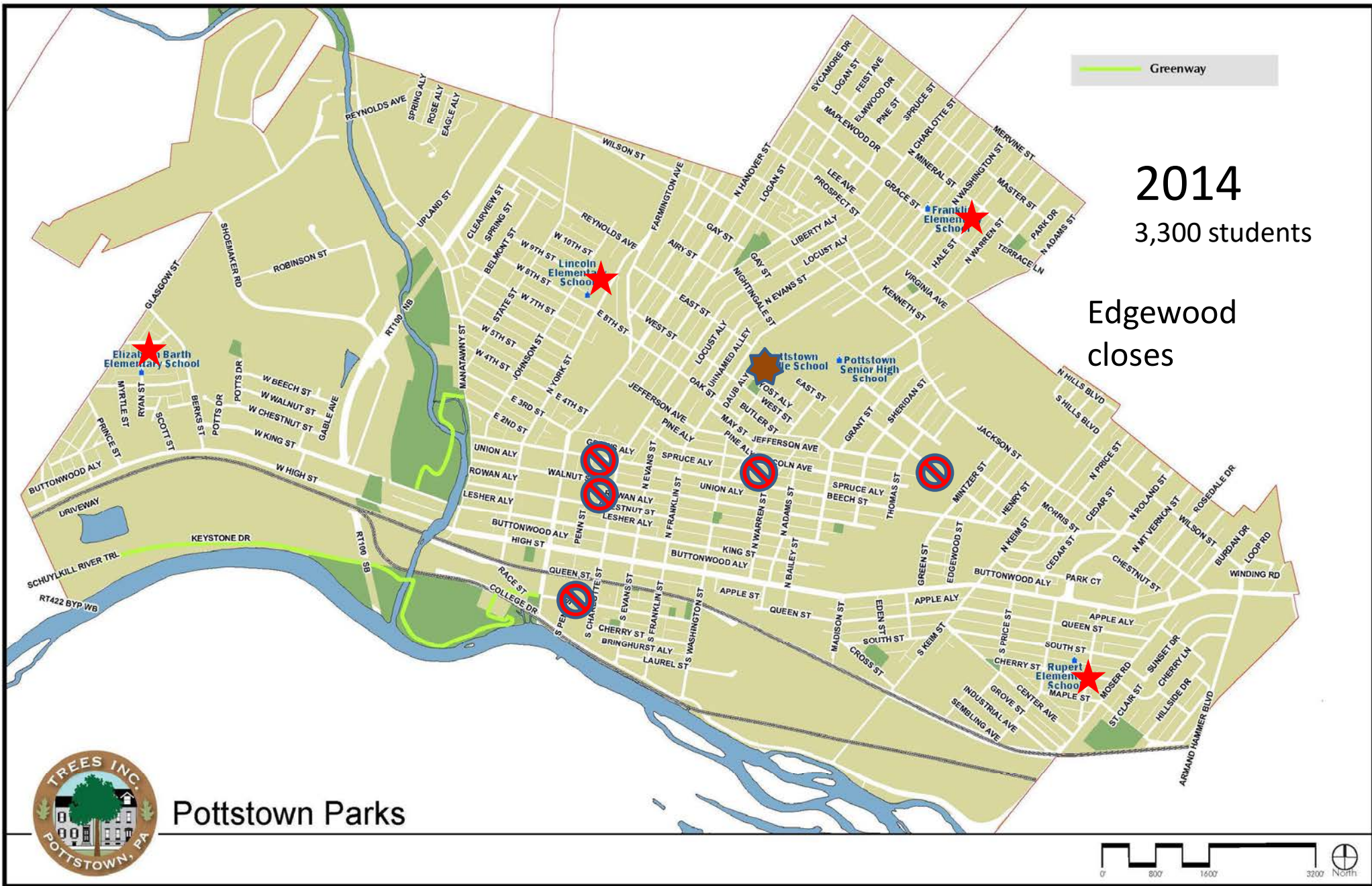
Online Video of Friday's move-in at pottstown.com

renovated and expanded.

Rupert Elementary School — named for William Whitehead Rupert, Pottstown's first schools superintendent — will officially re-open to students on staff Monday, about two months after it was supposed to.

MOVE SPACES





2014
3,300 students

Edgewood
closes



Pottstown Parks



		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
President		Lawler	Lawler	Lawler	Lawler/Robertson	Robertson	Robertson	Robertson
2		Haring	Haring	Haring	Haring/Smock	Smock	Smock	Smock
3		Mock	Mock	Mock	Zahora/Thees	Thees	Thees	Thees
4		Tinucci	Tinucci	Tinucci	/Thomas	Thomas	Thomas/Skitko	Skitko
5		Zahora	Zahora	Zahora	Mauras	Mauras	Mauras/Francis	Francis
6		Deegan	Deegan	Deegan	Huss	Huss	Huss/Zahora	Edwards
7		Huss	Huss	Huss	/Barnhill	Barnhill	Barnhill	Barnhill
8		Morgan	Morgan	Morgan	Morgan	Morgan	Morgan/Edwards	Zahora
9		Oister/Hartman	Hartman	Hartman	Hartman	Hartman	Hartman	Hartman
		Georeno	Georeno	Georeno	Georeno	Georeno	Georeno/Krem	Krem

		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
President		Robertson/Huss	Huss	Zahora/Huss	Huss	Huss/Zahora	Zahora	Zahora
2		Smock/Wausnock	Wausnock	Hartman	Hartman	Hartman	Hartman	Hartman/Stilwell
3		Thees/White	White	White	White	White/Bacallao	Bacallao	Bacallao
4		Skitko/Pargeon	Wilson	Wilson	Wilson	Wilson/Kefer	Kefer	Kefer
5		Edwards	Pargeon	Pargeon	Pargeon	Pargeon/Williams	Williams	Williams
6		Barnhill/Wilson	Edwards	Wausnock	Wausnock	Wausnock	Wausnock	Wausnock
7		Zahora	Zahora	Edwards/Harris	Harris	Harris	Harris /Francis	Francis
8		Francis	Francis	Francis/Weand	Weand	Weand	Weand	Weand
9		Hartman	Hartman	Zahora/Hylton	Hylton	Hylton	Hylton	Hylton
		Krem	Krem	Krem	Krem/Lindley	Lindley	Lindley	Sparagana

		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
President		Zahora	Zahora/Stilwell	Stilwell	Francis	Francis	Francis	Francis
2		Kefer	Kefer	Kefer/Lawrence	Wilkerson	Wilkerson	Hylton	Hylton
3		Bacallao	Bacallao/Heidel	Heidel	Heidel	Heidel	Heidel	Kline
4		Stilwell	Wilkerson	Wilkerson	Lawrence	Lawrence	Lawrence	Lawrence
5		Williams	Williams	Williams	Williams	Williams	Stilwell	Johnson
6		Wausnock/Bearden	Bearden	Bearden	Bearden	Bearden	Bearden	Bearden
7		Francis	Francis	Francis	Stilwell/Armato	Armato	Armato	Armato
8		Weand	Weand	Weand	Weand/Rose	Rose	Rose	Rose
9		Hylton	Hylton	Hylton	Hylton/Barnhill	Barnhill	Barnhill	Barnhill
		Sparagana	Sparagana	Sparagana	Sparagana/Rodriguez	Rodriguez	Rodriguez	Rodriguez to 6/2021