

Building plans at SIDC worry naturalists

By **JULIE MACK**
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The Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, a local environmental group, is protesting potential building at the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) on a tract city planners have tagged as a natural preserve.

After seeing survey equipment on the site Friday, members of the environmental group launched a flurry of telephone calls and Mailgrams to state and local officials to "help in this emergency situation."

But the proposal is so preliminary that Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly said protest is premature. She said that the development may not even affect the wooded area in dispute.

The 40-acre tract, called Corson's Brook, is bounded by the Institute for Basic Research on the north, Forest Hill Road on the east and the former administration residences for SIDC on the south.

The City Planning Commission, in a February 1983 report, recommended the site for inclusion in the Greenbelt. Thomas Paulo, senior planner for the commission and project director of the Greenbelt study, said Corson's Brook is the main site on the property the commission wants protected from develop-

ment.

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) announced plans for development two months ago as part of the program to reduce the patient population at SIDC. The plans call for two 12-bed facilities to be constructed in 1985 and 1986, according to James Walsh, SIDC director. Two other facilities, each with 24 beds, may be built in 1986 and 1987.

While the original concept called for the facilities to be built next to the Institute for Basic Research, Walsh acknowledged the development may include part of the wooded area.

But he noted that plans for construction are not complete, and that OMRDD has only begun its study of the project. "We're not moving in bulldozers tomorrow," he said, adding that it is too early to say what part — if any — of the tract would be targeted for development.

Walsh said the site was selected because it is the only area of the SIDC campus which adjoins a residential neighborhood. "If we build community residences, we want them to be in a community," he said.

But Paulo and members of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods question whether Corson's Brook

is the only appropriate site for the group homes.

Ellen Pratt, a spokeswoman for the group, said, "I'm not arguing whether they should build group homes or not build group homes, but I am saying that they should not build there. We're asking state legislators to stop funding for this project until a more appropriate location for the homes can be found."

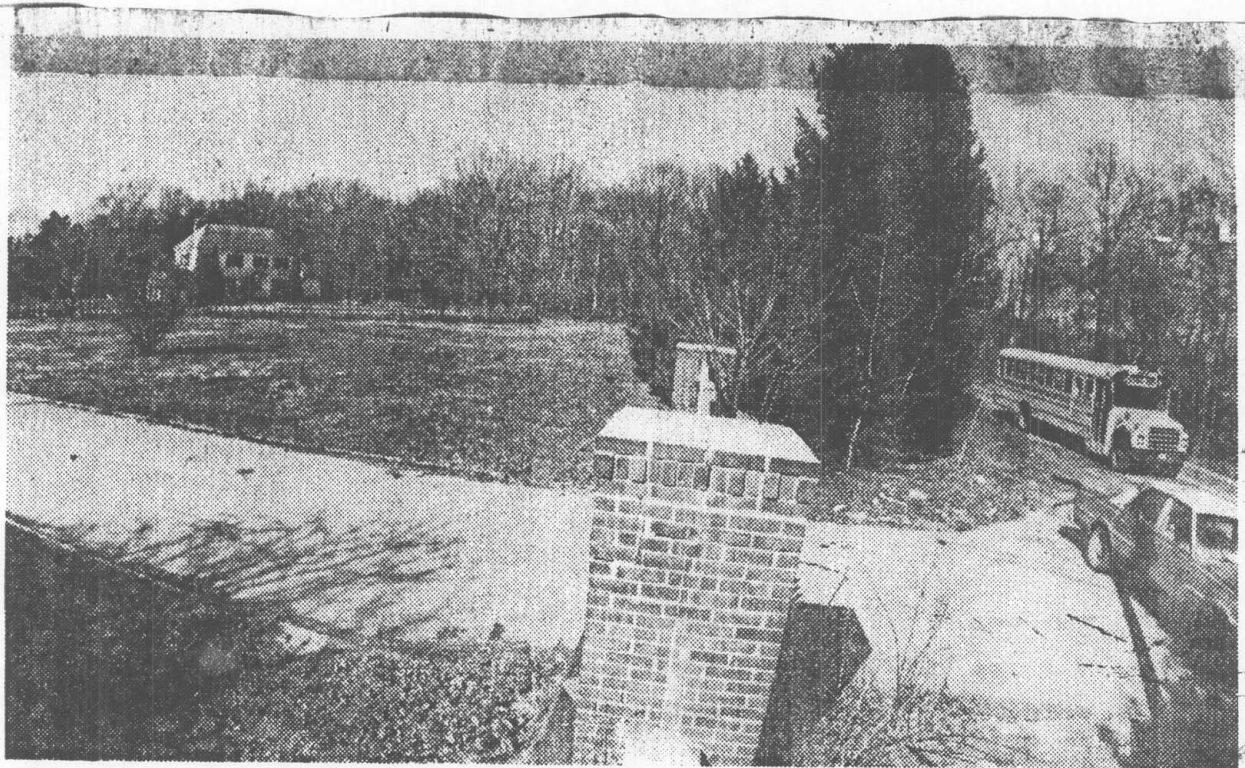
She stressed that Corson's Brook is a mature wooded area with 650 trees, which could be jeopardized by development.

A spokesman for state Sen. John J. Marchi said the senator recognized the concern of environmentalists and has told officials at OMRDD that he would not approve funding for development "until we get more details and until the community has a chance to respond."

Mrs. Connelly said the protest is premature. "Nothing is settled yet," she said. "The site selection has not even been done."

She said that state officials are aware of her's and Marchi's concerns, and added that after OMRDD completes its feasibility study on the group homes, the community will have its "opportunity to talk."

Walsh said that the community opposition has a touch of irony.



One cottage sits on the site at the Staten Island Developmental Center where administrators are considering building more to be used as group homes. The site is bordered by Forest Hill Road.

S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante

"If we could put those two 12-bed facilities elsewhere in the community, I would be willing," he said, adding that one reason OMRDD was building homes on state land was because of opposition to community sites.

Walsh pointed out that Mrs. Pratt led opposition to the place-

ment of a group home for autistic children in Eltingville last September. "These people can't have it two ways," he said. "They can't fight group homes in the community and then fight when we try to put them on state property."

Mrs. Pratt said she thought

the comment was "really unfair," and that she was arguing in this instance against developing the Greenbelt, not against the group homes.

"It's absolutely ludicrous that a stance I took ... should boomerang on me," she said.