

Board 3 OKs group home in Tottenville

By MARK LABATON

By a 19-16 vote, members of Community Board 3 recommended use of a Tottenville residence as a group home for 10 retarded persons last night. There were six abstentions.

Funds to purchase the home must be secured from the state, and the structure must be redesigned before it can be occupied by the severely to moderately retarded persons, Carol Rothfeld, coordinator of site development for the Staten Island Borough Developmental Services Office, said after the vote.

"It wouldn't happen before some time next year," Ms. Rothfeld said. "We hope by the middle of 1983."

Nearly 100 residents protested the proposed home at a public hearing two weeks ago, and about 20 residents attended last night's meeting in Richmond Memorial Hospital.

The home, at 7768-7770 Amboy Rd., is the fifth approved in the Board 3 area, covering the South Shore. The Amboy Road home is sponsored by the state Office of Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and will be run by the Staten Island Borough Development Services Office.

In the debate before last night's vote opponents of the proposal argued that Tottenville already had one group home — located on Page Avenue — while some other South Shore communities didn't have any.

Proponents said that two homes would not threaten Tottenville. In addition, they said, retarded persons — particularly those from Staten Island — needed housing on the South Shore.

"I live one-half block from the site, and I believe this is not saturation of the area," Neil Harwayne said before the board vote last night. "These are human beings we are talking about."

"The number of (group home) residences we are going to absorb is open ended," noted Mario Candida. "We have to bite the bullet, and put two houses in Tottenville."

On the other side, Stanley Buraczynski said: "We should go to all and spread it out. My feeling is that the state is not doing its job in finding the sites."

Anthony Borowiec asked Ms. Rothfeld if it was possible for the state to search for a home in each community before putting a second in any community. She said it wasn't because of zoning and sewer regulations, as well as other obstacles.

"I'm not satisfied with the answer," Borowiec responded.

Under state regulations, a community board cannot reject a site for a group home unless the proposed home is within a half mile of another group home or it is likely to change the character of an existing neighborhood.

However, earlier this year, the board thwarted development of a group home on Ionia Avenue, Annadale, on the grounds that using the facility for that purpose would cause flooding and sewer problems.

Because of a split decision, the

health and hospitals committee could not serve as a guide to board members last night as it often does. Prior to the board vote, two members of the committee favored the proposal and two were against it. The remaining two committee members did not express any preference.

Placement of group homes has been an issue in recent years because social service agencies are turning away from placing mentally handicapped persons in institutions in favor of group facilities.

According to Joseph Dicapua, second vice chairman of the board, the state planned in 1978 to place 85 retarded persons in South Shore group homes and now plans to place at least 130 persons.

At present, the Page Avenue home is the only one currently operating in a South Shore community. However, in addition to the home in Tottenville approved last night, sites for homes in

Great Kills, Oakwood and Anna- date have been approved.

In other business:

● Board members voted to support a College of Staten Island selection committee's recommendation that a new college campus be constructed in South Beach.

● Board Chairman Jack Potenza announced the board will send a letter to the Board of Education recommending that PS 63 be named after Leo Whyte, a board member who died recently. Potenza also urged South Shore residents to write to the Board of Education.

● Potenza said an insurance company basement in Great Kills may serve as the board office when the board's leaves its Princess Bay headquarters in mid-October. So far, he said, the board has not signed an agreement for a new office. Potenza criticized City General Service employees for suggesting that the board rent a private residence, which is illegal.