

Fate of 300 acres, buildings at stake

By JULIE MACK
Advance Staff Writer

Members of a task force looking at possible uses for the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) campus have been told to "let their imaginations run wild."

During the committee's first



John C. Egan.

meeting yesterday at the Willowbrook center, the commissioner of the state Office of General Services said he "wants community input from day one" and wants every idea to receive full consideration.

"We hope your imaginations run wild, no matter how impossible your dreams may seem," Commissioner John C. Egan said. "I hope this group can talk candidly. We think bouncing ideas off each other is the best way to do this thing."

The task force — created by Egan's agency, which is responsible for disposition of surplus state property — consists of Henrik Dullea, director of state operations; Borough President Anthony Gaeta; Philip Scampas, land use committee chairman for Community Board 2; Marilyn Mammano, Island director of the City Planning Department; Frank Scarangelo, chairman of the Island Chamber of Commerce; Michael Finnerty, state budget director.

Also, Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and

No limit on SIDC proposals

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Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD): John Oppenheimer, chairman of the environmental science program at the College of Staten Island; Assembly members Elizabeth A. Connelly, Eric N. Vitaliano and Robert A. Straniere, and Genevieve Benoit, chairwoman of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Council.

Egan said he wants the group to have a preliminary report ready by September, with a final report ready by December.

The report will deal with the fate of almost 300 acres of land and more than 40 buildings currently controlled by OMRDD.

Built in the late 1930s, SIDC once housed more than 6,000 patients. There are now about 850 mentally retarded clients living on campus, but all of them are scheduled to be placed in community residences within the next three years as part of a program to close large institutions.

By the end of 1987, OMRDD hopes to close down SIDC, retaining only a 90-acre tract in the southeastern section of the campus. The tract currently houses the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation and seven frame buildings, former staff housing, which now serve as group homes and program facilities.

OMRDD hopes to build another four group homes for 72 patients on the tract.

The plan for new construction has come under attack because it involves Corson's Brook Woods, an area earmarked for inclusion in the Greenbelt and

tagged by environmentalists as a natural preserve.

However, Egan said the group home issue will not be addressed by the task force because it does not involve land that OMRDD is giving up.

Webb said opponents to the plan will be able to comment when OMRDD makes a presentation to Community Board 2.

The task force is being asked to make recommendations on usage of the land and the timing of any development, according to Egan. He said that part of the campus is now vacant and another 125 acres will be empty by April 1, 1986. Thus, he said, it could be developed before 1987.

Because of the property's current use, Egan said he agreed that the handicapped should be given special consideration when drafting proposals for it. "The handicapped are part of the community," he said. "If we are building a new community, then we should include them in that community."

Egan did not commit himself to any particular proposal and repeatedly emphasized his desire for community participation.

"My orders from the governor's office are loud and clear that we do this in a particular way," he said. "We listen, not only to business, but to what people are saying."

Egan said he hopes to present the task force with a list of proposals at the next meeting, June 7.

He said he welcomed any ideas from the public. Proposals are being collected by Joseph Stellato, Office of General Services, 26th floor, Corning Tower Building, Rockefeller Plaza, Albany 12242.

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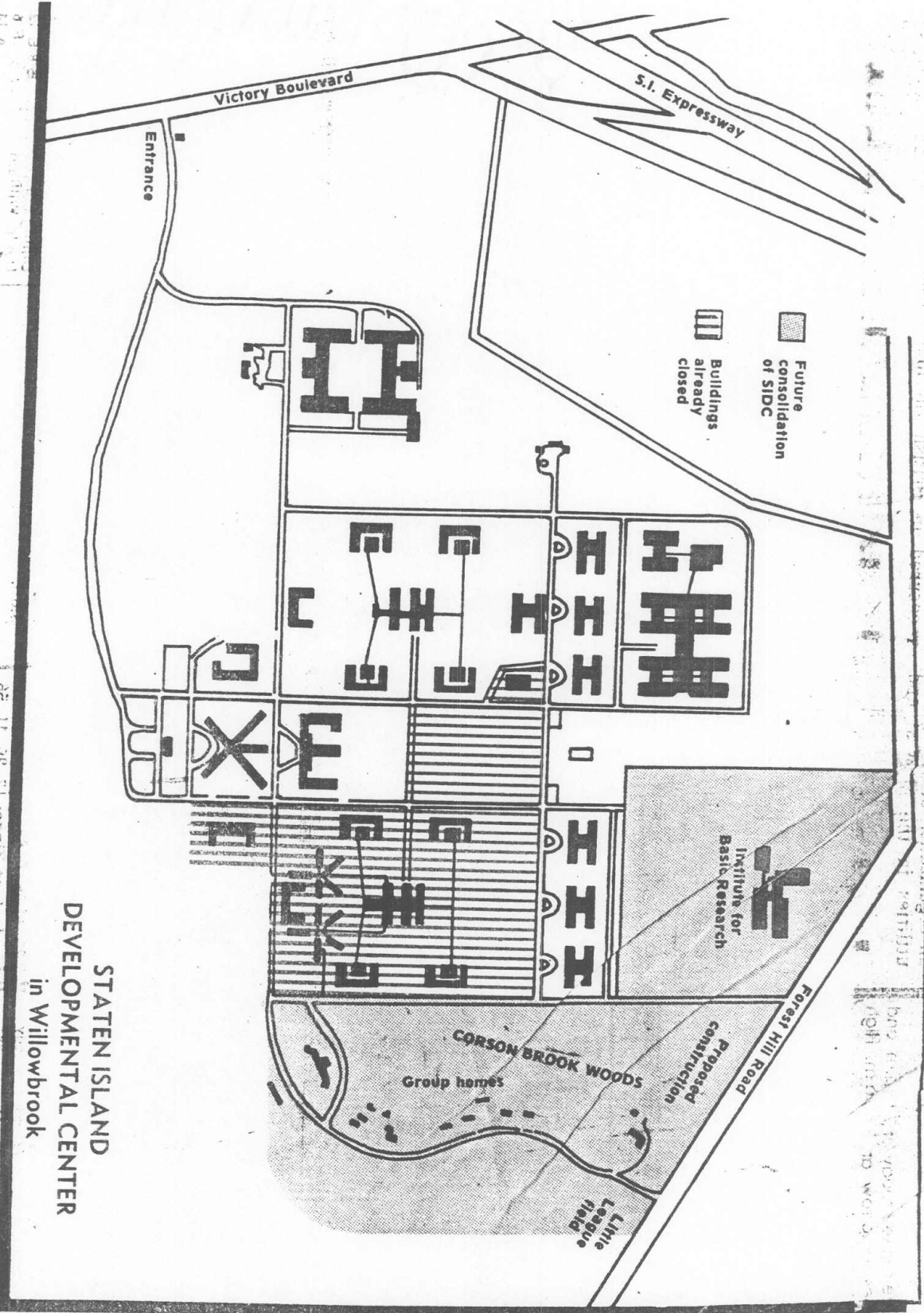
Office of General Services Commissioner John C. Egan tells members of the Willowbrook task force what their duties will be. Assemblyman Robert A. Straniere sits in the third row at right.

SI Advance Photos by Irving Silverstein



From left, Asssmblywoman Elizabeth Connelly; Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano; Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities; John Oppenheimer chairman of the environmental science department of the College of Staten Island, and Henrik Dullea director of state operations, listen to plans for the newly formed task force at the SIDC.

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