

Board 3: Select group home sites or court will choose them for us

By DOUGLAS PATRICK

The opening of group homes for the retarded was debated last night at a Community Board 3 hearing with opponents and supporters reciting themes that have become almost commonplace in the state's controversial three-year-old drive to empty its institutions.

Opponents voiced concern over the unpredictable behavior of the retarded, the adequacy of staffing in the group homes and their effect on property values.

Supporters argued that the retarded — many of whom have lived in large, impersonal institutions most of their lives — have the right to live in a home-like setting.

Eight South Shore sites, which would house 80 persons, 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.

Meeting in Totten Intermediate School, Tottenville, Board Chairman Frank Beraud told an audience of approximately 300 persons that most of these group home residents will be from Staten Island.

Beraud also stressed that the board

was acting under a court order and said community residents should use the opportunity to help select those sites most agreeable to the community.

"If we do not select these sites, the state will select them without community input," Beraud said. "If the state falls, we have a very active judge who will do it," he said, presumably referring to Federal Judge Orrin G. Judd, who put the state under a federal court

order to place residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, in group homes.

The board compiled, with help of the state Department of Mental Hygiene and the Department of City Planning, a list of 40 sites for public consideration, including existing structures and vacant lots on which group homes could be constructed.

Because of the apprehension over group homes and accusations that some homeowners and real estate agents had not been consulted before several homes were placed on the list, at least seven sites were removed by request at last night's hearing.

Among those who expressed their opposition to group homes in their neighborhoods was Genevieve Drill, a repre-

sentative of the Tottenville Improvement Council, who said the community was too small to absorb residents of a group home.

Others told board members that their areas were not suitable for the retarded because of persistent flooding, a lack of adequate transportation, bad road conditions and heavy traffic.

Hugh McFarland, president of the Oakwood Civic Association, said the proposed sites in the Oakwood area were "located in flood-prone areas."

Representatives of the New Dorp Central Civic Association said they opposed group homes for the retarded in their area because the Staten Island Developmental Center was going to set up a recreation center for the retarded in the RAP Center on New Dorp Lane. They also cited the existence of two homes for foster children in the area.

William Shearon, chairman of the board's health and hospitals committee, said no community would receive more than one group home.

In response to one question, Elin

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Howe, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, explained the difference between the mentally retarded and the mentally ill.

Mental retardation takes place in people under 18 years old and cannot be cured. The retarded, Miss Howe said, usually have a mentality that would be comparable to an 8-year-old child.

Mental illness, on the other hand, can occur at any age and can be treated. Miss Howe stressed that the retarded should not be confused with the mentally ill.

Sonia Braniff, board chairman of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council, a group assisting the center in setting up group homes, said advisory groups that include neighborhood residents would be set up to help monitor the performance of each group home.

Mrs. Braniff reported offices will be set up to oversee the operation of group homes in each of the Island's three community boards.

