

Group home rejected by Board 3

By MARK LABATON

Community Board 3 members, acknowledging that they were ignoring state guidelines, last night unanimously rejected a proposal for a group home to serve mentally retarded persons in Annadale.

Citing the potential for traffic, parking and septic tank woes, 35 board members voted against the proposal at a meeting in Richmond Memorial Hospital's cafeteria. Two members abstained.

The board now has 15 days to select another site or face a hearing before the state Office of Mental Retardation.

After the hearing, the Office of Mental Retardation can either reject the board's recommendation and use the site anyway, accept the recommendation or require the board to find an alternative site, said Carol Rothfield, the agency's coordinator for site development.

Before the vote, Joseph DiCapua, who heads the board's Health and Hospital committee, explained why his committee opposed use of the site, at 72 Ionia Ave., as a group home.

"This recommendation was not easy to make because we weren't following state requirements," he said. But, he added, "we are adamant that the house is not adequate for a group home."

Under state regulations, a community cannot reject a site for a group home unless several other homes already exist within a half mile of the proposed home or the proposed home is likely to change the character of a neigh-

borhood, DiCapua said. Board officials conceded that the proposed home fit neither description.

DiCapua pointed out that a feasibility study of the property, commissioned by the Office of Mental Retardation, failed to mention that the area does not have sewers.

He also used charts to show how a group home would worsen the area's traffic and parking problems.

"If there was a snowstorm, no fire vehicle would be able to get in there," he said.

Other board members, who said they visited the area surrounding the proposed site, agreed.

Although no one attending the meeting spoke in favor of the proposal, Ms. Rothfield said afterward that she hoped the issue could still be resolved amicably.

"Our goal," she said, "is to integrate our clients as part of the community — not apart from the community."

Last week about 100 neighborhood residents came to a Community Board 3 meeting to voice opposition to the home, which would be operated by Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children.

However, according to Board Chairman Philip S. Iskowitz, board members were not influenced by community pressure.

"I think they (the members of the board) all acted in good conscience," Iskowitz said, adding that the board "will wait to see what the Office of Mental Retardation does and then take the best course of action."

Community Board 3 recently approved use of a site in Great Kills for a group home.

Placement of group homes has become an issue in recent years because social service agencies are turning away from placement of handicapped persons in institutions in favor of group facilities in residential areas.