

The trail is unlike any other on Staten Island. Tall vines climb the trees and hardly a soul ever disturbs the area's vegetation. The path runs past the New Springville Little League fields (near Forst Hill Road) and eventually goes into LaTourette Park.

With a dearth of ballfields on this Island, which was once dotted with baseball diamonds, the large open spaces of the developmental center are daily used by teams with no place else to go. The teams leave their cars in the park and walk a dirt path right onto the developmental center's grounds.

Certainly a park and a university are not the only possibilities.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, whose office is on the developmental center grounds and who has been urging the state to move quickly to plan for its future has received numerous requests for use of the state land.

For example, McKee High School, with an outmoded building and no property has looked into the possibility of relocating to the center's grounds. There is an active vocational training shop there for the center's residents and a relationship between the vocational high school and the state seems made to order.

Various community groups have been asking to use some of the vacated state buildings, but thus far little has been done in that direction. If normalization of the lives of the disabled is a state goal, and it seems a wise

one, it is hard to understand why more integration of the community into the life of the center hasn't taken place. Is less use and eventual dumping of the land a higher state priority?

Planning schemes like I'm proposing here always look dandy in print. But, of course, lots of things could get in the way of the kind of planning that would benefit the people of Staten Island. I see three real roadblocks.

First, the U.S. Navy Resale Office is bound to resurface as a possibility if court actions thwart its attempt to go into Fort Wadsworth. This project would mean jobs but also cars and possibly the loss of much land to the public.

Second, the Willowbrook Parkway is still on the city's maps, planned to cut between Willowbrook Park and the developmental center. Everyone says it will never be built, but it's still on the maps and no real planning can be done until it's taken off.

Finally, there is the never-ending lust of the city for tax-producing property. Money has a high priority with this city administration, which might look favorably on rows of houses instead of rows of ferns. As for the state, owner of the property, well, Gov. Carey's position in favor of the Tavis power plant shows his concern for Staten Island. He is not to be trusted.

The City Planning Commission is right now doing a study of Staten Island's so-called Greenbelt, which ought to include this state property. The study ought to lay out the options for the property and then throw those options out to the public for a decision.

After all, we do own that property, and shouldn't we — not Albany or City Hall — decide what to do with it?

(Robert Miraldi, a Mariners Harbor resident, teaches journalism and communication at St. John's University.)

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