Social service agency to expand

The 1887 Wainman mansion, built at 61 N. Franklin Street by a Pottstown lumber merchant, is one of our most distinguished buildings. Every room in the house is paneled in a different wood — mahogany, walnut, cherry, maple, redwood. The main rooms have pocket doors and all the windows have shutters that fold into recesses.

Back in February, we reported that Gail Cooper, long-time principal of Pottstown Middle School, wanted to restore a historic Pottstown home as a retirement project.

Borough officials suggested the vacant Wainman house, adjacent to the Cluster building at King and Franklin streets.

Unfortunately, the legally recorded owner of the building, Bank of America, said it couldn’t be sold.

Although the property was acquired by the bank in December 2012, it had not been posted for sale because it might “revert” to the investor. The investor could not be identified because of privacy laws, according to the bank. Subsequently, the property was transferred to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, which turned it over to a real estate agency. The agency then arranged an agreement of sale with the Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities.

The Cluster provides free food, clothing and counseling to the needy in the former American Legion building next door.

However, the Wainman house is located in a zoning district that specifically excludes client-based social service providers. When the Cluster bought the former American Legion building, it obtained a waiver from the Pottstown Zoning Hearing Board. The Cluster building, assessed at $481,000, is tax exempt. The Cluster would once again need a zoning waiver for the Wainman house.

But is this the best use for the Wainman house? This magnificent mansion would be ideal for an office, a bed and breakfast, or other use that would contribute to Pottstown’s tax base and help revitalize the neighborhood.