

Community center upgrade to begin

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After years of trying to build a new home for Middletown seniors, township officials will instead give them \$1.5 million worth of improvements next year.

Parks and recreation Director Debby Lamanna said major renovations to the township community center on Trenton Road, which houses the seniors association, will start in 2010 and, hopefully, be done by the end of next year. The work is being funded by a \$10 million bond issue approved by the supervisors in 2008.

The work will include overhauling the heating and air-conditioning systems, renovating two restrooms, upgrading four other restrooms, new doors and windows throughout the entire center and other items, said Lamanna.

"We'll also be applying for grants that would fund other renovations," she said. "Work could extend into 2011."

The township-owned community center, formerly a private school built in the early 1970s, has been used by the township and seniors for more than 25 years without any major work. Most of the structure is taken up with seniors' activities, but it's also used by the township parks and recreation department for storage and some recreation programs.

"A lot of the building is made up of smaller rooms and, if we can find additional funding, it might be beneficial for our programming and the seniors to knock down some walls and create bigger rooms in some areas," said Lamanna.

Township officials have talked for years about a new community center, but location, price and other factors have been stumbling blocks. The latest price estimates for a new community center ranged from \$4 million to \$5 million and even higher, and there is just no way the township can afford that in the foreseeable future, said supervisors Chairman Chuck Thompson.

The township has installed a new floor and done other work in a large room used by the seniors for lunches, meetings and other activities, Lamanna said. Much of that work was done by public works department employees who will be doing some of the work on the bathrooms, added Thompson.

"The building is still in fairly good structural shape but was in need of new (heating and air-conditioning) systems and other things that will make it more energy efficient and save us money," he said. "Once all this work is done, it should be a really nice facility."

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