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Group home renovation nearly final

By MICHAEL SENTER

Staff Writer
Renovations at the planned group home for mentally retarded persons at 34 Beechmont Drive are nearly completed.

Westchester Developmental Disabilities Services Office (WDDSO) hopes to move eight to 10 mentally retarded adults into the house by the end of February, according to Anthony Lombardo, WDDSO associate director of site development.

"For all intents and purposes, the renovations are complete," Lombardo said Wednesday.

The house was rundown when it was sold to the state in September 1979 and was vandalized during the year it was vacant. Renovations began last September.

The vacant house became a focus of

Update

controversy in New Rochelle when the state sought three additional community residences in 1980 without occupying the initial house. Community leaders and residents urged the state to occupy 34 Beechmont Drive before selecting other group homes in the city.

The vehement protests from residents and local politicians over the selection of three additional houses prior to the use of 34 Beechmont Drive led the state in July 1980 to postpone its search until the 34 Beechmont Drive house was renovated and occupied.

The state repeatedly broke promises to city officials about the renovation of

the house. In August, state officials pledged the house would be renovated by mid-November.

Larry O'Kane of the New York State Facilities Development Corp. said Wednesday that \$122,025 was spent renovating the house near the corner of Beechmont Drive and North Avenue.

A new kitchen, roof, electrical system, as well as new windows and a smoke and fire alarm system have been installed at the house.

The house, which the state purchased for \$88,945 and was unoccupied for almost one year prior to the purchase, has also been painted and the brick work has been re-finished.

The residents of the house, who still have not been chosen, are expected to attend various skill development programs on weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

On weekends they will begin to become acquainted with their new neighborhoods and attend local activities such as movies, churches and recreational programs.

The group homes or community residences are mandated by the 1975 Willowbrook Consent Decree and are intended to give mentally retarded people an opportunity to live in as unrestricted environments as possible instead of large state institutions.

Charles Awalt, WDDSO site development director, explained last June that a community residence "gives mentally retarded persons the opportunity to begin to develop the skills to begin to enjoy life; to enjoy society and to enjoy friends. It opens the world to them. It opens the potential to develop their lives and become normal human beings."