

Willowbrook Transfers

Are Opposed

By MARY ENGELS

A proposal to transfer residents from the Willowbrook Development Center to the new, but unused, Island View Care Center in Concord has met with opposition from community groups.

Changing Boxes

According to spokesmen for the groups, about two months ago it was learned that the new center at 1000 Targee St. might become the home for these 240 residents.

Shortly thereafter, at a public hearing, members of the Concord Civic Association composed of several hundred residents, and of Community Planning Board 3 expressed dissatisfaction that the community had not been consulted before plans for Island View had been made.

Area Is Congested

Among other questions raised about Island View were what was holding up the state license to operate and why the center's original request for a nursing home was turned down, Community Planning Board Chairman Trevor Mills said.

Jim Britton, president of the Concord civic group, commented "They're (the nursing home) supposed to work with us through the planning board on a building of this type, but the owners and developers just put up the structure and say to hell with the community."

He added, "If they had consulted with us, they would have known that the area in question is already a congested one. Doctors Hospital is adjacent to it and already gets more of a traffic flow than the area can bear."

Last week the Grassmere Civic Association joined these two groups in calling for a meeting with State Mental Hygiene Commissioner Alan Miller.

In a strongly worded letter to the commissioner, Tom Brisco, chairman of the health and hospital committee of Planning Board 3, said he had been asked to investigate why the community, and he personally, as a member of the Advisory Council on Mental Retardation of the State of New York, had not been notified of the plan.

Israel Fogel, who leases the center, said it is still awaiting state licensing and that the building wasn't granted the nursing home license because "At that time, a moratorium had been put on the number of nursing homes on the Island."

The three-story building, which resembles a gigantic motel, has been vacant for almost 14 months. In that time Fogel said he has been seeking other uses for the premises. Early this year he said he heard through a mutual friend about Dr. Miodrag

Ristich of Willowbrook and his desire to find additional space for some of the severely retarded residents who need medical, surgical and nursing care.

Third Voice Heard

Fogel contacted and entered into an agreement with Ristich on April 1. "I didn't envision any problems. In fact, I went ahead with hiring a staff, which I've since had to reduce because of opposition from the community," Fogel said.

Fogel is still hopeful he will ultimately be issued a license by the state. Then, he said, "It would only take a few days for me to get the necessary help and be ready for the transfer of the Willowbrook residents.

"Personally, it is my feeling it would be much better for them to be in rooms with two to four beds, as we can provide, than have them 60 in a ward as they are now at Willowbrook," he said.

Willowbrook's director, Ristich, said he feels "the move would be in the best interest of the residents."

Saw No Problems

"It's not as if we're farming out people and forgetting about them. We will have two full time social workers at Island View who will see that the residents get the best in medical and nursing care.

"If the operator of the premises does not provide programs in accordance with the rules and regulations of the State Department of Mental Hygiene, then we'll be able to move accordingly," said the director.

Meanwhile, another reason for community opposition is a charge that the state is going back on its word to make a gradual transfer of Willowbrook residents to their county of origin.

"Not so" said a state spokesman, who maintains that the first priority to these residents is to improve their living conditions and programs. "That need—for improving the level of care—is so great we feel that it overrides the goal of transferring them to their own community."

