

Panel hears proposals for SIDC property

By JULIE MACK
Advance Staff Writer

Nine proposals on future use of the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) property were discussed yesterday by the SIDC Advisory Council, but details were sketchy and the council chairman stressed that the group is still at a "very preliminary" stage.

"We know there are a lot of things wrong with the ideas we're coming up with here, but there are also a lot of things right," said Commissioner John Egan of the state General Services Office. "Right now, we want to concentrate on the positive. Our object is to get as much on the table as possible."

But Egan said the idea of transferring part or all of the property to another state agency has been discarded. "Any agency that has expressed an interest in the land has not been accepted," Egan said. He was ambiguous on whether that ruled out relocating state agencies from the World Trade Center to buildings at SIDC.

The property is currently un-

der control of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), which operates the SIDC. The developmental center is scheduled to be closed by the end of 1987, vacating about 300 acres and more than 40 buildings.

The advisory council, which is comprised of four state officials and nine local representatives, was formed to make recommendations on the disposition of the vacated property. A draft report is expected by September and a final report by December.

Yesterday was the council's second meeting, and the purpose was to begin listing proposals. Some of the nine ideas presented received only cursory mention.

One of the more specific proposals came from Young Israel of Staten Island, which is asking for 16 acres of the property to build 102 units of senior citizen housing, a group home for the mentally retarded and a neighborhood park. The development could also include a shelter for the homeless, Rabbi Jay Marcus said.

The congregation is made up

of about 600 families in the area adjoining the eastern border of SIDC. The property sought by the congregation is located across the street from the temple on Forest Hill Road, north of the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation.

That same site, as well as Corson's Brook Woods, has been earmarked by the City Planning Department and Parks Department as a natural preserve for inclusion in the Greenbelt.

In addition, the agencies said they wanted about 95 acres of the property along the western border of the campus to expand Willowbrook Park. Some of the area already contains ballfields and is used frequently by the community.

Marilyn Mammano, director of the Staten Island office of City Planning, said she realized that some of the land included in the proposal — specifically Corson's Brook Woods — is not part of the property being vacated. That land is being retained by OMRDD, which hopes to build group homes on part of the property.

"I disagree with the idea of excluding that area of land from our discussion, although I see where you are coming from," she said to the state officials. "But I think we need to look at the property in totality and figure out what's good for development and what should be preserved."

City officials did not present the only proposals involving recreation.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly asked the council to consider the interest of the regional Little League association, currently headquartered upstate in Newburgh, which is looking for a complex closer to the metropolitan area.

In addition, Mrs. Connelly said she wanted some of the SIDC property as a recreational site for the handicapped. Such a site would include an enclosed Olympic-size swimming pool, a gymnasium and a running track, she said.

Mrs. Connelly said she also wants additional acreage set aside as a "land bank" for future use for the handicapped.

Assemblyman Eric N. Vitaliano distributed copies of a proposal by Imagine-A Better Way, a non-profit organization seeking four acres of land for a school for developmentally disabled adults.

James Cooney of the Civil Servants Employees Association, which represents many SIDC employees, endorsed the idea of keeping facilities for the handicapped on the SIDC campus, although he said those facilities should be operated by the state rather than by non-profit agencies.

Cooney, who acknowledged his primary motivation is to save jobs for state employees, said his organization would like to see the Carl Warner complex — the newest group of buildings at SIDC — turned into a medical center for the handicapped, in addition to the establishment of 30 to 35 group homes on the campus.

Another suggestion is to renovate the SIDC buildings to accommodate a consolidated campus of the College of Staten Island. Dr. John Oppenheimer,

chairman of the CSI environmental science program and a member of the advisory council, said the college's administrators are seriously considering the Willowbrook site.

But Mrs. Connelly said she understood CSI officials are committed to another site, in Ocean Breeze. Philip Scampas of Community Board 2, who said his board had already endorsed the Ocean Breeze property, said he thought the board would oppose CSI's relocation to Willowbrook.

Of the other proposals introduced at the meeting, Assemblyman Robert A. Straniere suggested that buildings be set aside for community theater groups, and the Jewish Foundation asked to rent Building 19 as a school for 500 students during the next two years while its new school is under construction.

In addition, the CSEA representative suggested that the state could save "thousands of dollars" by using part of the SIDC property to store and repair the state's fleet of vehicles in the metropolitan area.

Page 2 of 2 Pages