

## Grassroots summit could start rebellion for a better future

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The attendance of more than 600 people, including some from Pottstown, at last week's state summit, "Building One Pennsylvania" was encouraging.

Those attending the summit last Friday in Lancaster displayed a commitment to progress and change that is desperately needed for the future and for the economy.

In a state where government is constantly mired in politics, it will likely take a grass-roots effort like this one to turn things around.

Neither Pottstown, as an example of an aging town that wears its struggles on its sleeve, nor the state as a whole can afford to keep doing things the way they've always done them. And, that's what speakers at the Building One Pennsylvania summit were quick to point out.

The status quo is unsustainable, said Allentown Mayor Ed Pawlowski, quoting Dwight D. Eisenhower, who said "the history of free men is never really written by chance but by choice; their choice!"

"Doing nothing is hard to do because you don't know when you're finished. Enough is enough," Pawlowski said.

"It's time to stop doing nothing."

Other speakers at the summit pointed to the effects of suburban sprawl in Pennsylvania. "We will not assure economic stability by building one more shopping mall; one more office park or one less multi-family apartment. The jig is up," said Rutgers professor David Troutt. "We are running out of land and natural resources to run to and use up."

"... Pennsylvania has hundreds of places that fight amongst themselves rather than compete together in a global economy, and rather than spending wisely on re-building and re-tooling our existing communities," said Myron Orfield, of the Brookings Institution.

Locally, those attending the summit included Amy Francis, of the citizens group Code Blue; Tom Carroll, of the civic organization Preservation Pottstown; Reed Lindley, superintendent of Pottstown schools; Tom Hylton, Pottstown School Board member, and Newstell Marable, president of the local NAACP.

Like most of the 600 attending, they represented groups with different agendas but a common goal of improving their communities.

That is the essence of the First Suburbs initiative and the drive behind the Building One Pennsylvania summit — to bring people together at the grass-roots level from churches, civic groups, school boards, and municipal government and get change started in spite of

the paralyzing effects of state and federal government.

All agreed the "talk" was inspiring and offered insights for communities. But some, including Pottstown Schools Superintendent Lindley, said he wants to hear more about solutions.

Lindley said he was concerned about how much of the meeting was devoted to "honoring the problem, worshiping the problem" and how much was not devoted to discussing possible solutions.

But, putting 600 people in a room to discuss the serious problems facing Pennsylvania's communities and to begin to understand how to get past them is a tremendous start.

Building One Pennsylvania may be the beginning of a powerful rebellion that makes positive change the way of the future.