

Retardation leaders praise Board 3 for efforts in locating group homes

By DOUGLAS PATRICK

Although community resistance in some parts of New York State has delayed plans to empty state-run institutions for the mentally retarded, Community Board 3 has received praise for its efforts in setting up alternative residential sites on the South Shore.

"Community Board 3 has really extended itself in working with us in a cooperative fashion," Elin Howe, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, said yesterday. "I have been very pleased with the progress so far."

Eight South Shore sites, which will house 80 people, must be identified within the board area as part of the state's effort to return all but 250 profoundly handicapped Willowbrook center residents to their hometowns by 1981.

Sonia Braniff, board chairman of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council, an advisory group assisting the center in establishing residential homes for the mentally retarded, echoed Miss Howe's sentiments.

"They have been an absolute delight to work with," she said.

"Not only have they been very cooper-

ative in the selection site process, but they have taken one step further and shown a great deal of interest in the quality of the program to be conducted at the sites," Mrs. Braniff, a Stapleton resident, said.

In a letter sent a week ago to Thomas A. Coughlin, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the board said: "We believe that the facilities made available to the center residents must be every bit as good as those sites we would wish to place our own families."

"We do not intend to select those facilities which are generally out of the way or generally considered undesirable to other residents in our area," the letter continued.

Community Board 1, which encompasses the North Shore, will not set up residential homes because it is considered "saturated" with health-related and social service facilities. Community Board 2, meanwhile, has encountered hostility from residents who oppose residential homes for the retarded within their area.

Community Board 3 has told Miss Howe that it will be necessary to build

some facilities because it has been difficult for the board to locate an adequate number of existing buildings large enough and good enough to serve as home for mentally retarded persons. Each residence will house a maximum of 10 people.

Although Miss Howe said there is "some existing money" for the construction of new facilities, she said residential homes will have to be set up in existing structures as well.

The board will present Miss Howe and other state officials with 16 site selections by Dec. 1 so that the center will have "flexibility" in selecting eight sites, according to Board 3 members.

Miss Howe said she could not predict when the first residential home on the South Shore would be established because "it is just too early."

She also stressed that half the residents from the center to be relocated on the South Shore will be Staten Island residents.

Community Board 3 chairman Frank Beraud said he hopes that a maximum number of residential homes will be built so that new residents will know the

facilities exist before they move to the area.

But Beraud also acknowledged that construction will be impossible in already-developed communities such as Oakwood, saying he hopes the board will reduce tension among community residents by including them in the planning process. A public hearing on the site selections will be conducted later this month.

"The board has an obligation to see that these facilities are set up in the right way, and we plan to do just that," Beraud said.