

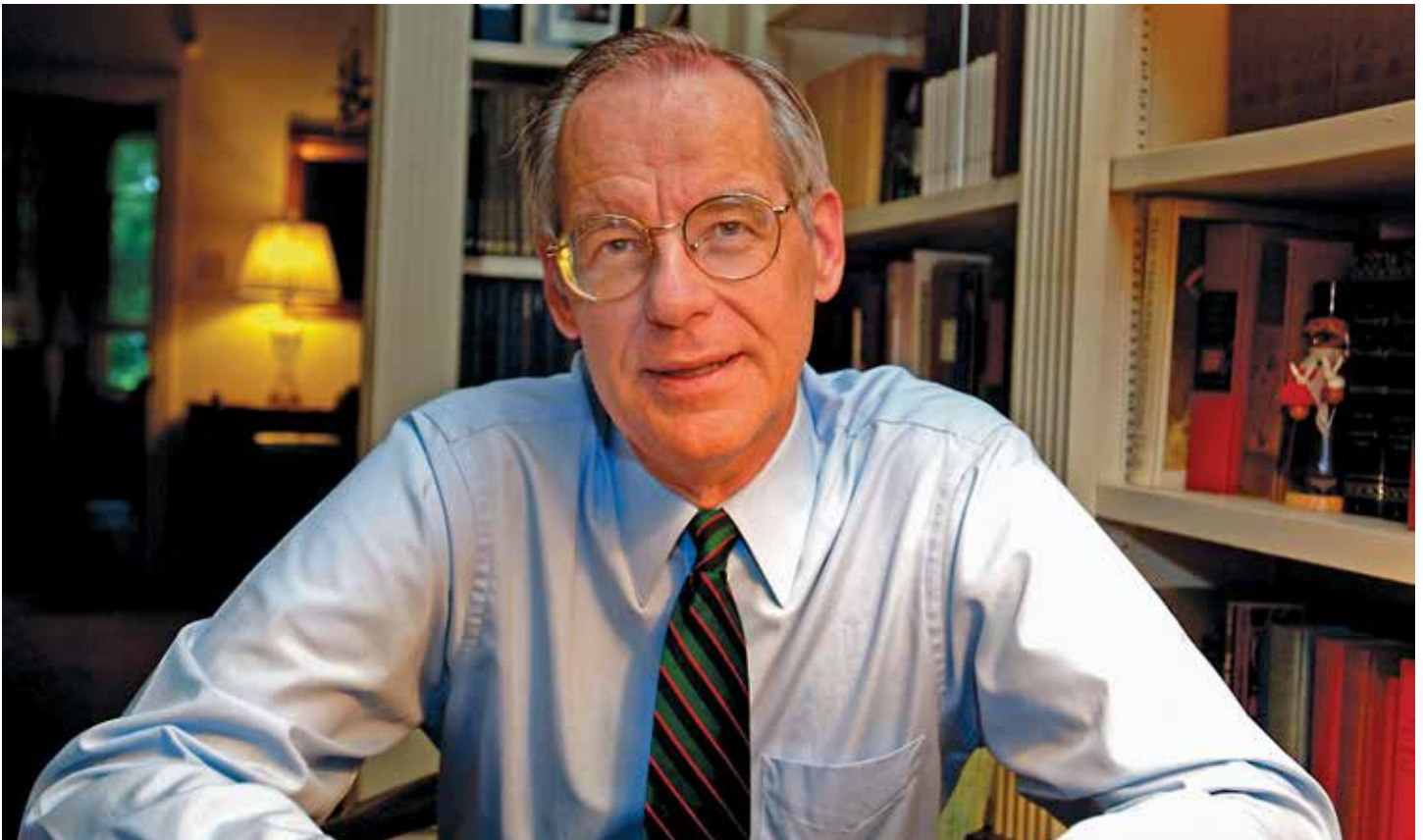
MONTGOMERY AWARDS

Planning Advocate
2022 Award Winner



Thomas J. Hylton

Save Our Land, Save Our Towns, Inc.



