

Group home for retarded is protested

By JIM BUELL
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More than 100 Willowbrook residents turned out last night to rally against a planned group home for the mentally retarded in their community.

The home, which would be located in an existing residence near the corner of Willowbrook Road and Sunset Avenue, would house 10 moderately to severely retarded youths or young adults.

An undetermined number of them would be transferred from the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC), which Gov. Mario M. Cuomo has pledged to close by 1987. But details are not yet specific, because the agency that hopes to open the group home has not yet presented its proposals.

"As far as I'm concerned, over my dead body," Philip Altmark, a schoolteacher whose home is next to the proposed facility, told the audience during last night's meeting in PS 54. He and others opposing the group home say they first learned last summer that the house's present owner had begun negotiating with an agency that runs a number of group homes for the retarded throughout New York City. They expressed frustration that specifics of the plan are not yet available.

"This is in the midst of a residential area, across the street from a school," Altmark said. "It's possible it may be fine, but nobody has asked us about it, or told us anything about it, in the time since last summer. Because of that, my answer will have to be 'no.'"

Representatives of Bais Ezra, the Brooklyn-based agency preparing to buy the home, declined to attend last night's meeting.

In a conversation with the Advance earlier in the day, the agency's executive director, Lester Kaufman, said details will come

out after the agency makes a formal request for a zoning variance permitting the group home. Once that occurs, Community Board 2's Land Use Committee must hold public hearings on the issue before the board makes its recommendation to the city.

"We felt this meeting was premature," he said.

Harold Zavin, chairman of Community Board 2's Area III Committee, has included a discussion of the group home plans in the agenda for a committee meeting next

Thursday at 8 p.m. in the board office at Sea View Hospital and Home. Contacted at his home after last night's meeting, he agreed the rally may have been held too soon.

Organizers of last night's meeting announced that next week's session had been called by the board's Land Use Committee, which is not true. Land-use procedures have not begun, Zavin emphasized. He said that he plans only to report back the residents' concerns to the full community board at its March meeting.