

New tone at group home hearing

By MARK LABATON

Courtesy and civility were the hallmarks of a Community Board 3 hearing last night on a proposed Huguenot group home for retarded adults.

In the past, group home hearings often have been fraught with accusations and anger.

Frank Beraud, the board's district manager, described last night's hearing as "completely different" from past meetings on group homes. "We hope this is the way from now on," he added.

About 40 persons packed Community Board 3's Great Kills office, and several contended that the proposed group home on 1018 Huguenot Ave. would be a mistake. The home is now privately owned.

If the plan is approved by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the home would be used to house eight moderately to severely retarded persons.

The state agency hopes to

lease the property for five years, with an option to renew the lease for an additional five years, said Carol Rothfeld, who found the site for the Staten Island Borough Developmental Services Office.

She said that the site has been inspected by architects and engineers for the Facilities Development Corp., who have listed a series of improvements that will have to be made before it can be used for a group home. Area residents say the home is run down and needs major repair work.

Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children Inc., which runs a group home for six persons on Page Avenue, Tottenville, has applied to operate the proposed home.

The proposed home would be used for four persons from Staten Island and four from the Staten Island Developmental Center, whose client population is being reduced as a result of a court order.

The residents would be at least 30 years old, said Joan Hodum,

the director of Staten Island Aid to Retarded Children.

Two to three supervisors would be at the facility at all times, and residents would attend day treatment or vocational training centers six hours a day during the week, she said. In addition, a psychologist, a social worker, a pathologist, a nurse, and a recreational therapist would work with the home's clients on a part-time basis.

Area residents objected to the proposed home on several grounds.

Some complained about possible traffic sewage and flooding problems.

Citing the flooding problems, Ralph T. Orrico, who lives at 1006 Huguenot Ave., near the proposed group home, said: "I'm not against retarded people being my neighbors ... but I don't think this house is capable of handling the number of people that they want to come."

Others said they would feel

threatened if retarded persons lived in their neighborhood.

"When my child is going to school or when I'm going to the store, I don't want to be confronted with someone who is profoundly retarded," Marianne Conkling said. "It makes me nervous."

Ms. Hodum said none of the people placed in the home would offend the community.

The Office of Mental Retardation has authority to decide whether the site is used for a group home. Under that department's rules, a community board can reject a proposed group home that is within one-half mile of an existing group home.

It can also find an alternative to a site that has been proposed.