



The rubble of a fire-charred Dongan Hills building, which state officials seek to open as a facility for the retarded. Fire marshals suspect arson.

S. I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante

## Marshals hunt arsonist in office fire

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

Fire marshals are seeking an arsonist who set fire to a Dongan Hills building late Sunday in what they say may have been an attempt to prevent the opening of a facility for the area's retarded citizens.

"At this point we are working under the assumption it might have been a person or persons opposed to the idea," Deputy Chief Fire Marshal John Barracato said.

The blaze at 26 Dumont Ave., which caused medium damage to a portion of the two-story structure, apparently was fueled by a flammable liquid discovered by investigators yesterday at the foot of the building's stairwell, Barracato said.

On April 19, over some area opposition, Community Board 2 approved the use of the building as a state Borough Developmental Services Office, which would provide counseling, therapy and recreation for the community's retarded residents.

Fire officials will decide within the next few days if they will ask the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department to investigate possible violations of federal civil rights statutes stemming from the suspected arson, Barracato said.

Elin M. Howe, director of the Borough Developmental Services Office, said yesterday the state still intends to seek a lease to rent the premises so the office can open, perhaps by the end of the summer.

But the building's owner, Joseph Per-

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