

Former Garber's site again considered by Willowbrook

By MICHAEL J. FRESSOLA

In what may prove to be a startling reversal, the Willowbrook Developmental Center's proposal for the vacant Garber Brothers store in Port Richmond, a proposal that spawned strong community opposition and was believed dead, was revived last night during a meeting of the Port Richmond Community Council.

A Staten Island businessman who asked not to be identified is negotiating with the Garber family to buy the store and will lease it to the developmental center for use as a training and counseling center provided the plan meets community approval.

Reportedly, this reintroduction of the proposal has already garnered some favor, in particular, at a meeting of the Port Richmond area committee of Com-

munity Board 1 last Monday. According to Kathy Sollecito, president of the council, a "contingent of residents" spoke in favor of the plan that night.

Willowbrook, which was dissuaded from the Garber Brothers proposal late last year, originally intended to set up a large center in the vacant store to serve perhaps 400 de-institutionalized Willowbrook residents and the indigent retarded. Willowbrook eventually accepted Community Board 1's recommendation to break the program into parts and had recently begun negotiations with the owners of the vacant Pantry Pride store, Port Richmond, as a site for a portion of the training and counseling program.

All along, however, Willowbrook officials maintained that the Garber Bros. store would suit their needs best. Nevertheless, Elin Howe, Willowbrook's

director, said during a December community board meeting that she would not bring a program into a resistant community.

Apparently, a few Port Richmond residents are beginning to think that an occupied Garber Bros. store is better than an empty target for vandals.

The businessman who is negotiating to buy the store is a Port Richmond resident. He stated that the influx of Willowbrook staff and clients would be helpful to the area.

James Callaghan, a 15-year Port Richmond resident, characterized his community's original opposition to the proposal as "totally irrational and hysterical." He claimed, as did several others at the meeting in the Camelot Drug Prevention Center, Richmond

(Continued on Page A 2)

Page 1 of 2