Thomas J. Hylton, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, author, and activist, received the 2022 Planning Advocate Award under the Montgomery Awards program, for his life-long advocacy promoting good planning and design through historic preservation, land conservation, and livable and walkable communities. Through his editorial writing at *The Pottstown Mercury*, as a journalist for 22 years and as a continuing advertiser to this date, as well as grass roots work with several nonprofit organizations and local boards, Tom has been the catalyst for change for Pottstown Borough and Montgomery County for over 40 years.

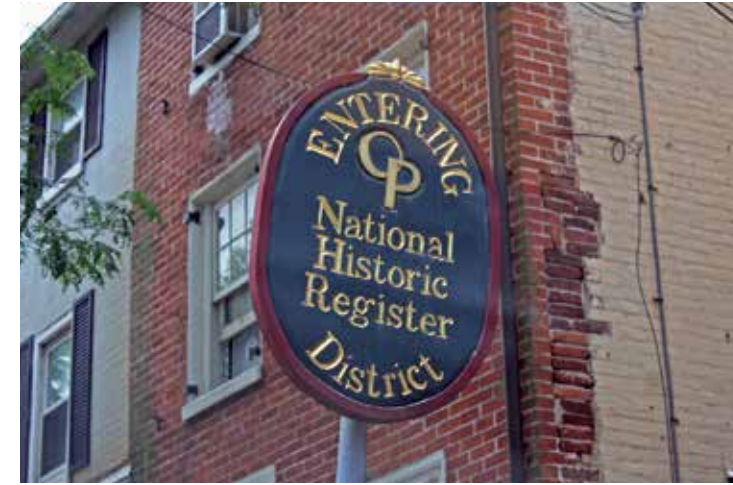
Tom first became an advocate for good planning in 1982, when the Pottstown School District School Board decided to tear down a school building that had once been the Pottstown High School and was still used by the district. Built in the 1920s, it had been well-built but not well-maintained, and it did not have a parking lot, which meant that teachers and staff had to park on the street. After the historic school building was torn down, forever changing the landscape in that part of the borough, Tom realized that he wanted to be more than an observer, and decided to become an advocate for change in his community.

Having grown up in a small town and being able to walk to school, Tom knew that it was important to him to be able to live in a vibrant, walkable community. He recognized that there are certain elements present in a quality community, which he later explained as rules in his book, "Save Our Land, Save Our Towns." These are: a sense of place, human scale, self-contained neighborhoods, diversity, transit-friendly design, trees, alleys and parking lots to the rear, humane architecture, outdoor rooms, and maintenance and safety. This coffee-table style book, published in 1995 with the help of Preservation Pennsylvania, built on the research and work he had done to date and informed much of the work he would do in the future, especially through his nonprofit corporation by the same name.

Much of Tom's early efforts were accomplished through the framework of nonprofits. In 1983, Tom was part of the founding board of the nonprofit, Pottstown Trees, Inc. Inspired by the tree-lined streets of the City of Lancaster, in 1982, Tom had convinced his publisher at The Mercury to help raise \$500,000 to plant trees along the streets of Pottstown, knowing that this would contribute to the livability of the borough. Through this initial effort, over 1,900 trees were planted over the course of 2 1/2 years, most of which have thrived and still remain, and a permanent endowment was created to fund sustained maintenance. Over the years, over 2,800 trees have been planted, some as recently as November, 2022. With the help of community partners, including the Pottstown School District which hosts a nursery on the high school grounds, this initiative is aimed to continue well into the future.

