Historic factory to housing

Renovations will soon begin to one of Pottstown’s most historic factory buildings.

The 19th century Meyerhoff Shirt Factory at Charlotte and Cherry streets, last used in the 1990s as a Mrs. Smith’s Pie Co. laboratory, will be converted into 27 condominiums and market rate apartments. Two townhouses will be constructed facing Cherry Street next to the factory building.

Greg Lingo, spokesman for the Rockwell Development Group, which is building the adjacent Hanover Square townhouses, said the company hopes to begin construction by the beginning of July.

With big windows, high ceilings, and spectacular views of the Schuylkill River, these condominiums should attract discerning buyers with ample financial resources.

The factory building’s location along the Schuylkill River greenway, and its close proximity to Route 422 and the downtown, makes the units particularly appealing.

Factory buildings like these have been renovated into fashionable condominiums and apartments in cities all across the country.

The Pottstown project was held up for more than a year — and almost killed off — because of the borough’s inflexible parking requirements. Pottstown’s 2003 zoning ordinance, which gave officials discretion in assessing parking to allow for the repurposing of architectural gems like the Meyerhoff building, was foolishly amended in 2015 to require two parking spaces for any one-bedroom unit, regardless of individual circumstances.

Fortunately, the developer came up with a creative solution: Add parking spaces on both sides of Charlotte Street by making it one-way south.

The zoning hearing board approved a parking variance based on that plan after the police department and Council endorsed it.

The developer will be taking advantage of federal historic tax credits because the building is sufficiently distinctive to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The developer will also avail itself of the LERTA tax abatement program approved in 2016.

These loft-style dwelling units make the highest and best use of Pottstown’s rare and irreplaceable community assets — historic architecture, a traditional downtown, and proximity to the Schuylkill River.

By this time next year, the restoration should be complete.

Commentary by Thomas Hylton