

Saving the best of our older towns

Wed, Mar 18, 2009

The First Suburbs Project is the right idea at the right time. The Project is the continuation of a plan begun several years ago to revitalize the inner ring communities of Philadelphia, those older towns closest to the city. In Delaware County, that includes places like Upper Darby, Lansdowne and Yeadon. These communities face issues of neglect and loss of tax revenue, partly due to the western flight of businesses and residents to greener pastures in western Delaware County and Chester County. Those left behind had to cope with funding shortages that made it harder to maintain schools, libraries and infrastructure. Some found themselves without a vital business/commercial district. At the same time, the local government was having a harder time providing services to those in need.

First Suburbs, actually the Southeast Pennsylvania First Suburbs Project, is a nonprofit group that claims Upper Darby, Lansdowne and Yeadon as founding sponsors. It includes the older, developed suburbs of Delaware, Chester, Montgomery and Bucks Counties. First Suburbs has grown into a coalition of government officials and community agencies, as well as religious and social organizations, all working together to "harness their communities" power by directly engaging citizens to affect policies and practices that will lead to the stabilization and revitalization of their communities," according to the group's Statement of Purpose posted on its Web site. Tomorrow evening, from 7 to 9 pm, the group is hosting an Accountability Forum on the Federal Stimulus Package at the National Christian Conference Center, 1485 Valley Forge Road, in Valley Forge, a meeting that Pa. Gov. Ed Rendell is expected to attend. The hope is that the discussion will lead to local allocations of the stimulus funds where they will do the most good. For more information, or to register to attend, go to the group's Web site, sepaftp.org.

We applaud the desire of different people in our communities to work together for the common good. We encourage people to check out that meeting and to find out more about First Suburbs.

At this critical juncture, when everyone is struggling, it is more important than ever for different parts of our communities to come together, and to work with those in the state and federal governments, and in the private sector, to share ideas and resources. These efforts need to produce more than a handout. They need to provide creative, efficient solutions that give us towns where people want to work and live.