

The Mercury wrote an informative article recently titled “Vote looms in Pottstown as mural law debate goes on” on July 6th. As reported, the members of the Pottstown Community Arts has been negotiating with the Borough Council and Borough Administration to eliminate the maintenance section of the proposed mural ordinances.

Not only did this maintenance clause halt our Welcome to Pottstown sign for the corner of Manatawny and King street, it threatens to halt future mural projects.

The Council and Administration is concerned about how the murals will look in 20 years when a mural begins to reach the end of its lifetime. Yet, the structures that Pottstown Community Arts is proposing to improve look depreciated today and will continue to be an eyesore if nobody does anything.

What Pottstown Community Arts wants to do is clean the area, prepare the surface, and paint a stunning artwork on a forgotten wall. All for free. We have raised the money and collected the supplies from local businesses and residents who want to improve the appearance of Pottstown.

It is fascinating to note that the current 2 murals behind the Pottstown Library were painted in 2007, 10 years ago. They look as good as the day they were painted. There is no wear, no deterioration, and no graffiti nor has there ever been.

Murals, when done well, do **not** require maintenance. Instead, they increase property value of the building they are painted on as well as the entire surrounding neighborhood. They increase community pride and community involvement. They should be encouraged.

Legally holding a property owner liable for the maintenance of the mural is a disincentive. It is a deal breaker. Already, we have seen this first hand. Property owners that were delighted and excited to have a mural painted on their wall or structure have slowly backed away.

Inevitably, murals will deteriorate. However before they deteriorate and even as they are deteriorating, they will beautify the structure that they are painted on for the next decade and more. The goal is to improve Pottstown **now**.

Let us review how other nearby cities and towns handle the inclusion of murals.

Philadelphia: “Philadelphia is widely considered the mural capital of North America. Their city and private foundations sink millions of dollars into creating and promoting community murals. Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program started in 1984 as the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network and has produced over 2,800 murals, averaging 130 per year. The murals not only employ renowned artists and attract tourists but also are a significant part of Philadelphia’s identity as a city of diverse neighborhoods”, said Murals Arts Program public engagement associate Amy Johnston.

Regarding maintenance of their thousands of murals, There is no written agreement with the City of Philadelphia. Because of the Mural Program's long history, people know that if they see something they can call and a dedicated crew is sent out.

Baltimore: "[*Murals have*] been a proven deterrent [*to graffiti*]," said Shawn James, community arts coordinator and director of the Baltimore Murals Program. A public program with public and private funding, it produces an average of 17 murals per year in a city more comparable to Milwaukee by population. James said murals go through an open process of community involvement and approval; there are no permits or fees.

Phoenixville: There are no permits or fees. There are no maintenance requirements. Phoenixville has a Beautification Advisory Committee of which the Borough of Phoenixville allocates \$10,000 to the Beautification Commission each year; other money is raised through fundraising and locating sponsors. They do not require the property owner to maintain the mural because it would be a disincentive.

In summary, the maintenance requirements in the Mural Ordinance clause is hindering mural artwork. Yet, so much good comes from murals: they increase property values; they increase community pride; they increase community involvement; and they discourage graffiti.

The majority of the Borough Council members and Administration would rather have vacant buildings remain forgotten, continue deteriorating, and continue blighting our town than let Pottstown Community Arts beautify the town through public art and hard work.

We can do better. This is our town too.

Help us as we help make Pottstown a more beautiful place to live.

Thank you,
Marie Haigh
President of Pottstown Community Arts