

# Building 27 at Willowbrook misses out on \$1.2 million

The retarded of Willowbrook Developmental Center's Building 27, a one-story structure that still glimmers with institutionalized neglect, almost got something better yesterday.

Gov. Carey, in announcing \$49.3 million in federal funds expected for public works projects in New York State, called for approximately \$1.2 million to go to Building 27 for "humanization" renovations and improvements.

Contacted about the Carey disclosure, Thomas A. Coughlin, deputy commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene and reportedly a good friend of the governor, expressed surprise. "You're putting me at a complete disadvantage," he said, "because I don't

know anything about it. I'll find out and get back to you."

Two hours later, Coughlin called back from Albany. "This is a sort of embarrassing story," he confided. "The whole thing got botched up somewhere."

Around three years ago, Coughlin explained, the mental hygiene agency had decided to renovate Building 27, which has been well below department standards and is in desperate need of improvements.

But with the advent of the 1975 court order involving Willowbrook and the massive job of finding safe and suitable community residences for 2,200 of its clients, the state agency dropped its plans to upgrade Building 27.

"We wanted the money to go to the community instead," Coughlin insisted, "but obviously our order got lost in the shuffle."

The commissioner said he had called Carey already, informing the governor of the mistake and telling him to remove the project from the list of 50.

So when the 49 other projects, expected to receive federal approval shortly, get under way, Building 27 housing 50 individuals with a variety of physical and mental disabilities will not be among them.

It will remain the same because, Coughlin said, "sometimes these things just get lost in the paperwork."

-- SYDNEY FREEDBERG