

College of Physicians and Mütter Museum will undergo a \$27 million expansion and renovation

The first phase of renovations will include larger galleries, building upgrades, better signage, and expanded exhibition space. Construction will begin in early 2026.



A rendering of the new, accessible entrance that will connect the College of Physicians building, which houses the Mütter Museum, and its new space at 2129 Chestnut St.

Courtesy of MGA Partners

by Rosa Cartagena

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The College of Physicians of Philadelphia, which runs the popular [Mütter Museum](#), announced plans on Monday to expand its footprint at 22nd and Chestnut Streets with a new, accessible entrance, larger galleries, educational and event spaces, an upgraded gift shop, and a renovated core gallery for the museum.

The oldest private society of physicians in the country, the College [purchased the buildings](#) at 2129 Chestnut St., a former Swedenborgian Church and Parish House, in 2023 for about \$9.3 million.

The organization has since raised \$27 million to initiate the first phase of renovations, which will occur in stages over the next few years.



A rendering of the sanctuary space at the former church located at 2129 Chestnut St. The College of Physicians plans to use it for events.

Courtesy of MGA Partners

A large glass structure will serve as the new entrance and will connect the current College building and the adjacent church building. The latter will hold administrative offices, shared spaces for College Fellows, and public event spaces for both College and Mütter programming.

“We’ve been space constrained for a number of years. In our original building, we use pretty much every square inch of space, and so this allows us to increase the space, especially our educational offerings,” said CEO Larry Kaiser, a thoracic surgeon who [was appointed in January](#).

The College typically welcomes about 5,000 students a year for STEM and museum programs. With more classroom space, they anticipate doubling the number of Philadelphia students that can be reached.



A rendering of how the College of Physicians building will connect to the adjacent former Swedenborgian Church at 2129 Chestnut Street.

Courtesy of MGA Partners

The renovations will also increase the amount of gallery space for the museum. There will be greater square footage in the current galleries with the goal of showcasing more of the Mütter and Historical Medical Library collection of some 500,000 objects, from medical equipment to [human remains](#).

Expansion plans initially developed under former [College CEO Mira Irons](#) and Mütter executive director Kate Quinn, who was [dismissed in April](#) following years of public controversy around the museum's [handling of human remains](#).

Now, in place of a museum director, [the Mütter is led by Erin McLeary](#), senior director of collections and research, and Sara Ray, senior director of interpretation and engagement.



A rendering of the Mütter Museum's renovated core gallery, which will expand its footprint while retaining its Victorian aesthetic.
Courtesy of MGA Partners

The core gallery of the Mütter, which showcases historical artifacts along with skeletons and organs that [represent rare medical conditions](#), will undergo significant renovations to update the display cases and create more space for the exhibits on view.

The Victorian aesthetic will remain, but the casework and labels will be upgraded for better visibility and legibility. Those renovations are expected to begin in 2027.

“People love the look of the museum. They love walking into that space and feeling like they are transported back into time, they respond really positively to it. We really want to respect and honor that,” said McLeary. “However, when people walk up to look into the cases, they’re dealing with century-old glass that’s hard to see through ... so we really want to honor the architecture of the building, the feeling of being transported to a different time and place, but really improve the visitor experience and the staff experience [with] strategic updates.”



From left: New Mütter Museum leaders Sara Ray, senior director of interpretation and engagement, and Erin McLeary, senior director of collections and research.
Constance Mensh for the Mütter Museum

It’s likely that the exhibits will also change as staff rotates specimens and objects out so that museum staff can ensure preservation and conservation.

“I’ve been giving tours of this museum since like 2014 — it’s 11 years that I’ve walked through that core gallery with great attention to detail, and almost nothing has changed,” said Ray, who was once a docent. “There’s some things that have been in there for decades at this point, and they need to be rotated off display for the stewardship of that specimen.”



The Benjamin Rush Medicinal Plant Garden.
Courtesy of MGA Partners

The hope is that the Mütter will be able to spotlight more of its historical holdings as only about 20% of the collection is currently on display.

Design firm MGA Partners and project managers Becker & Frondorf are partnering with the College on the expansion efforts, and construction will begin in early 2026.

An earlier version of this article reported that Mütter and the College's expansion is a deviation from Mira Irons' plans, and that there would be new galleries at 2129 Chestnut Street. The expansion is in line with the plans of Mütter's former leadership and, for now, is limited to the existing galleries in the museum.