

No action on group home plan

By LORI WEINRAUB

After a long, heated debate, Community Board 2 voted at its meeting last night to take no action on a proposed group home for the mentally retarded at 795 Rockland Ave. in Sea View because the board could not come up with a majority of votes either for or against the project.

The board's failure to take action means that the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, through the Borough Developmental Services Office, can proceed with plans to begin operating the home for nine moderate and profoundly retarded men and women.

At a public hearing on the issue Monday night, residents of homes surrounding 795 Rockland Ave. expressed their opposition to the project, citing problems with traffic, septic tanks and what they perceived as a saturation of group homes as reasons to move the home to another location.

Members of the board opposing the home offered similar arguments, with several members claiming that the character of the community would be changed and that the isolation of the area would serve to isolate and hide the retarded residents from the rest of Staten Island.

But those who supported the home said that the board had no right to deny these people a home in the community. In addition, according to state law, a community cannot legitimately oppose a

home unless there is a saturation of homes in the area. A saturation is defined as having a home less than half a mile from an already existing home. A community can also voice opposition if the home would substantially alter the character of the neighborhood.

Although the agency can now proceed with its plans, the board still has 15 days to come up with an alternate site if it so desires.

In other action, the board unanimously voted to reject a zoning ordinance change from residential to commercial for a proposed parking lot and office building in Dongan Hills. More than 75 Dongan Hills residents, who denounced the zoning change at a recent public hearing, attended the meeting last night and cheered when the vote was announced.

The change would have provided for a parking lot behind four retail stores on Hylan Blvd., bounded by Jefferson Ave., Boundary Ave. and Stobe Ave., and for construction of a two-story building on a parcel of land across the street bounded by Boundary Ave., Stobe Ave., Hylan Blvd. and Bermuda Place.

The residents said they feared the change was a subterfuge to provide increased parking for a new amusement park in the area. The board rejected the request on the grounds that the retail stores did not need the parking and told the residents to appear at the

city Planning Commission hearing on the change to make their feelings known.

Recommendations from an ad hoc committee on the Greenbelt study were presented to the board by chairman Joseph Manifold. A lack of time prevented any action on the recommendations, which include:

● Formalizing the name "Greenbelt Park of Staten Island" and determining the area's boundaries. Manifold told the board that the number one priority should be recognizing the Greenbelt's boundaries so it can be determined what areas of land should be included in the Greenbelt.

● Demapping and rezoning the right-of-way of Richmond Parkway and the Willowbrook Expressway and zoning for park and R-1 purposes.

● Review and improve the local existing street network, particularly those affected by the demapping of Richmond Parkway and the Willowbrook Expressway. Also, Capodanno Blvd. should be opened and extended to Fielding Ave. as proposed, and Forest Hill Rd. should be widened and paved to mapped width.

● Undeveloped lands should remain forever wild and privately owned lands should either be donated to a public trust or swapped for land outside the Greenbelt.

● An unnamed park in the study should be named "Deere Park."

● Residential use should be restricted to the existing buildings within Sea View for senior citizen housing only.

In other action the board voted to:

● Dismiss members Dorothy Sarantopoulos and Vito Soranno for excessive absences. Member Genevieve Benoit resigned.

● Endorse Amethyst House, a halfway house for women alcoholics.

● Support more than \$42,000 in funding for after-school programs at Egbert Junior High School, Midland Beach, PS 52, Dongan Hills, and PS 41, New Dorp.

● Apply for intervener status in the interrogatory session at the upcoming Con Edison coal conversion hearings.