

Attorney general looking into UCP deals in Port Richmond

By BRUCE ALPERT

Staffers for state Attorney General Robert Abrams are probing allegations that United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of New York City officials squandered agency funds on the purchase of four real estate parcels in Port Richmond, the Advance has learned.

The probe, being conducted by members of the attorney general's Charities, Trusts and Estates Bureau, centers on UCP's recent purchase of the former Garber Bros. building at 281 Richmond Ave. and three adjoining frame houses.

The Garber's building and two of the adjoining homes were purchased from Port Richmond resident and real estate speculator Joseph Michelotti, who, according to records filed with the county clerk, sold the parcels for two to six times the price for which he bought them a year earlier.

The state probe reportedly was

touched off by a complaint from a local homeowner who apparently was angered by the agency's expansion of its property holdings and operations in the Port Richmond area.

Timothy Gilles, spokesman for Abrams, confirmed that the Charities, Trusts and Estates Bureau is probing UCP, but declined to provide any details.

Sources, however, have told the Advance that the investigations centers on a state statute that requires officers of not-for-profit corporations to disburse funds judiciously.

Leslie Park, executive director of UCP, said he welcomes the state probe because, he contends, "it will show that we have acted responsibly."

"We are a charitable foundation and we have nothing to hide," Park said. "Our financial records are available to anyone."

Park said the agency turned to the

long-vacant Garber's building after being stymied in its efforts to lease land at Sea View Hospital and Home and the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, for a planned expansion of its rehabilitative services for the mentally ill and physically handicapped on Staten Island. UCP currently operates out of a storefront at 296 Richmond Ave., across the street from the Garber's site.

Under the agency's plans, the Garber building would be used to provide day programs for 200 youngsters, while the three adjoining frame houses -- located at 90 and 96 Albion Pl. and 1061 Post Ave., would be razed for parking and access to the Garber's building by the agency's handicapped clients.

Park said the purchase of the four parcels followed appraisals by real estate experts and with the approval of the state Facilities Development Corp., which serves as the real es-

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state arm for state mental health agencies.

"We met with them (state probers) and they examined the whole situation and told us that they did not even think it warranted an investigation," Park said.

But Gilles said the investigation remains active and no determination has been made on the validity of charges against UCP.

Michelotti was unavailable for comment. But Ronald Burroughs, who sits on the Port Richmond Local Development Corp. with Michelotti, said charges that the real estate speculator made a huge profit from UCP are unfair.

Michelotti's critics, Burroughs said, fail to consider the money he spent on physical renovations of the Garber's site.

Deeds examined by the Advance indicate that Michelotti purchased the Garber store for at least \$76,000 on July 31, 1978. About 13 months later he sold the parcel to UCP for at least \$450,000.

On July 31, 1978, real estate records reveal, Michelotti purchased the homes at 1061 Post Ave. and 90 Albion Pl. for \$34,000. About 13

months later he sold them to UCP for at least \$70,000.

The property at 96 Albion Pl. was sold to UCP on Feb. 8, 1980, by Anna Becker of Port Richmond for \$44,000, according to real estate records.

Park said the agency is awaiting final funding approval from the state before it begins the work necessary to transform the Garber's building into a day center. The state, he said, is expected to fund up to one-third of the cost of the center.