

# Willowbrook proposal snarled in red tape

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WASHINGTON — The General Services Administration is proceeding with a proposal to bring the Navy Resale office to the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, but is still months away from a final decision on the matter.

When asked to rate the move's prospects, agency officials still send out uncertain signals. "I'm neither pessimistic nor optimistic," Charles Laduc said yesterday.

Laduc, the director of the Space Management Division in GSA's New York

City office, said the proposal has progressed to the point where the agency and the Navy have completed an inspection of the state-owned center and are preparing to sign an agreement that would note just what facilities the resale operation would occupy at the sprawling institution.

But before the GSA can formally approve the site, Laduc explained, the agency must conduct a market survey "to let the private sector know what we are looking for and allow them to make their offers." The procedure, which involves publishing advertisements in

local newspapers, normally takes several months, he explained.

Laduc estimated that the GSA will not be able to make a final recommendation on the Willowbrook proposal until late May or early June. Moreover, he said, the GSA decision will have to hinge on how the state's lease offer stacks up against those submitted by private bidders.

The state is under a federal court order to cut the Staten Island institution for the mentally retarded to a 250-bed

facility by 1981. To comply with the mandate, Gov. Carey has proposed to slash the center's budget from \$44 million to \$29 million and to reduce its work force from 2,800 to 1,200 in fiscal year 1981. The institution currently has about 1,600 residents.

Navy officials want to move the resale office, now located in condemned quarters in downtown Brooklyn, to the center's main hospital structure and administration building, both of which the state is scheduled to abandon in the phase-out plan. The office, which manages the Navy's giant post exchange system, supports about 800 federal jobs and is considered a plum.

The chief obstacle to the Navy takeover proposal is the question of who will pick up the tab for rehabilitating the Willowbrook facilities to meet federal building standards. The cost has been estimated at from \$6 million to \$10 million.

State Sen. John J. Marchi says he and state commerce department officials have worked out an arrangement under which the Navy would provide the front money for the remodeling project and then be reimbursed by the state on an amortized basis. Asked yesterday about the plan, Laduc said, "that's the state's problem."

Former Borough President Robert Connor, who has been orchestrating the negotiations for the Pentagon on the matter, said Navy brass still regarded Willowbrook the new site for the resale operation. "That's where we want to go," declared Connor, assistant secretary of the Navy.

The Willowbrook proposal also has the strong backing of Congressman John M. Murphy, who torpedoed the Navy's original plan to move the resale office to the grounds of Fort Wadsworth.