Ready made for college housing?

Now that the renovation of the long-vacant Fecera’s warehouse on Beech Street into apartments is underway, it’s time to look at another of Pottstown’s historic gems: the Pottstown Shirt Factory.

The century-old factory on South Charlotte Street, just a stone’s throw from Industrial Highway and the Schuylkill River Greenway, was last used by Mrs. Smith’s Pie Co. The five floor, 30,000 square foot building, which is structurally sound, has been vacant ever since Mrs. Smith’s closed in 1998.

Last year, the Montgomery County Community College West Campus announced plans to partner with a developer to build student housing somewhere near the campus.

The plans were put on hold this year as the college transitioned to a new president and a new vice president at its West Campus.

The Pottstown Shirt Factory is just a five-minute walk from the college campus and just three blocks from High Street stores.

Many colleges have partnered with developers to renovate historic buildings for student housing.

For example, Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster partnered with a developer to renovate three old tobacco warehouses into 26 apartments housing up to 74 F&M students.

The developer manages the apartment complex, which charges market rates for the apartments. The developer pays full real estate taxes on the properties.

The community college could do the same thing with the shirt factory, which would easily qualify for federal historic tax credits.

The shirt factory is one of the most prominent landmarks in Pottstown, easily seen as you enter Pottstown on Hanover Street.

Renovating the building for student apartments would continue the college’s laudable practice of adaptively reusing historic Pottstown structures.