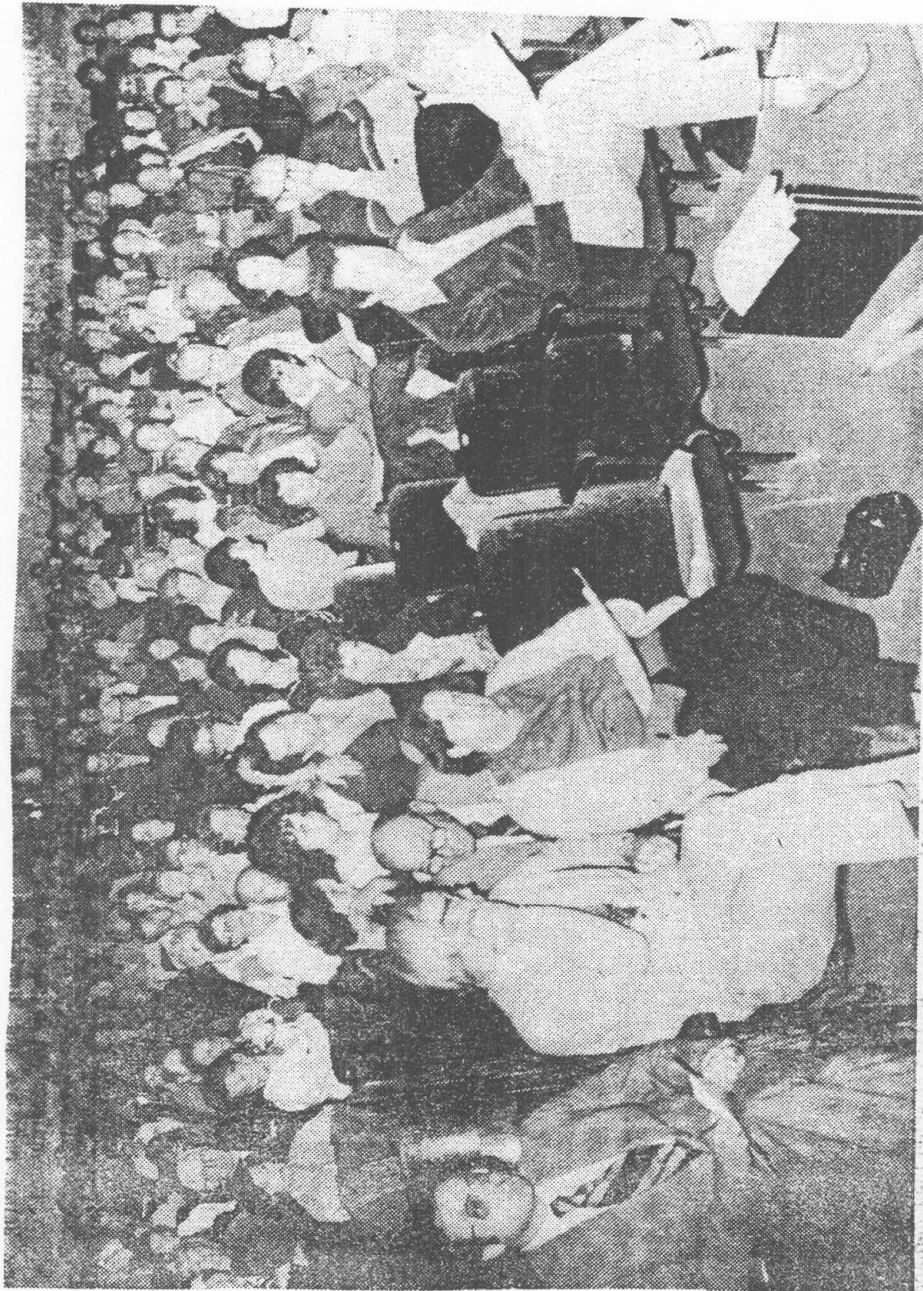
One resident who came out strongly in favor of group homes was Paul Merrill, president of Concerned Parents of Retarded Children, who said the retarded have a right to get out of constricting institutions and into good homes.

"We do not want our kids in institutions anymore; we want them in a decent home," he said. "All we want is your support in saying that we can stay in the community."

Six sites are being considered in Annandale; five each in Great Kills, Tottenville and Oakwood, and two each in Eltingville, Princes Bay and Huguenot.

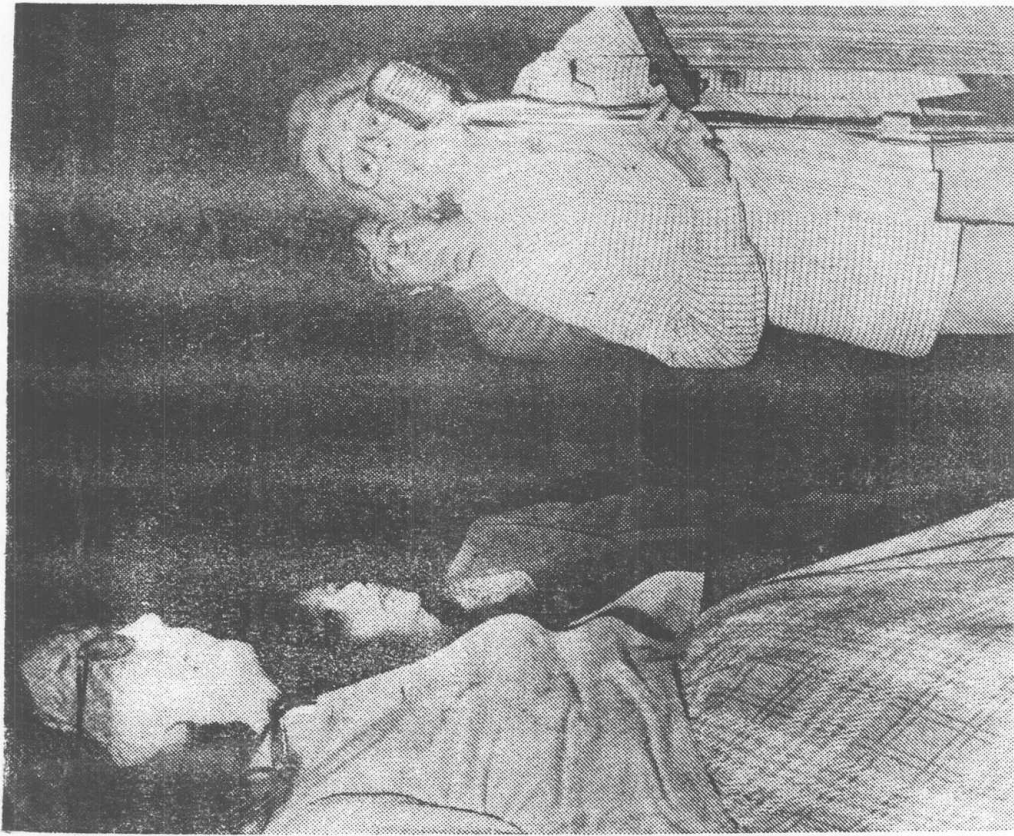
Single sites are being considered in New Dorp, Richmond, Arden Heights, Charleston, Richmond Valley and Pleasant Plains.

