

Home for aged OKd after lengthy debate

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Community Board 2 spent three hours last night preparing itself for a future hot potato and two more hours disposing of a past bombshell during its third straight tension-filled, marathon meeting in Borough Hall.

The board voted 9-4 to approve construction of a 120-bed non-profit home for the aged in Rosebank after board

members, had, for the second straight month, become embroiled in acrimonious and sometimes personal debate over the issue.

At 12:35 a.m., after nearly two hours of heated discussion, some members attempted to close debate on the St. Nicholas Cathedral Home for the Aged.

Chairman Georg Olsen, however, blurted out: "You can fire me as chairman if you like.

But I'm not going to get bogged down over some parliamentary procedure." He allowed discussion to continue. Twenty minutes later the board voted to approve.

By an 8-1 margin, the board also gave a vote of confidence to Robert Karlin, acting chairman at last month's meeting when, after four hours of stormy debate, Dr. Dominic

(Continued on Page 12)

(From Page 1)

Miraldi charged Karlin with "disgraceful and discriminatory" behavior over the method in which he conducted discussion over St. Nicholas.

Before the two votes, however, a jam-packed conference room audience listened to, and fired questions at, three representatives of the state Department of Mental Hygiene who were present to brief the board on a New Brighton halfway house for 10 mentally retarded adults.

The 200 Tysen St., two-story house, already purchased by the state, has been the focal point of considerable community concern. Representatives of the North Shore Coalition, and ad hoc community group, were out in force last night.

Along with board members, the representatives engaged James Forde, acting director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, Albert P. Robidoux, Willowbrook's Chief of community services, and Mental Hygiene's Peter Knauss in protracted, sometimes testy exchanges about the halfway house.

Knauss made the first presentation to the board, saying the house's residents "will fit into the community," that the Department of Mental Hygiene does "want to be good neighbors" and that in the state "the need is fantastic" for these facilities. There are presently 22 halfway houses in the state.

Robidoux followed with a passionate appeal on the need to break up the large institution so that a resident can "give love and receive love" in a new setting. He said the mentally retarded can "grow to be ... productive people.

"I hope," Robidoux said, "no one will say that in our community there will be no room."

Robert Gang, a psychologist who would be director of the halfway house, told the board that "you're probably riding next to these people on the buses now" since many of them travel and participate in the community.

With the presentations finished, Olsen gave the floor to Dr. Miraldi who proceeded to hurl questions at the representatives. He asked Robidoux who would provide medical care for the halfway house residents.

Robidoux responded that, when possible, the patients would be treated by Medicaid doctors or by physicians at Willowbrook.

Miraldi jumped to his feet, pulling out a shopping bag full of what he claimed were \$20,000 worth of vouchers for service to Medicaid patients for which he had not been reimbursed.

"No respectable man will treat patients on Medicaid," Dr. Miraldi said.

Moments later, after Miraldi and two other board members finished questioning, Forde, apparently sensing the com-

munity hostility, said: "We are certainly not looking toward controversy with the community."

He said the Department of Mental Hygiene was looking for community response. "We want to listen and respond," he said.

"The halfway house is the humane and proper thing to do.

"We are being criticized by the court because they say we are not concerned with our patients' rights. We want to say to the court, look we are working with the community," Forde said.

Responding to a question after Forde's comments, Knauss gave a detailed presentation of the steps that the Department of Mental Hygiene had undertaken before purchasing the Tysen St. house.

When Knauss finished, board member Morton Flexer said, "I'm glad you didn't repeat the story about the little boy. I haven't heard that one in six months."

Flexer's remark was about a story Robidoux had told of his relationship with a 17-year-old mentally retarded boy who, he said, has asked him. "What is it like to be a real boy?" Robidoux did not respond to Flexer's comment but just shook his head.

Flexer asked if the halfway house would eventually be expanded to "15 or 20 or 30 people." Knauss, citing physical

limitations, said "No, it would not make sense."

"Willowbrook has not made sense in the past," Flexer responded.

"One of the reasons we are here," Forde said, is to rectify the mistakes at Willowbrook." His voice rising, Forde said, "we are looking for help."

One fear that surfaced during the questioning was expressed by Mrs. Rose McBrien of the Livingston Manor Civic Association. "What instruction," she asked, "have these retarded people been given in sexual mores?" Mrs. McBrien said her concern was for the potential residents as well as for community children.

Robidoux explained that the 40 residents ready to move into the halfway house, all Staten Islanders, have been faced with co-ed situations. "They don't need any more or any less training than we do," Robidoux said.

"They've had no training?" Mrs. McBrien asked. "Have they been taught that there is a certain class of people they shouldn't approach?"

Robidoux said they had been socialized to deal with normal sexual situations.

Three hours into questions, near 11 p.m., the community and halfway house represen-

tative left the meeting. The work of the board had just begun. They bickered, fought, and haggled for two more hours.

No vote was taken on the halfway house. Olsen said it is likely a public hearing will be called, even though last night's meeting essentially was a public hearing.

In other, non-related action, the board voted unanimously to approve a request from the Jersey Street Task Force that Borough President Connor request the Board of Estimate approve funds for the Comprehensive Jersey Street Study Proposal that the Task Force had approved in August.