Ambulance Corps to build new facilities
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CONGERS - Boxes overflowed storage closets and chipped wood tables rested on floors that creaked with every step.

Forty-one years after the 7,500-square-foot building was built, the Congers-Valley Cottage Volunteer Ambulance Corps' headquarters is in desperate need of a makeover, officials said.

"It's an outdated facility," said Nick Rusiecki, captain of the ambulance corps. "It really doesn't meet the needs of the corps right now."

The ambulance corps is planning to spend $2 million on a new building that would meet federal requirements and better serve the community, he said. Plans have been in the works for about five years and are under consideration by the Town Board.

"It's been a very long process," Rusiecki said. "We thought we would be ready for a groundbreaking a year ago."

At first, the group planned to expand and upgrade its facilities but was told by numerous contractors that it would be more worthwhile to knock the building down and start fresh, he said.

Throughout the process, members of the corps looked at examples of modern facilities in town to get ideas on what to do and what not to do when designing its own building.

"I think it's going to be great," said one member, Efren Marrero. "Once we expand, we'll have a lot more space to do a lot more things."

The corps is hoping the construction project, which would take a year, will begin this fall.

The group has saved about 15 percent of the necessary funds so far and plans to hold fundraisers to obtain the remaining amount, officials said.
Among the problems members of the corps cited with their current building were a lack of space for storage, the need for a bigger office, and separate rooms for people who want to sleep, eat, read or watch TV. Right now, there is only one room for many of those functions.

"There's one guy who's a paramedic who volunteers for us," Rusiecki said. "He has to sleep on one of the couches, and it's like a train station there with people coming in and checking their mail."

There are also several federal requirements that aren't being met, said Brian Lynch, spokesman for the group. Among them, he said the building is not handicapped-accessible, there is no exhaust-removal system for the ambulance trucks, and there is little space left for private documents that must be locked away under homeland-security requirements.

The ambulance corps is proposing a 12,000-square-foot building with several multipurpose rooms, additional storage, a laundry room, separate bunks for men and women, and an ambulance bay that can store three trucks, including their newest model, which is too tall to fit in the existing bay, Lynch said.

Bill Hughes, the treasurer for the corps, said the corps averages 1,400 calls a year, a significant increase from the 600 or so when he joined 10 years ago.

"The people in the community are getting older," he said. "And the community just expanded tremendously with a growth in the number of townhouses and apartments."

Lynch said a more comfortable facility for the corps' 52 active members would lead to better service for residents.

"To serve the community better, members have to be rested and refreshed with the proper supplies," he said.

Many members prefer to respond to calls from home because the facilities are uncomfortable, Lynch said. However, having staff on site would help reduce response times.

"Time is always a factor when somebody calls 911," he said.