

600 blast 5 proposed group homes at public hearing

By DIANE C. LORE

More than 600 Staten Islanders, ignoring driving rain and highway flooding, turned out last night at a Community Board 2 public hearing to voice their opposition to five sites proposed by the state for use as group homes for the mentally retarded.

More than 60 persons, who spoke emotionally against the sites, were greeted with cheers and applause during the four-hour session in the auditorium of Sea View Hospital and Home. None of the residents spoke in favor of the sites.

The five sites — two in Grasmere and one each in New Springville, Graniteville and Dongan Hills — were rejected by community residents because they were either located on busy streets, or too near schools, hospitals and other community-based facilities, and because the buildings themselves were said to be unsafe to house the retarded.

As alternative sites, some speakers proposed opening the group homes on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook, or accommodating them in city-owned public housing projects or other apartment buildings.

A two-family brick house at 630 Hylan Blvd., Grasmere, is proposed for use as a group home to be operated by the Federation Employment and Guidance Service of Manhattan.

John Wilkenson, a Grasmere resident, said the site was located near three

schools — PS 30 on McFarland Ave., South Beach, and St. Joseph Hill Academy and St. John Villa Academy, and was also located near the Hills of Grasmere condominium townhouse complex. "Besides that," he added, "it's also near two ponds (Brady's Pond and Cameron Pond in Grasmere) and God forbid some kid should fall in and drown."

A handful of Grasmere residents also spoke out against a proposed site at 1082 West Fingerboard Rd., Grasmere. The wood-frame house was proposed as a home to be run by the Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children.

Residents said the wood-frame structure would pose a fire hazard to retarded clients. The house would also pose a

site. Middle class homeowners are being asked to shoulder the state's guilt for the failure of Willowbrook, Mrs. Dennan added, as the audience clapped and cheered loudly.

"My tenants have already told me they're going to move out if this group home gets in here," said another Fingerboard Rd. resident. "If my tenants move, I'll lose the income. I'll be forced to move out of my home."

"I feel for the mentally retarded, but I feel more for my neighbors who have worked their whole lives to own a home," added Mary Anderson, of Grasmere, who opposed the Fingerboard Rd. site.

Dongan Hills residents expressed sim-

"I feel for the mentally retarded, but I feel more for my neighbors who have worked their whole lives to own a home."

sanitary threat to clients because it is not linked to a sewer system, they charged. The house, they added is also located on a 40-by-80-foot lot, and would leave no yard space for retarded clients to use.

"There are no sewers, only a septic tank to service the property, and septic tanks can overflow," said Joseph Dennon, a homeowner on Fingerboard Rd.

"Placing group homes in an established, residential neighborhood can only be blockbusting," he said, and his wife, who spoke out later against the

ilar fears about a proposed two-family brick home at 158 Cromwell Ave. The group home proposed for that site would be run by the Association for the Advancement of the Blind and Retarded, a Queens-based organization.

Homeowners said the building contains plumbing and heating violations and lacks yard space. They said the site was too near the Staten Island Rapid Transit tracks and near two schools — PS 11 on Jefferson St. and St. Ann's School. They cited heavy traffic flow along Cromwell Ave., from cars using

Page 1 of 2