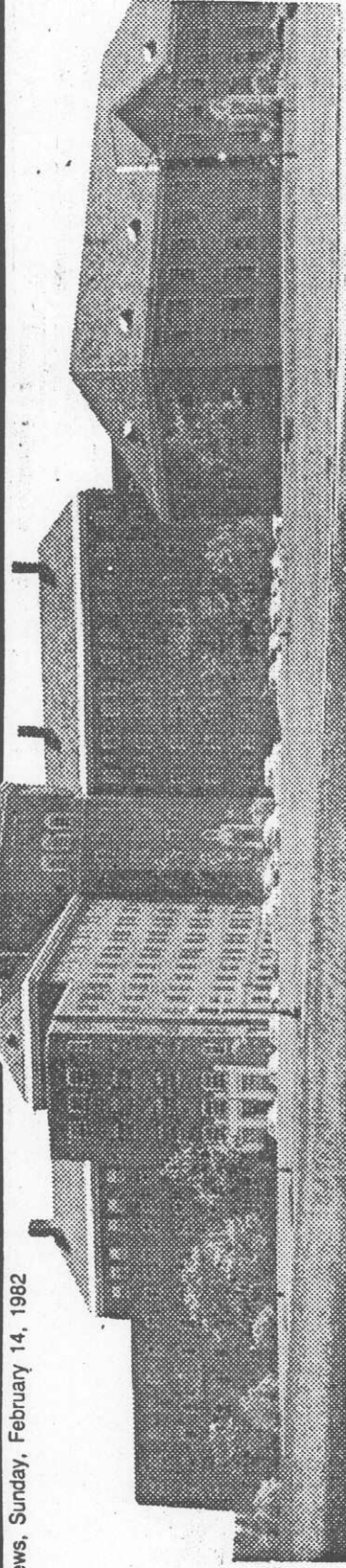


Staten Island

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IN THIS SECTION

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Staten Island Developmental Center is looking good to potential developers now that the institution's population is decreasing.

Concern grows over Willowbrook site

By MARY ENGELS

AS THE population decreases at the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook, a concern about the fate of the state-owned, 382-acre facility is growing.

In addition to the more than 67 buildings that once housed 6,257 mentally retarded clients, there are several acres of vacant land that includes trees, parks and brooks, making the area prime property for development.

While the state insists it has no immediate plans for Willowbrook, it has asked its Office of General Services to see what can be done with the surplus property.

Richard Thomas, program manager for General Services, said, "We are trying to determine the potential alternatives for the development of the site in the best interests for all the people, especially the local community." They have hired a consulting firm, Gruen Associates.

The first phase, the data gathering, has just been completed, Thomas said. It covers such areas as the environment, traffic, buildings, the surrounding area and the economic marketability of the site.

At the same time, the Facilities Development Corp. also is doing a study for the Office of Mental Retardation, which presently owns the property. That study will deal with the consolidation of services there.

Dennis Clark, director of planning for Gruen Associates, said that he recently had shown a draft of the three-month study to Community Board 2. The board, he said, mistakenly assumed that Gruen was advocating development of the site because it showed economic marketability of the site, including its accessibility to highways and streets.

"All we stated was that there is a market for development if they choose to go that route," Clark said. "There is no predisposition or plan."

IN A LETTER to General Services Commissioner John Egan, Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly called for the establishment of a task force to evaluate the Gruen findings and make recommendations.

Connelly said, "We consider the land and the buildings a prime resource. Its future is of great concern to Staten Islanders and I feel the time is right to convene a task force to evaluate Gruen's data and recommendations and make recommendations of its own."

She asked that the task force include representatives of the following groups: the borough president, the Staten Island Planning Office, Boards 1, 2 and 3, the city and State Departments of Parks, the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council, the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, the local Chamber

'We consider the land and the buildings a prime resource'

Elizabeth Connelly

of Commerce, the Office of General Services, Office of Mental Retardation and the Willowbrook Center.

SHE HAS INDICATED in the past that the state should relocate many of the offices now housed at the World Trade Center to Willowbrook.

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