Retirement benefit for Mt. Kisco ambulance workers on ballot

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MOUNT KISCO - The village's ambulance corps is seeking passage Tuesday of a ballot proposition that would establish a retirement benefit program for active volunteers.

The measure would provide corps volunteers a monthly payment of $20 for every year of active service they provide for up to 40 years. An ambulance volunteer who is active for 10 years, for example, would receive a $200 monthly benefit. Volunteers would start collecting the benefit when they reach age 65.

The pension-like program, similar to one passed for volunteer village firefighters in 2003, is aimed at keeping volunteers and possibly bringing in new recruits.

Bert Daley, president of the Mount Kisco Volunteer Ambulance Corps, said if the volunteer ranks dwindled to the point that the village had to go to a paid ambulance service, that arrangement would cost more than $1 million a year.

He noted that volunteering for the ambulance corps requires a significant commitment. Emergency medical technicians, he noted, are required to take hundreds of hours of training. The corps has about 35 active members, Daley said.

Volunteers are vested in the program after providing five years of active service.

To qualify, volunteers would have to earn at least 50 credit points annually for a variety of activities.

Volunteers can get credit for up to five years of active service they provided from 2004 to 2008, assuming they meet certain requirements. But to get the award for that prior service, they would have to put in an additional year of active service in 2009 or beyond.

For a resident with a home assessed at $40,000, the village average, the service award program would cost about $15 a year, said Village Manager James Palmer. That averages out to a tax increase of about $0.38 per $1,000 of assessed value.

The overall annual cost of the program is expected to be $60,000 to provide the benefit to current volunteers. But that cost is expected to drop by up to $25,000 in five years because by that time the pre-2009 service is expected to be fully paid for, according to village officials.

Mount Kisco officials also expect that New Castle and Bedford will help pay for the program. Those two towns pay fees for the Mount Kisco Volunteer Ambulance Corps to provide life-support services to portions of their communities.

Mayor J. Michael Cindrich said he plans to vote yes.