

Board members cool to study on Developmental Center

By THOMAS CHECCHI

The very early stages of a study on the future of more than 300 acres of the Staten Island Developmental Center met with skeptical questioning and criticism last night when the findings were presented to members of Community Board 2.

While it was only a sketchy report on the first phase of a state-commissioned study on possible development of the land, board members berated the report as being too market-oriented by fo-

cus on the potential for residential and commercial development.

The presentation was given in the board's headquarters in Sea View Hospital and Home by consultants hired to analyze property that is to be surplus when the Willowbrook institution reduces its population in coming years.

Jack Deitch, chairman of the board Land Use Committee, said, for example, that the initial report seemed to focus on little more than the land's marketabi-

lity for residential development. "Why not think about future generations?" he asked. "Have you considered just keeping it as a land bank" or as a site for a "cultural center or civic center . . . something that might be necessary in 25 years? Why use up every inch of land? Why not save it?"

While Deitch's suggestion was termed a "legitimate proposal" by Donald Elliott, an attorney for Gruen Associates, the consulting

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Donald Elliott, an attorney for Gruen Associates, talks about the consulting firm's preliminary study of more than 300 acres on the property occupied by the Staten Island Developmental Center. Elliott made his presentation to Community Board 2 in Sea View Hospital and Home.

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firm, he repeatedly told board members that the findings simply represented the results of the "data collection" phase and that the firm is far from recommending what should be done with the land.

His remarks, however, did little to allay fears that the feasibility study would result in marketing the land for development.

One board member, Rea Stein, found it "disturbing" that the initial report "moved right into a market study." "You talk about growth, but what was not included (in the presentation) was an overview of the effects of growth and what might be needed in the future, like a cultural center," she said.

In brief reports, seven consultants discussed the geology and ecology of the site, its vegetation and landscape, the potential for rehabilitating buildings on the land, surrounding traffic and its accessibility, air quality and the marketability of the site.

Although Elliot said the presentation was given to allow board members a chance to comment on the focus and direction of the study, Joseph Pinno-

la, a board member, said it was "unfair" to expect the board to make recommendations "when we have only a verbal report and a limited number of facts. We want a copy and a timetable," Pinnola demanded.

"This is a start," the attorney responded, "these studies have a tendency to get rolling and pick up speed, so we wanted to let you get in it right away. But you will have other opportunities to comment on the study," Elliot added.

"We have come to you at this stage to give you an idea of the data base we will work with," said Richard Thomas, program manager of the state Office of General Services. State officials will continue to keep the board "aware of the progress so we can go down the road jointly," Thomas said.

Commenting on the site's proximity to the Greenbelt, Thomas said state officials were "aware of the sensitivity" of the issue.

While acknowledging that the report was "of an interim nature," Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly was "bothered by the report's presumptuousness."

"Environmentally, the report was fine," Mrs. Connelly said, "but as for the future of (the rest) of the property, the premise of the report was that the land would be marketed. In fact, the report focused so heavily on the marketability of the developed areas, that I fear other alternatives will be ignored."

Pointing out that the College of Staten Island is considering consolidating the St. George and Sunnyside campuses and that there are community groups and government agencies in need of office space, Mrs. Connelly added, "these ideas weren't addressed because they have no market value."

The assemblywoman, who reviewed the study last week, concluded in a written statement, "I'm not convinced that we're not in the middle of a white-wash."

Elliot told the board that a draft of the "data collection" findings would be submitted for it in early March.

In other business, the board:

☐ Voted unanimously to approve a request for a variance for conversion of a barn with a hayloft and attached carport at 325 Ocean Terr., Todt Hill, to a one-family dwelling with a carport.

☐ Voted to deny a request by the owner of an establishment at 2516 Hylan Blvd., New Dorp, for a special permit to operate a video-game amusement arcade.

☐ Voted to conduct a special meeting Monday night in Sea View Hospital and Home following a public hearing on a proposed state-run group home for 10 profoundly retarded young adults to be constructed on a lot at St. George Rd. and Aultman Ave., Richmond. The board will vote on the proposal after the mandated hearing.