

# 1st group home to open . . . . 4 years and 134Gs later

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Some time this July, four men and four women from Staten Island are expected to walk up a flight of stairs into a 13-room house in New Brighton, set down their luggage and call the place home. When that happens, New York

State will have spent \$134,000 over four years to make it all possible.

The saga of this group home for the retarded, located at 200 Tysen St. next to Henderson Ave., is one packed with woes — from its controversial beginning in 1974 (when much of the community opposed it) to its hoped-for opening in

July.

The Tysen St. group home was to be the first on Staten Island, a symbol of what care for the retarded should be like in the future. Right now the home stands as a symbol of bureaucratic bungling and points out how expensive the transition from institution to community will be.

The latest is this: After purchasing the house for \$64,000 (1974) and renovating it for another \$20,000 (1976) the state has now decided (1978) that another \$50,000 must be spent to make the three-story, wood-frame house liveable.

After four years of planning and renovation by the state's Department of Mental Hygiene, a new bureaucracy which has now entered the picture, the Metropolitan Placement Unit, has decided that a new kitchen, two more bathrooms and a remodeled basement must be installed.

No one is saying that the latest improvements are folly, but state staffers who have been with the project for a few years think it is comical — or sad — how inefficiently the bureaucracies have planned this venture.

"The whole thing is a job," said one woman who has been involved in the planning for treatment of the house's eventual residents, of whom four will be from the former Willowbrook Developmental Center and four from the Staten Island community.

"The process has been so mucked up over the years," concedes Edward Hassett, a director of program planning in the Metropolitan Placement Unit (MPU).

"But the state has put a lot of money into Tysen St. and we feel we should finish it out," says Edward Mathews, an aide to Hassett. Mathews shares the anger of other state staffers and is equally incredulous that the Department of Mental Hygiene didn't realize four years ago that one bathroom would be insufficient for four men and four women.

As for the basement, Mathews says it is needed as a recreation room, but first the basement boiler must be replaced

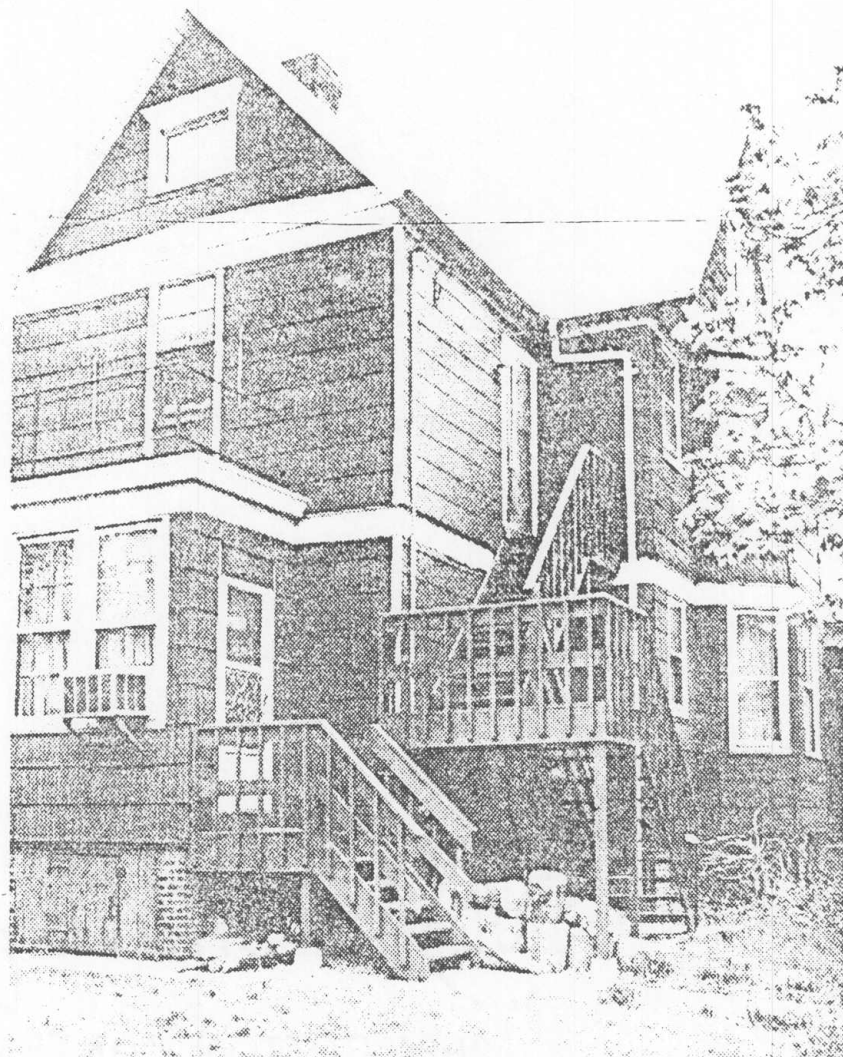
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A controversial New York State group home for the retarded will be located in this house in New Brighton, at the cost of \$134,000.

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The house cost the state \$64,000 and was renovated with an additional \$20,000. An additional \$50,000 is needed to make the three-story, wood-frame house liveable, the state says.

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and then enclosed to meet fire prevention regulations.

The kitchen, he says, needs a new sink, some new utilities, and more counter space. Some of the bedrooms, which already have been fireproofed, need to be enlarged. At least one of the bedrooms has no electrical outlet, a product of the work supervised by the state Office of General Services in the spring of 1976.

Mathews said he did not know what the bill for the new work would be, but one source said he saw an estimate of \$45,760. Mathews conceded the bill could

go as high as \$50,000.

If it had to be done all over again, would the state purchase and renovate a house similar to the Tysen St. one? "That would depend," Mathews says. "If there was a need for the service, yes we would. If there were better facilities, certainly not."

Problems like Tysen St.'s are unlikely to appear these days, however, because the state is now leasing group homes and not buying the property. And because only one bureaucracy, MPU, is doing the work.

Since March 1976, MPU has opened 11 group facilities and now there are 54 in New York City.