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Elin Howe, center, acting director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, leads members of a Port Richmond community group through Building 61 at the center along with Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, behind the director.

S.I. Advance Photo by Barry Schwartz

Willowbrook tour leaves residents cold on training plan

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

Jacqueline Publicover, the president of an Elm Park Parent-Teacher Association, yesterday went to the Willowbrook Developmental Center to see the type of workshop for the mentally retarded being proposed for her neighborhood.

She was against the plan before the "fact-finding" tour. And after the tour had ended, Mrs. Publicover had not changed her mind.

The mother of a 9-year-old girl who

attends PS 21, Hooker Pl., Mrs. Publicover recited a familiar litany of "concerns" about the state plan to turn the former Garber Brothers store on Richmond Ave., Port Richmond into a large training center for people who live or once lived at Willowbrook.

Those "concerns," Mrs. Publicover said, include a fear of increased crime, fear for the safety of "our children" and the safety of "the Willowbrook cases as well."

Willowbrook administrators, including

the facility's acting director Elin M. Howe, showed Mrs. Publicover and other Port Richmond residents the activities that center in Building 61, where the handicapped construct and package pens and other items, preparing to leave the institution to enter community life.

Led by Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, the only member of the entourage who seemed the least bit non-committal about the proposal, the skeptical parents and business leaders insisted they wanted the tour because they still had many questions about the site.