

Residents to protest halfway house plan

By S. LAINE GOLDSTEIN

Faced with a demand for a moratorium on the construction and expansion of health-related facilities in West and New Brighton, Community Board 2 meets tonight to hear opposing views on the proposed Tysen St. halfway house for the mentally retarded.

A residents' group calling itself the North Shore Coalition, which claims that "the Brightons . . . are supporting a burden of health-related facilities in dramatic disproportion to the rest of Staten Island," has stated its dissatisfaction with the planning process that produced the halfway house plan.

The community services division of Willowbrook Developmental Center, sponsor of the halfway program, maintains that it has diligently provided information on the proposal and has dealt in good faith with area residents.

Although tonight's meeting is closed to the public, board chairman Georg Olsen has invited North Shore Coalition representatives, including Mrs. Sarah A. Holzka, a former administrator at Staten Island Aid for Mentally Retarded and a neighbor to the halfway site at 200 Tysen St.

Peter Knauss, an official in the state Department of Mental Hygiene, is expected to respond to the coalition's questions. Knauss will be joined by Albert P. Robidoux, chief of Community Services at Willowbrook and, possibly, James Forde, acting director of the institution.

In an interview yesterday, Mrs. Holzka took exception to remarks made by Forde last Friday at a meeting with the Office of Staten Island Development. The acting director, who completed his first month on the job yesterday, reportedly said that the public must make

a decision based on the "substance" of the halfway house proposal.

"Why do we discuss the substance after the fact?" demanded Mrs. Holzka, who added that Willowbrook and the state had succeeded "only in creating fear in the neighborhood."

As proposed, the three-story wood frame house will house about 10 "mildly to moderately" retarded adults, who will receive 24-hour supervision (though no staff will live in).

The house was acquired in July by the state Department of Mental Hygiene for a reported price of \$64,000, part of a \$150,000 appropriation made to set up this facility. It is expected to open in the spring.

In a statement to be made at tonight's meeting, the coalition says it has not been consulted by government, state or city officials "about the sudden proliferation of health related facilities in our neighborhoods. We consider this most recent acquisition for use by the state Department of Mental Hygiene as just one more facility thrust into our residential communities

without prior notification or consultation with the people most affected by their presence."

Mrs. Holzka lists the proximity of Klein's Forest Manor, which houses in excess of 60 mentally disturbed outpatients, and the projected occupancy of New Brighton Manor, believed to house more than 400 aged or mentally disabled adults.

"We are distressed in what appears to be not only a careless but cruel disregard for our families and children," says a coalition statement.

"Not only have the health authorities acquired properties in an apparently clandestine manner, but there has been no community presentation of a cohesive plan that takes into account supportive medical psychiatric services."

On the matter of community notification, the Advance has acquired a copy of a letter written by a former member of Willowbrook Community Services to Fred D. Koehler, then chairman of the West Brighton Committee of Community Board 2. The letter, dated Nov. 20, 1972, advised

Koehler that the mental Hygiene Department is seeking to locate two halfway houses on the North Shore and has one site under consideration for rental.

Mrs. Holzka said she first learned of the halfway house location from an Advance article which appeared July 9.

The board session is designed to deal strictly with the Tysen St. halfway house, although the coalition has made it clear that they are concerned about the "institutionalization" of the North Shore to a point where it will become, in their phrase, a "dumping ground" for handicapped individuals.

Georg Olsen, board chairman, said the Tysen St. issue will be put to the public hearings, perhaps to begin one week from today.

To further discussion on this matter, the Livingston and Randall Manor residents' association will hold a public meeting at Walker Park tomorrow at 8 p.m. Several Island health officials are expected to attend.