

Group home nixed after 2-year effort

By ROBERT MIRALDI

An agency which has been seeking for two years to establish a group home for retarded Staten Island residents has been shot down again—this time after receiving a preliminary approval from a state architect.

The approval, says one state official, was a "mistake," and never should have been given to the Volunteers of America for a hostel it had wished to develop at 30-32 Westervelt Ave., New Brighton.

But the thumbs-down from the state Department of Mental Hygiene has the hostel planners perplexed, angry and frustrated after a two-year search which has included viewing almost 100 buildings in pursuit of Staten Island's second hostel for the retarded.

The turn-down also comes at a time when the state is attempting to depopulate its 20 developmental centers for the retarded and expand the current network of community-based group homes to include 26 new facilities in the city.

Only one of those facilities will be on Staten Island, explains Mrs. Barbara Blum, director of the month-old Metropolitan Placement Unit. "If the Westervelt Ave. facility is workable," she says, "we want it to go through."

At this point the Westervelt

group home looks bleak because, state officials say, the building is about nine feet too high, at least four feet too narrow and would cost too much to rehabilitate.

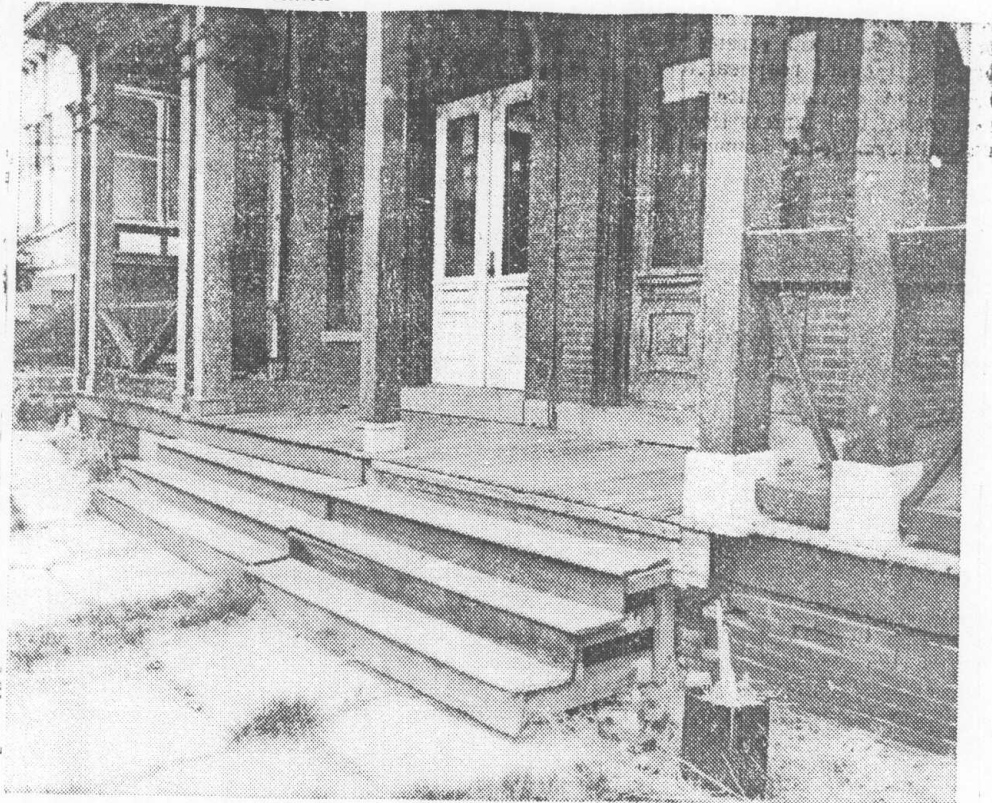
Different officials give different views and figures, however.

Meanwhile, says Mrs. Beatrice Victor, chairman of the Staten Island Retardation and Disability Council, there are almost 8,000 retarded Staten

Islanders who "terribly" need this hostel—a permanent group residence for 12 persons.

City officials estimate that there will be a need for about 30 group homes here. Thus far, a home at 200 Tysen St., New Brighton, is the Island's lone home for the retarded.

"This is the second time the state has suddenly withdrawn



Rickety steps and a broken-down porch will add to the repair work for the Westervelt group home. How much money repairs will total may decide the fate of the proposed facility.

S.I. Advance Photo by Barry Schwartz