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## Architect hired for new Milltown firehouse

BY MARY ANN BOURBEAU • STAFF WRITER • JULY 31, 2009

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**MILLTOWN** — The Borough Council has approved the hiring of RSC Architects of Cliffside Park to draw up plans for a new and long-awaited firehouse.

It's the latest step in a project that's been on the table for 15 years. The borough's firehouse on South Main Street was built in 1889; the other one on Cottage Avenue was constructed in 1925. The new building will be a consolidation of the two departments.

"This location appears to be the best one because the borough already owns the property," Fire Chief Jules Dekovics said. "We (the firefighters) are all taxpayers, so we're looking at the cost as well. There are a lot of construction industry professionals in the fire department, which made the process so much better."

The historic buildings currently being used have structural issues such as leaky ceilings, and do not meet current codes and regulations for fire departments, Dekovics said. The new building will have a diesel exhaust system and showers for the firefighters who are exposed to hazardous materials. It will also be large enough to house the fire trucks.

"It will have all the amenities required by the state," Dekovics said. "We are by no means looking to build the Crowne Plaza. We just want a functional building that meets our needs and the code requirements."

The new firehouse will be built adjacent to the existing South Main Street firehouse on the site currently occupied by the Milltown Historical Society. The two buildings that sit there, which are owned by the borough and managed by the Historical Society, will be moved to the rear of the existing historic firehouse. The existing firehouse will then house artifacts from the Eureka Fire Museum.

"We'd like to make a little historic district," Dekovics said.

RSC Architects was chosen because of its extensive experience in designing firehouses, said Council President Brian Harto, who is a member of the fire department.

"We felt very comfortable with them," Harto said.

The cost of the project has not been determined, nor has a start date.

"If all the stars were aligned, I could see starting sometime next year," Dekovics said.

Harto said Councilman Randy Farkas was the lone member to vote against the plan.

"The rest of us felt now was a good time," Harto said. "Construction costs are lower than they have been in 15 years and we're exploring every possible avenue for grant money. It's never a good time to spend money, but we're at the point where we really can't wait anymore."

The Milltown Fire Department responded to 230 calls last year. Like many volunteer organizations, membership has declined in recent years, so it was good news when three firefighter's applications were approved by the Borough Council at the meeting, bringing the ranks up to about 50 members. Those applicants are Peter Dialfonso, Steven Hohwald and Robert Manley-Ruiz.

"When all the equipment is in one place, it's easier to utilize manpower better since membership is dwindling," Dekovics said.

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