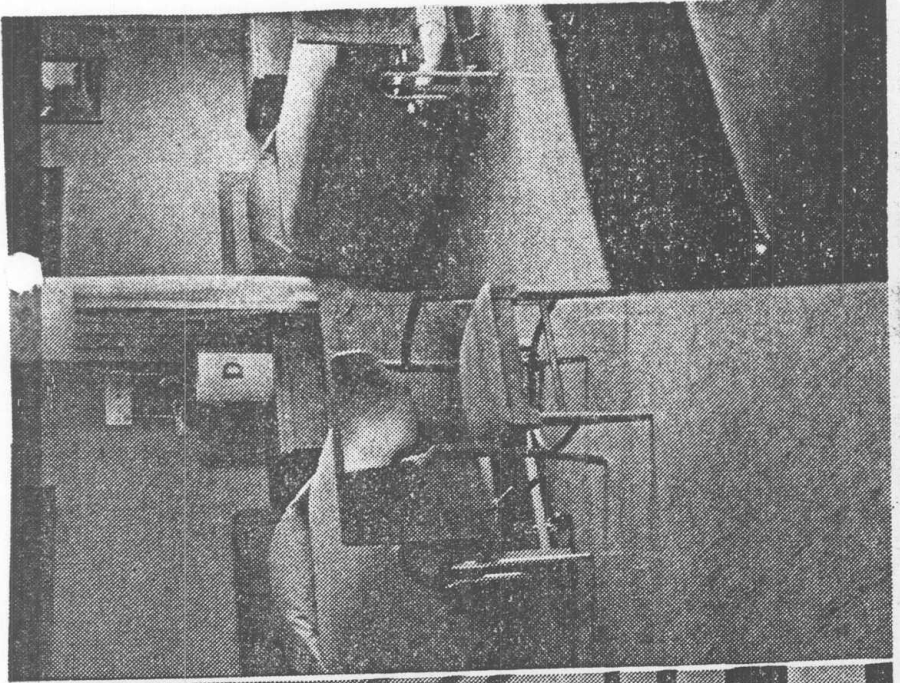
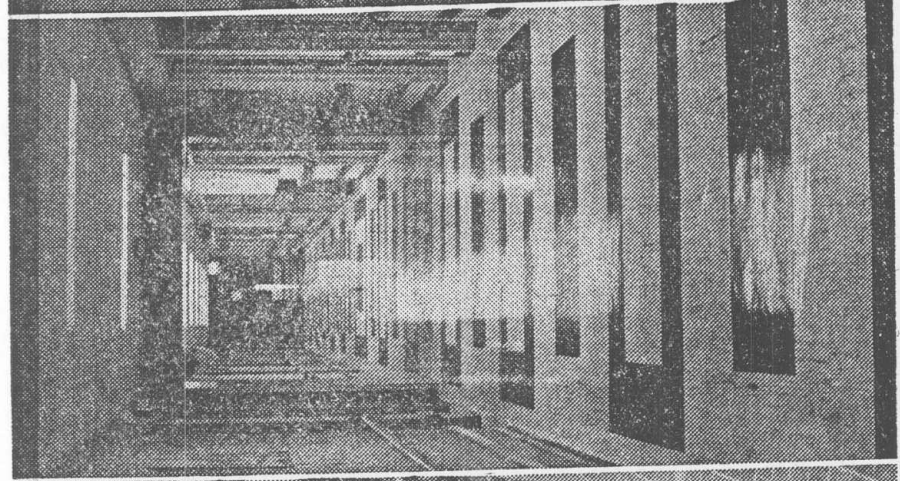
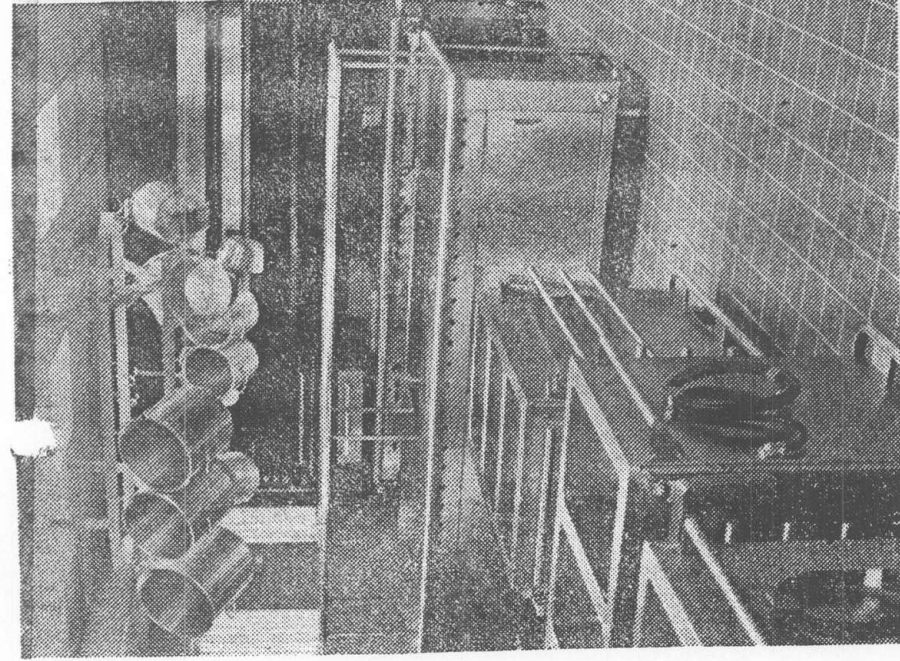
2 Social Workers

Mills disagrees: "It would be just like putting these people from one box to another one."

Many in the area thought when the building was first being built that it was going to be an addition to the hospital. The lack of hospital bed space on Staten Island has long been a community concern.

According to Fogel of Island View, the idea had been considered but nothing ever came of it.

Meanwhile, the building remains empty until possibly the state, the community and the nursing home representatives work out some sort of agreement.



Stainless steel equipment in the kitchen awaits cooks and helpers, waxed corridors bear no scuff marks and beds await occupants at sparkling new Island View Care Center as controversy rages over use of the installation.

News photo by Jim Romano