Another passion of Tom's is the preservation of historic structures that are the fabric of a community. In 1984, he helped to found the Old Pottstown Preservation Society, now known as Preservation Pottstown. He wrote the successful nomination to have a portion of Pottstown placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Through the National Register Historic Preservation Tax Credit program, many buildings in Pottstown were preserved, including the first which was the Roller Mill Apartments in a 1725 building. In addition, he helped to write two local historic district ordinances which have enabled the further preservation of many buildings in town.

Leveraging the advantage of a nonprofit, Tom helped to broker several deals that preserved other landmarks and promoted economic development. Pottsgrove Manor was closed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in 1986. Through negotiations with the state senator and the county commissioners, Tom facilitated a deal to preserve the property where the county would restore this 1752 home on 4 acres and manage it as a historic site under a 100-year lease from the state. Other projects that resulted from Tom's efforts include the Montgomery County Community College West campus and the Pottstown Borough Hall and Park in the middle of town, both of which contribute to the vibrancy of Downtown Pottstown. Tom's work on the Pottstown Borough Planning Commission will also have a lasting impact through his ordinance writing efforts. As

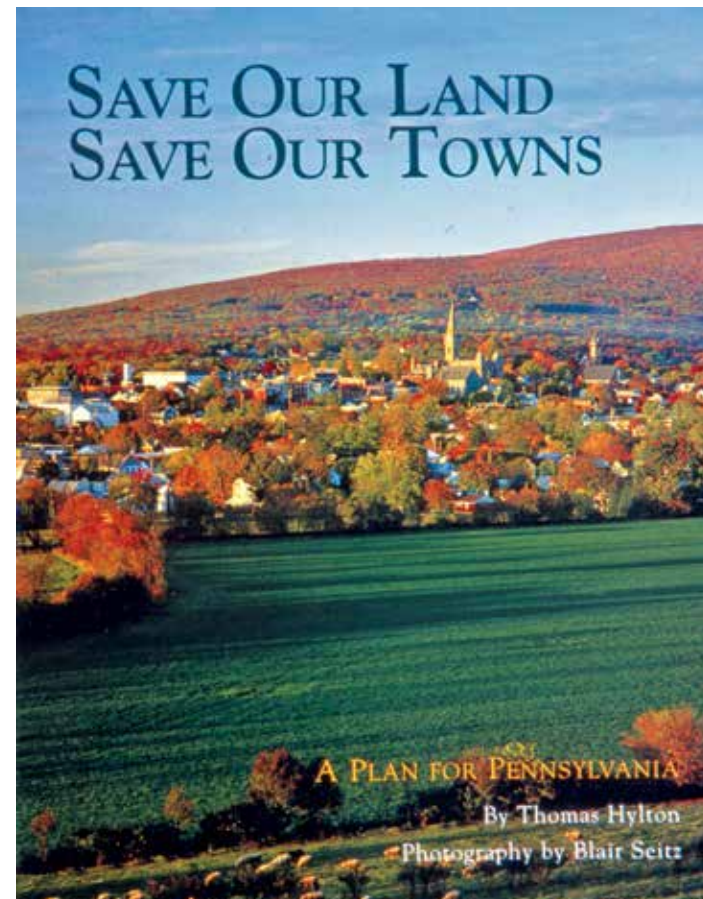


chairman of the Planning Commission, Tom utilized a grant from the William Penn Foundation to craft form-based zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances, which included a design review component for new construction.

Tom has been able to make other impacts through his nonprofit Save Our Land, Save Our Towns, founded in 1994, as well as his participation on the local school board. One of the most significant projects was the Pottstown Bike and Ped Plan, now known as Walk and Bike Pottstown. Save Our Lands paid the consultants to create this plan, which was the document that

