

Board plans hearing for retarded center on New Dorp Lane

By DIANE C. LORE

New Dorp residents will have a chance to air their views on a controversial proposal to open a training center for the retarded on New Dorp Lane.

Avoiding an emotional discussion, Community Board 2 voted last night to postpone a recommendation on the proposal, pending a public hearing. The hearing will be scheduled within the next two weeks.

"A Very Special Place Inc.," a private, non-profit organization, is seeking to open a day and evening training center for mentally retarded and physically handicapped adults in the former RAP Center on New Dorp Lane.

Michael Primiano, chairman of the board's New Dorp-area subcommittee, said his committee is not opposed to the concept of the center, but argued that the site is located in an already heavily congested area. "This is not the proper spot for the center. It's at an intersection. You'll have people pulling up and

parking, adding to the traffic congestion," he told board members at the monthly meeting in Sea View Hospital and Home.

Two board members, however, questioned whether Primiano might have a conflict of interest. "Are you representing your civic association or the area committee?" Patricia Whitehouse, chairman of the social service committee asked.

"I'm here to represent the area committee," he replied.

Another board member, James Stuckey, questioned whether it was ethical to allow Primiano to vote on the proposal.

In addition to being a voting member of the board and chairman of the board's New Dorp-area subcommittee, Primiano is president of the New-Dorp Central Civic Association Inc.

"How can you say you're opposed or not opposed to the site and proposal,

when you've drawn up this agreement?" questioned Jack Deitch, vice chairman of the board.

Deitch then produced an unsigned draft of an agreement between the civic association, represented by Primiano, and Genevieve Benoit, president of A Very Special Place.

Without mentioning the RAP Center as a site for the program, the agreement asks the directors to abide by six stipulations. One of the stipulations is that two civic association members, both chosen by Primiano, shall serve on the board of directors of the program.

But board members never had an opportunity to question a representative from the program. After waiting three hours to speak, Connie Johnansen, a member of the board of directors of A

Very Special Place, left after the board voted to postpone the recommendation.

"We came to the board in good faith," she said. She reminded board members they can only act in an advisory capacity. "We didn't have to come before you. We could have gone in and opened up the program," she said.

A representative from the program, however, will be allowed to testify at the public hearing next month, it was noted.

A Very Special Place hopes to serve 80 mentally retarded and physically handicapped adults at the center, according to its proposal. Half will come from the South Shore and the remainder will come from the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook.

Thirty clients would be served during the day programs, while 50 would be served during the evenings and week-

ends.

Services provided during the daytime hours would include occupational and speech therapy, mobility training and living skills. Evening and weekend services would include arts and crafts sessions and various planned "family activities," where families of handicapped and retarded clients could participate in programs on a membership basis.

The ratio of staff to clients would be approximately 4-1. The center would be funded entirely by the state Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the proposal stated.

At its September meeting the board voted to recommend that the center be opened, citing a need for such services

on the South Shore. No recommendation was made on a site for the center. A public hearing was then requested by Primiano and other board members, but no date for the hearing was scheduled.

Some board members fear the hearing on the proposal may turn into a similar situation as a public hearing last April concerning another proposal to reopen

the vacant RAP Center building. A proposal by the Richboro Community Mental Health Agency to open a drug-free clinic in the RAP Center building was withdrawn after two days of public hearings in which hundreds of New Dorp residents shouted and carried placards announcing their opposition to the proposal.