



# Pennsylvania Conference of Teamsters

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## LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

### THE FUTURE of the PA STATE MUSEUM

HARRISBURG (Nov. 26) – State museum officials will spend most of 2020 developing a new master plan to guide activities and operations at the William Penn Memorial Museum in the Capitol Complex. The museum, also known as the State Museum of Pennsylvania, opened in 1965.

The circular building is on the National Register of Historic Places, noteworthy as an architectural example of the mid-20th Century Modern Movement, which emphasized abstract geometrical forms in its design. The museum building maintains a circa 1960s look in its interior decoration, signage and public accommodations, and it continues as a major tourism draw for Pennsylvanians, including groups of schoolchildren on field trips. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission embarks on this project with recession-era budget cuts and a winnowing of its state-run historic sites behind it.

The master plan will result in four of five large scale projects to be undertaken during the next 10 to 15 years, said Museum Director Beth Hager at an archaeology workshop held earlier this month. Other goals are to provide context to guide programming, exhibit planning and other projects and create a better experience for visitors.

The planning effort includes a series of questions about the museum starting with the first impression visitors get when they walk through its main doors on Third Street. It will look at what visitor amenities should

be available (it currently lacks a restaurant) and the proper spaces for a children's play area, nature lab and educational programs. Like museums around the nation are doing, the State Museum will examine whether it offers enough experiences to appeal to diverse audiences.

Questions will be asked about the future of standing exhibits in such areas as natural history, industrial technology, archaeology and military history. The plan will make recommendations on whether any exhibits should be retired or made more interactive. The recent restoration of the dioramas in Mammal Hall will likely serve as a guide point for decisions concerning other exhibits. In time for the Hall's 50th anniversary, the Museum restored the life-size representations of bison, elk, beaver and other mammals presented there. A special exhibit explained how the dioramas were created in the first place.

The State Museum itself has been the scene of some historic events relating to state government. Gov. Ed Rendell and legislative leaders held a public meeting there in 2008 to address the state's impending fiscal crisis during the last recession. The Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board held public suitability hearings in the auditorium in 2006 for applicants seeking state casino licenses. The master plan, due out next September, will recommend a strategy for the building and its exhibits, phasing of projects and cost estimates.