

Foes charge group home is on water-logged land

By MICHAEL AZZARA JR.

A potential site for a group home in Great Kills received heated opposition last night from community residents, primarily because of a serious drainage problem they said exists at the site.

The home, which would serve mentally retarded adults, is proposed for a duplex structure at 165 and 167 Dewey Ave. Residents there say the duplex, which was originally designed as two semi-attached two family houses, is now being illegally used as two three-family homes.

Three of the four formal speakers at the public hearing, conducted in Community Board 3's office in the Factory Center,

Princes Bay, opposed the plan, saying that the building was erected nine years ago on a natural water course and has not been able to be sold because of the resulting drainage problem.

"Nobody did their homework on these homes," Edward Edwards said, adding, "The homes are basically poor."

Carol Rothfeld, coordinator of site development on Staten Island for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disability, said she was unaware of a possible drainage problem because it was not mentioned in a feasibility study done on the site.

But whatever Community Board 3 recommends as a result of last night's hearing, her office

will continue to investigate the matter to determine if there is a problem, she said. The board must make its recommendation Tuesday at its regular monthly meeting.

Discussion followed a slide presentation that pictured the operation of other group homes throughout the state. A Princeton University study done in 1978 was cited as concluding that the introduction of a group home to a community does not affect property values.

Then Rosemary Barrett, assistant director of the Association for Children of Retarded Mental Development, the non-profit group planning to operate the

(Continued on Page A 4)

(From Page A 1)

home, explained the group home concept and some operating procedures for the approximately 35 community residents attending.

"It's an ordinary daily routine that's established in every home" to give residents the opportunity to live as normal a life as possible, she said.

Ms. Barrett offered to give Great Kills residents a tour of a group home run by her association on Hylan Blvd. in Grasmere.

"But where is the financing coming from?" asked Charles Brown, the first speaker, who said state budget cuts at institutions such as the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, indicate that the state does not have money to fund group homes.

Ms. Rothfeld said funding for the Great Kills site, provided through state funds and Supplemental Security Income realized by the residents, is guaranteed.

The second speaker, Edward Brienza of 170 Dewey Ave., said that the water problem is so severe that attempts to pump the water out of the houses failed. The builder was unable to sell

the homes and has therefore rented them, Brienza said.

He also said the excess water has created recurring rat infestations. "The bad water problem makes an ideal condition for rats to grow," he said.

Frank Markussen, the third speaker, was the only speaker who favored the proposal, describing himself as "a bleeding heart for the retarded. Retardation, I think, is something we all have to deal with." Too many people, he said, try to ignore the problem.

Edwards was the final speaker.

Joseph DiCapua, chairman of

Community Board 3's health and hospitals committee and chairman of last night's hearing, said that the law requires the board to base its recommendation on only two criteria.

The first is the proximity of another group home. If another home is located within a half-mile of the proposed site, the site could be rejected.

The second criterion is whether the group home would "change the character of the neighborhood."

DiCapua said the law also requires that "if we recommend against this site, it falls upon us to find an alternative site."