The board will announce its site selections at its next regular meeting Nov.

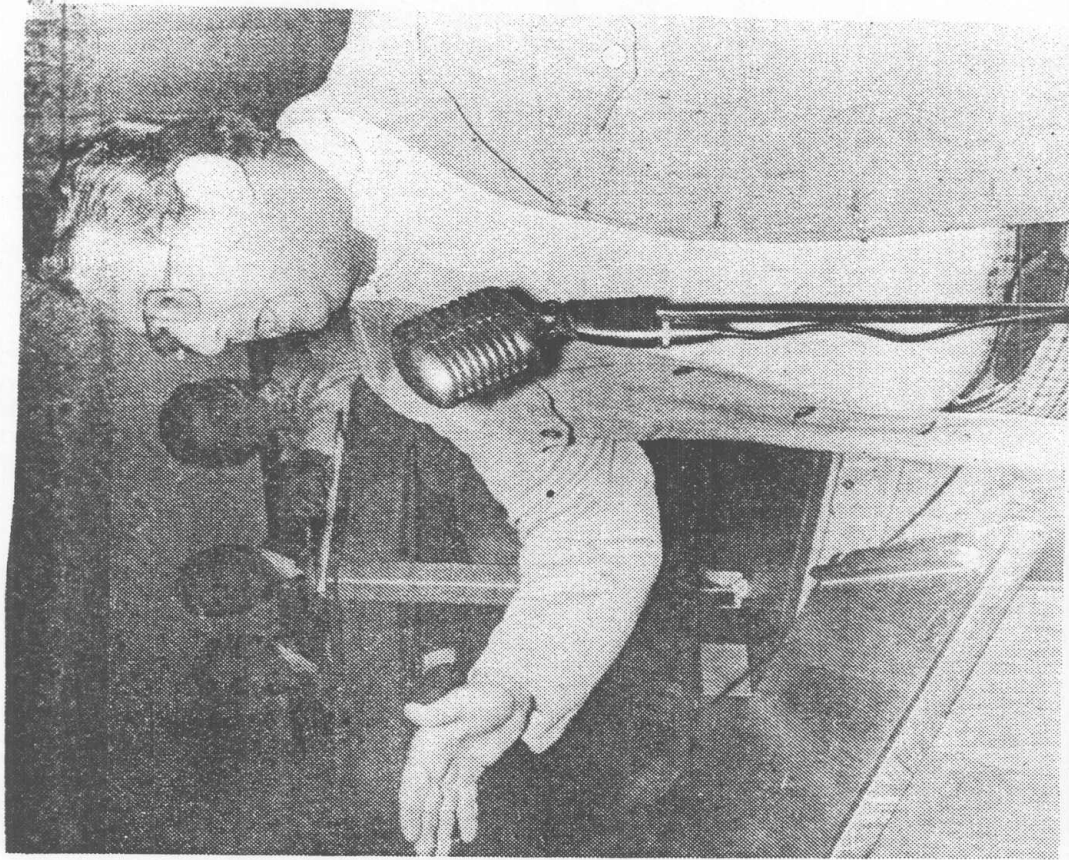


About 300 persons fill the auditorium in Totten Intermediate School for a hearing on the selection of eight sites for group homes on the South Shore.

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Genevieve Drill of Tottenville tells why she opposes group homes in her neighborhood. Elin Howe, left, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, and Sofia Braniff, board chairman of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council, listen.



Paul Merrill, president of Concerned Parents of Retarded Children, speaks in favor of group homes.

91-S.I. Advance Photos by Tony Carmonite
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