

Rifka

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moved to the former Beth Rifka Nursing Home in Concord, which has 240 beds, while the renovations at Warner were completed, she said.

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities is presently trying to obtain the vacant nursing home, which has been the subject of controversy for the past nine years. Built by Medicaid felon Bernard Bergman, the nursing home was closed in February after the state Health Department found widespread patient abuse.

Dr. Curry estimated it would take about two years to complete renovations at Warner. After that, patients could be moved back to Warner and Beth Rifka could house the scaled-down operation of the Staten Island Developmental Center, fulfilling the final stage of the Willowbrook Consent Decree of 1975.

That decree ordered clients from the Staten Island Developmental Center, which once housed more than 6,000 patients, to be placed into community residences and for the institution to have a final population of 250. The original deadline for that order was 1982, although that has been expanded to 1985. SIDC currently houses 710 clients.

It has been assumed by many that a small portion of the SIDC grounds would be set aside for the 250-bed institution, which would serve mainly Staten Island residents.

But Dr. Curry said yesterday that Beth Rifka might be a better possibility for the Staten Island institution since it is available now, providing more stability for long-term planning. "You've got it now," she said. "You can grab and keep it."

Members of the council, which is a consortium of nonprofit agencies and interested citizens, seemed somewhat disturbed by the proposal. Several noted that Beth Rifka had been offered once before, nine years ago, as a home for the retarded, and the plan was rejected after heated opposition from the public. Dr. Curry admitted she was not aware of the 1974 proposal.

"What makes you think what was inappropriate nine years ago would be appropriate now?" said Polly Panzella, a Staten Island parent. "I call it dumping people from one institution to another."

Dr. Curry argued that it was the management of the home that was unsuitable, not the facility itself. In fact, she added, the building is in much better shape than the Karl Warner Center.

She added that nothing definite

has been settled, and the matter is dependent on the outcome of negotiations with UCP.

"I'm just offering options," she said. "I didn't say you have to take it."

But council members still argued that the state seemed to be moving ahead with plans without consulting them.

After the meeting, council chairwoman Genevieve Benoit said she thought it would be counter-productive for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to obtain Beth Rifka, and then force the community to accept a plan.

"I find it very upsetting that a government body that should be responsive to the people it is serving is making plans without notifying the community most concerned," said Ms. Benoit.

To explore the situation more, the council formed an ad-hoc committee yesterday and asked them to form a recommendation about Beth Rifka and its suitability for use as a mini-institution.

In addition to her proposals about Beth Rifka and the Karl Warner center, Dr. Curry said the state would try to find other nonprofit agencies to take over UCP's other programs, including

the 50 apartments which house some of UCP's 700 retarded clients.

She said the contracting of other agencies would have to be done very carefully, to insure that the current problems with UCP are not repeated in the future.

Beatrice Victor, executive director of the Richmond Terrace office of Volunteers of America, asked what would happen if no agencies offered to pick up the UCP programs.

"Don't even ask me that," said Dr. Curry. "There are enough well-meaning, well-qualified agencies that I feel could do the job."

She also said that she hoped people currently employed with UCP could keep their jobs, if the facilities in which they worked came under state control. "I'm not looking at the people now at Karl Warner to be unemployed," she said.

After the meeting, Dr. Curry would not answer questions about her proposals.

"I have no comment," she said. "We're still in negotiations."

When negotiations are completed, she said, her office would issue a statement.