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## Years of planning ends with groundbreaking

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Work has officially begun on a \$2.2 million project to expand the Slingerlands Firehouse.

At a ceremony held on Wednesday, Aug. 1, Slingerlands fire officials broke ground to revamp the New Scotland Road facility. The project has been in the works since early 2008.

"We're excited," said Ryan McConky, a commissioner for the Slingerlands Fire District who helped spearhead the project. "There have been a lot of ups and downs along the way, but we've charged ahead and gotten through those issues. Now, we're just looking forward to seeing things progress."

The fire station was first built in 1966 and a majority of the structure is original. In 2000, a small expansion was completed to update office space, but soon ceilings began to leak in the older portions of the building and close quarters in the bay meant first responders were often breathing in exhaust fumes from engines.

In December of 2011, voters approved a plan to borrow \$1.8 million to go forward with the project. Then in July of this year another vote was needed to approve the use of an additional \$400,000 from the district reserves due to rising costs. That vote passed by a margin of 78 to 25.

The expansion calls for the addition of two bays, more storage areas for equipment and files, the construction of a radio room in the front of the building and the addition of a decontamination station, where firefighters can wash off harmful substances from fire scenes or from work on equipment at the station.

Fire officials said the health and safety of the volunteer unit was the main reason for the expansion.

"The primary expansion is going to get the firefighters away from the apparatuses while they are dressing and get them out of the same rooms that the engines are running in," said Slingerlands Fire Chief Brian Sleurs.

The expansion was also said to be needed in anticipation of growth due in no small part to the creation of the Vista Technology Park and because those in the department didn't have room for a staging place during emergencies.

"During (Tropical Storm) Irene and Lee we were sitting outside on a bench watching the weather underneath the overhang, but still out in the elements," said McConky. "We really didn't have anywhere to go."

Taxes will increase only on the \$1.8 million originally bonded for the project. The average homeowner in Bethlehem within the district will see a tax increase of \$78.44, while the average New Scotland homeowner covered by Slingerlands Fire will pay \$48.94 more.

At the ceremony Albany County Executive Dan McCoy, a former Slingerlands firefighter, said he's glad to see the project underway.

"I was a member here for about six years and even back then they were talking about an expansion and making more room for the apparatus," he said, calling the firefighter and officials working on the project "dedicated."

Sen. Neil Breslin said Bethlehem's fire responders are "unparalleled and Slingerland's Fire District is at the top" and the expansion will make service "even better."

"The goal right now is to get the bay portion done so we can get the apparatus back inside by the end of October before the freeze," said McConky. The main portions of the project are expected to be completed by December, with some minor work left over in the spring, depending on the weather.