Park museum plan may remain in fantasyland

By Robert Larkins

The Liberty State Park Public Advisory Commission wants the state to reject a proposed agreement for the Institute and Museum of Fantasy and Play to lease part of the Central Railroad terminal in the park.

The commission yesterday urged the institute and the Department of Environmental Protection to work out a smaller-scale proposal involving the partially-restored terminal, and it suggested that a hearing on the new proposal be held in Jersey City.

The museum would have featured part of the Princeton-based institute's doll and toy collection.

The advisory commission yesterday accepted the report of its ad hoc committee that investigated the museum proposal.

In many ways the ad hoc committee's recommendations were in line with the recommendations of the Citizens Committee of Hudson County.

The ad hoc committee's report asserted that the lease agreement would give the museum "a complete takeover of the terminal," with claims on 75 percent of its space, and that it would be "commercial" because of the possibility of admission fees and revenues from museum shops.

It also said the proposal could interfere with free cultural events and festivals at the park.

"We may ask ourselves," the report said, "are we spending millions of dollars in order to build the largest doll house in the world?"

The report claimed the museum proposal would conflict with the recommendations of Historic Conservation and Interpretation Inc., a consulting firm that has presented its views on future use of the partially-restored terminal.

That study was presented to the commissioners yesterday.

It said that the main building of the terminal was completed in 1889 while the ferry sheds and railway express building were added more than 20 years later.

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Park panel cool to toy museum idea

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Jersey City Mayor Thomas F. X. Smith, a commission member, suggested yesterday that the railway express building might be a suitable place for the Museum of Fantasy and Play, and the consultant's report, while not mentioning the toy museum proposal specifically, did suggest that a theme museum, an elegant restaurant and a permanent market could all find a suitable home in the railway express building.

The consultant suggested that the train concourse would function best as a "multi-use" space with no permanent exhibits to restrict movement, and the north and south passage areas used for rail history displays.

In other business yesterday, the commission endorsed Smith's proposal for a monument at the park to honor the eight servicemen who were killed accidentally during an aborted hostage rescue raid in Iran last April 24.

Paul Sedor, park superintendent, told the commissioners Jersey City was slow in plowing Audrey Zupp Drive into the park and that ice formed on Morris Pesin Drive from water that had leaked from underground pipes. He said it had almost been necessary to close the park. Following a recommendation from senior research analyst Robert Wernley, the commission formed a special committee headed by member John Powers to investigate the possibility of having the status of the commission codified into law. The commission was created by executive order of Gov. Brendan T. Byrne, and Byrne has only one year of his term left.

Smith, a gubernatorial aspirant, said no action that would "handcuff" an incoming governor should be taken.