

Editorial page

Our opinion

Plan for state land now

Sometime within the next few years the state will be making a decision of major consequence to Staten Island: It will decide what ought to be done with the more than 380 acres of land presently occupied by the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook.

The land, centrally located on the Island, must be considered a piece of prime real estate by any standard. That explains why so many competing proposals for use of the acreage have been offered.

Some have suggested the state property could serve as a high school or college campus, while others envision a public or private office complex at the site; builders are eager to grab up land for residential development, while others would like the property preserved as public parkland. It's clear that not everyone will be happy with the decision eventually made about the land's disposition.

It is essential, however, that Island residents have a say in deciding how surplus land at the developmental center will be used. Future use or uses of the property will have a profound impact on the community, and for that reason important decisions should not be left up to a handful of state bureaucrats in Albany.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly of West

Brighton suggested over a year ago that Gov. Carey should appoint a special task force, comprised of Island elected officials, community representatives and state planners, to review proposals for the Willowbrook land and to make recommendations on its future use. As Mrs. Connelly noted at the time, a comprehensive study conducted by the task force would help to "avoid a series of hasty ill-advised and fragmented results at a later date."

The assemblywoman's sensible proposal was ignored last year. But it's not too late for her proposal to be revived and implemented as the first step toward responsible planning for the future use of the Willowbrook property.

Mr. Carey and other state officials must recognize that decisions involving the acreage cannot be made in a vacuum. Only with the input of those most familiar with the Island's needs and problems can the state be certain that disposition of the Willowbrook property will be made with the community's interests foremost in mind.

The governor, working in cooperation with Mrs. Connelly and other public officials, should begin at once to form a task force to explore alternatives for the Willowbrook acreage. As the assemblywoman noted, a little bit of planning now can help to avoid a whole lot of problems later on.

Cerebral Palsy report commended

This letter is written in appreciation of one of the reporters on your staff, Anemona Hartocollis. We had first met in February, when she had first started started her investigation of possible mismanagement and probable fraud in regards to the finances of United Cerebral Palsy of New York State, Inc.

It was the first time I had ever become involved in something like this, and in fact the first time I had ever met a reporter in my entire life. As the months passed I developed a high degree of appreciation for Anemona's efforts, and high respect for her abilities as an investigative reporter. She keeps her word on confidentiality of sources, including the way in which she asks questions of those who are being investigated. She was extremely resourceful in developing other sources of which I feel most people would never be aware of (at least I wasn't). She is a pleasant person and respectful to those she has talked to, and she does show concern for their nervousness and anxieties. She also learned more about U.C.P. in four months that I did in four years.

I am also taking the time out to thank you for considering the investigation worthwhile, and for assigning a first class reporter to do the job. I believe the efforts that Anemona and other employees of the Staten Island Advance have made in the past four months have helped to prevent a tragedy from becoming a disaster, both for the residents and employees of United Cerebral Palsy. Please continue the good work.

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