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D.A. may probe fire at site for retarded

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

Fire officials said yesterday they have asked Staten Island District Attorney Thomas R. Sullivan to investigate an apparent arson of a Dongan Hills building that the state plans to use as a facility for the retarded.

A preliminary Fire Department probe gives "hearsay" information that an area resident or residents, upset over the planned use of 26 Dumont Ave., may have set fire to the two-story structure as revenge, according to Deputy Chief Fire Marshal John Barracato.

But Barracato added that fire officials don't have a suspect under consideration.

The May 1 blaze, apparently fueled by a flammable liquid discovered at the foot of the building's stairwell, caused medium damage to the brick structure, which is located on a quiet, residential block.

A report of interviews with Dongan

Hills residents and officials of the state Borough Developmental Services Office, the group wishing to lease the site, was turned over to Sullivan yesterday, Barracato said.

Sullivan, meanwhile, said he had not received the Fire Department report but is "awaiting it, so we can act accordingly."

The Fire Department, Barracato said, will leave it to Sullivan to decide if local authorities will ask the U.S. Attorney to aid in an inquiry of possible federal civil rights violations stemming from the suspected arson.

Arson is a state crime. However, civil rights issues relating to an arson generally are investigated by federal agencies, including the U.S. Attorney and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"These investigations do take time," Barracato said. "So far we have some very strong allegations but it's mostly all conjecture. We need some advice from the district attorney."

On April 19, over some area opposition, Community Board 2 approved the use of the building, now occupied by the New York Foundling Hospital, as a state Borough Developmental Services Office.

Elin M. Howe, the director of the office, said last week the state still intends to seek a lease to rent the premises for a counseling, therapy and

recreation center for Board 2's 200 retarded citizens.

The buildings owner, Joseph Perrotta of Midland Beach, said last week he didn't know whether or not he wanted to pursue negotiations with the state, fearing "reprisals" if he should do so. Perrotta could not be reached for comment yesterday.