

Plan for center for retarded in Board 2 area draws fire

By DIANE C. LORE

While stressing that they were not opposed to adequate care and community-based services for the mentally retarded, Dongan Hills residents last night voiced their disapproval of a proposal that would place a therapy, counseling and service center for the retarded in their community.

More than 30 persons jammed the small New Dorp office of Community Board 2 last night for a public hearing on a proposal by the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook to open a Borough Developmental Services Office (BDSO) for the care of the mentally retarded in the Board 2 area.

The site under consideration for the office is a 10-room, two-story brick building at 26 Dumont Ave., off Hylan

Blvd. and Old Town Rd., in Dongan Hills.

During the emotion-filled, three-hour hearing, the residents' main objection to the proposal emerged as what recourse homeowners would have if the office were opened in the neighborhood, but, for various reasons, failed to provide the proposed services.

"You're asking us to let you put this place in our neighborhood with no guarantee that it's going to work or that you'll do what you say you'll do. And if it doesn't work out, you've got a five-year lease and we're stuck," one homeowner noted.

Some resident said they would not mind the office opening if the community would be allowed to have some input into the facility through an advisory board or monitoring system.

Elin M. Howe, director of 1,600-bed

developmental center, said she would be "more than happy to have such a system" and invited community interest.

Felton King, president of the Willowbrook chapter, Civil Service Employees Association, representing workers at the institution, set the emotional tone of the hearing as the first to speak.

"No one has addressed themselves to the behavioral problems of retarded children," he asserted. "The state Department of Mental Hygiene has not identified what kind of retarded children will be placed in the community. It's very important to know the exact status of these people."

Jack Dietch, Board 2 member who chaired the hearing, told King he was making "general comments" on the state plan to release retarded persons

(Continued on Page A 2)

Page 1
5/2