

MIDDLETOWN

Fire station expansion could be completed soon

Most of the expansion is being funded with an \$800,000 casino grant.

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An ambitious expansion to the William Penn Fire Company station on Bristol Oxford Valley Road in Middletown is moving along and could be done by the end of the year, said fire company president Andy Foley.

The 5,476-square-foot expansion includes three vehicle bays, an engine room, an office and storage space. It will more than triple the size of the 1,745-square-foot station built in 1963 by fire company members.

"It will definitely be a morale booster for our members to finally have a nice new building they can be proud of," said Foley. He said he and other fire company officials believe the expansion can be finished sometime in December.

Once that's done, the fire company will concentrate on renovating the original part of the station into a recreation room, multipurpose/exercise room and storage, Foley said.

The current expansion is being mostly funded with an \$800,000 grant given to Middletown by the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Bucks, with money from the Philadelphia Park Casino in Bensalem. William Penn also got a \$200,000, 2 percent loan from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and \$150,000 from other sources, Foley said.

Renovating the original part of the station will take an additional \$200,000, he estimated, and added that the fire company is looking into ways to raise that money.

After the \$800,000 grant was announced, the fire company couldn't come to an agreement with Middletown officials on an additional contribution from the township. A \$300,000 contribution was proposed by former township manager Richard Gestrich that would have been funded with a loan to be paid back over 20 years. It was voted down 3-2 by the supervisors. Robert McMonagle, Kathy Heuer and Chuck Thompson voted no after expressing various concerns. Jasper Caro and George Leonhauser voted yes.

"I wish we had cooperated with them a little more, but I'm happy to see this expansion moving along," said Caro. "I think about 30 percent of the township lives in this station's district. It provides fire protection for a lot of people and it's important they have proper facilities to serve the people."