Little Known Trenton Commission Approved $300M Renovation of Aging State House

The Governor recently proposed a $300 million renovation of the State House Executive offices. Our Capitol which was originally built in 1792 has seen improvements over the years, and in the mid-1980’s the legislative chambers were modernized to reflect much needed electrical and computer wiring. It has been since 1950 that any improvements have been made to the Executive offices, which include four floors in the front of the State House.

The State Capitol Joint Management Commission — a body that is a mix of executive and legislative officials — voted 7-0, with one abstention, to move the project forward in late April. The little known commission is responsible for maintaining the "architectural, historical, cultural and artistic integrity" of the State House. The renovation is expected to displace all executive officials for at least four years and would allow for a complete makeover of the executive portion of the building.

Jeremy Rosen, a spokesman for the governor's office, said in a statement that "no reasonable person" can expect the executive branch to safely allow people to walk through a deteriorating structure. "The bipartisan, joint legislative-executive State Capitol Joint Management Commission understood that and reached the appropriate conclusion at last month’s open, publicly advertised meeting," Rosen said. "It’s beyond time to move forward with this restoration."

The main speaker at the State Capitol Joint Management Commission meeting was George Skarmeas, a partner and design director for Preservation Design Partnership, the architecture firm that is working on the project. During the meeting, Mr. Skarmeas said the renovation is expected to cost approximately $288 million. He also detailed a host of structural problems — like severe cracking, damaged windows, and a disastrous HVAC system.

"This is the most ingenious use of duct tape I've ever seen in my life," he said, showing a picture of how the tape is holding together a skylight.

Tuesday's vote authorizes leasing the State House to the Economic Development Authority, which would then sublease the building back to the commission. The commission would then pay rent to the EDA from Treasury funds — that money will be used to pay back the bonds over a 30-year period. It also limits spending on the project to no more than $300 million.