Shirt factory project to proceed

On Tuesday, we noted the Hanover Square gateway project across from the Hanover Street bridge is nearing completion. The townhouses are finished and the two commercial/residential buildings are almost done.

The Gateway project is located where the Mrs. Smith’s Pie Co. once stood. After the factory moved to Oklahoma in 1998, the Mrs. Smith’s buildings were demolished.

It has taken nearly 20 years for the site to be redeveloped. Let’s hope it doesn’t take that long for the renovation of the 19th century Meyerhoff shirt factory at Charlotte and Cherry streets, which was last used in the 1990s as a Mrs. Smith’s Pie Co. laboratory.

Rockwell Development Group, which is building Hanover Square, also owns the former shirt factory.

For 18 months, Rockwell has been trying to win approval to convert the factory into 27 condominiums and market rate apartments. According to its website, Media-based Rockwell has numerous high end residential developments in a three-state area, including Wayne, Ardmore, Bryn Mawr, Drexel Hill, Hopewell Township, N.J., and Hockessin, Delaware.

The factory should be a showcase project. With big windows, high ceilings, and spectacular views of the Schuylkill River, the condominiums and apartments should attract discerning residents.

But the borough forced Rockwell to jump through a lot of hoops. Because of Pottstown’s inflexible parking requirements, Rockwell had to go before the Pottstown Zoning Hearing Board twice — it was turned down the first time — to scrounge up enough parking to meet muster. The developer had to go through the subdivision process to acquire land from an adjacent homeowners’ association for additional parking.

Borough staff had a long, detailed list of other requirements.

It was a similar story for the $13 million Beech Street Factory. Developers trying to convert the long-vacant Fecera’s warehouse into 43 apartments similarly had to navigate regulatory roadblocks for three years — mostly because of parking — until the project was approved.

Rockwell president Greg Lingo said he hopes to get underway shortly.

Our town is full of derelict historic buildings that need to be placed into productive use. We need to facilitate — not complicate — the process.

Commentary by Thomas Hylton

RESTORATION PROJECT TO PROCEED SHORTLY — The owner of the Hanover Square townhouse project will convert the long-vacant Meyerhoff shirt factory at Charlotte and Cherry streets into 27 market rate condominiums/apartments. Eighteen months after the project was announced, it’s finally approved and ready to go.

www.pottstowncitizens.org