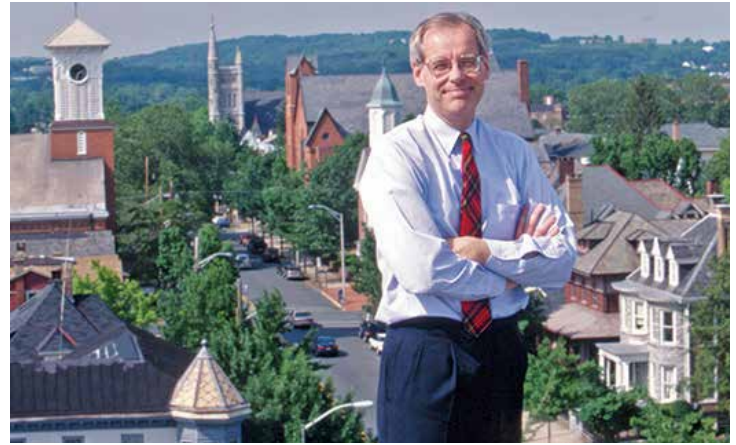
guided the creation of many bike lanes, sharrows, and side paths throughout the borough, connecting residents to the schools and businesses. A more recent initiative has been the creation of environmentally sensitive meadows on portions of school properties which were once unused lawn areas.

No story about Tom Hylton would be complete without talking about his Pulitzer Prize. In 1990, noticing that western Montgomery County and adjoining Chester County were rapidly losing farmland to suburban sprawl, he wrote a series of editorials about the importance of preserving farmland and



open space. These in part led to a successful referendum in Chester County to preserve farmland and open space. For this work, Tom received the 1990 Pulitzer Prize in Journalism for Editorial Writing “For his editorials about a local bond issue for the preservation of farmland and other open space in rural Pennsylvania.”

Thomas J. Hylton has spent a lifetime pursuing and fighting for his passion—the preservation and promotion of livable communities—and Pottstown Borough and Montgomery County have been the lucky beneficiaries of those inspiring efforts.



Nonprofits and Boards

- Founding Member of Pottstown Trees, Inc. (1983) (merged with Save Our Land, Save Our Towns in 2016)
- Co-Founder of Old Pottstown Preservation Society/ Preservation Pottstown (1984)
- Founder and President of Save Our Lands, Save Our Towns (1994-present)
- Member of Pottstown Borough Planning Commission (1999-2011, 2018-present, Chair from 2000-2010)
- Member of Pottstown Borough Shade Tree Commission (1995-2010, when it was disbanded)
- Member of Pottstown School District School Board (2009-2017, 2018-present)
- Organizing Member of 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania (1998-2003)

Accomplishments & Awards

- Pulitzer Prize Winner for Journalism-Editorial Writing (1990)
- Author of “Save Our Land, Save Our Towns” (1995)
- Speaker to more than 450 groups and organizations in 35 states on historic preservation, open space conservation, and traditional towns
- Borough of Pottstown Ordinance Governing Subdivision, Land development and Zoning, Adopted 2003
- Historic Preservationist of the Year, Preservation Pennsylvania (2000)
- Conservationist of the Year, Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation (1999)

- Urban Forester of the Year, Pennsylvania Forestry Association (1992)
- Wrote the successful nomination for the listing of the Old Pottstown Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places (1985)
- Led a community campaign to develop a new Pottstown Borough Hall and Park on High Street (1998)
- Led the campaign to restore angle parking to High Street which increased parking supply, provided traffic calming benefits, and allowed for the addition of bike lanes (2003)
- Led the campaign to locate the Montgomery County Community College West Campus in Pottstown (1994-1998)
- Planted and maintained over 2,800 new and replacement street trees in Pottstown Borough through Pottstown Trees, Inc.
- Preserved dozens of historic buildings and building facades in Pottstown Borough through Old Pottstown Preservation Society/Preservation Pottstown utilizing millions of dollars of historic preservation tax credits
- Supported the planning and development of 10 miles of bike lanes in Pottstown Borough to support walking and biking to school

The annual Montgomery Awards recognize the best in planning, design, and advocacy in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

The program acknowledges the high-quality work and commitment of communities, organizations, and professionals.

www.montcopa.org/MontgomeryAwards



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