

Board 2 nixes halfway house plan

By STUART FELD

Safety was the keynote at last night's Community Board 2 meeting as the board nixed the proposed halfway house for mentally retarded adults at 200 Tysen St., New Brighton, passed safety guidelines for potential halfway house sites, and asked questions about criteria and needs for traffic lights on Staten Island.

Debate, focussed chiefly on the efficacy and stringency safety-wise of certificates of occupancy issued by the Building Department, lagged on for nearly an hour as members fretted about whether state and federal requirements were as strict as those of the city and then, after deciding that they were not, if the state could somehow be persuaded to ask for the city-issued certificate of occupancy.

After it was agreed that the state would most likely not ask for a certificate and after the board was reminded that it was merely voting on guidelines that might be changed at any time, it accepted, after several rewordings, the phrase "or equivalent safety standards," meant to imply the signed recommendation of a licensed engineer or architect as tantamount in safety to the certificate.

Thus, the three-part proposal for halfway house sites, drawn up by the board's health and hospital committee headed by John Steen, was eventually passed.

It included the already-mentioned safety guidelines that Steen asserted are an "ethical responsibility" since the community board is allegedly the only city agency that has the chance to review them, the suggestion that the halfway house be within walking distance of public transportation to necessary areas, and that the site have a "basis for community acceptance."

After this hypothetical war was won, an actual battle was lost as the Tysen St. halfway house, proposed by the state Department of Mental Hygiene last year as one of four halfway houses for "slightly

mentally retarded adults from the Willowbrook Developmental Center, was knocked down in a close vote.

The reasons for its suggested "veto" were identical to the reasons for which the previous motions were passed: Concern over the safety of the mentally retarded, and a firm basis of acceptance in the community, which was felt to be definitely lacking in light of the vociferous disapproval of several civic associations and a random survey of the "man on the street."

Traffic signals, and their installation and operation, were another area of concern last night in Borough Hall as Mrs. Anita Grasso of the Department of Traffic was called upon to explain some of the seeming mysteries surrounding these enigmatic preservers of vehicular order.

Robert Karlin, chairman, brought up three particular sites: Louis St. and Victory Blvd., Grymes Hill, and Howard Ave. and Grand Ave., Sunnyside, where mechanisms alternately described as "sonic detectors" and "controller heads" are missing; and Forest Ave. and Silver Lake Rd., Brighton Heights, which is operational—apparently too much so for some.

Mrs. Grasso maintained that the reason the controller heads (which are missing in two other unnamed Island intersections) have not been installed yet is that the Traffic Department cannot obtain them. They are not sure why, Mrs. Grasso said, asserting that the Traffic Department only installs them, and furthermore does not know when it can get them.

"But," she added, "once they are available they can be installed within three or four days, maximum."

Responding as to why the light at Silver Lake Rd. and Forest Ave. was approved, especially after she revealed that the average installation cost for a traffic light is about \$12,000 and "maybe more," Mrs. Grasso said that the Traffic Department had approved of it twice before, only

to have it struck it down.

Mrs. Grasso then reported that several of the criteria judged for the installation of a traffic light include the volume of traffic and pedestrians, the accident rate and visibility. She added, after questioning, that the average volume figure used to determine if a traffic light is needed is if the traffic on the side street in question is 20 per cent of the two-way traffic on the major artery.

When asked why so many of Staten Island's lights seem designed to thwart the express-minded driver, Mrs. Grasso could merely say that Staten Island's traffic system is not amply computerized to switch automatically to flashing lights at night when a regular light is not necessary, or sophisticated enough to employ a completely synchronized system.

But, she added, the Traffic Department is always open to citizens' written suggestions.

Another matter brought up was the executive committee's approval, "effective immediately," of a set of criteria for "excused and unexcused absences." Excused absences included "sickness, business or professional requirements, and religious observances," while unexcused absences included "the attendance of another meeting," "leaving without permission," and "absence without reasonable notice."

It was also noted that board members may be removed for "three consecutive unexcused absences, or absence for more than one-half of the meetings called in any one year," and that the borough president has sole discretion and power over the removal, although members are "nominated" by the board's elected officers.

Other matters brought up were:

- The unanimous approval of the New York Public Library budget.

- The approval of the present Mitchell-Lama Belair Rd. project of 48 apartments in Fort Wadsworth.

- The "disastrous condition" of Stapleton.

- And the continuing saga of the opening of Cromwell Recreation Center.