

group home plan near SIDC up in air

By JULIE MACK
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No minds appeared changed after an occasionally heated dialogue among state, city and Staten Island officials who met yesterday on the question of building group homes in Corson's Brook Woods.

"I am more convinced than ever" that building on the 40-acre wooded tract is a mistake, city Parks and Recreation Commissioner Henry Stern said after touring the site.

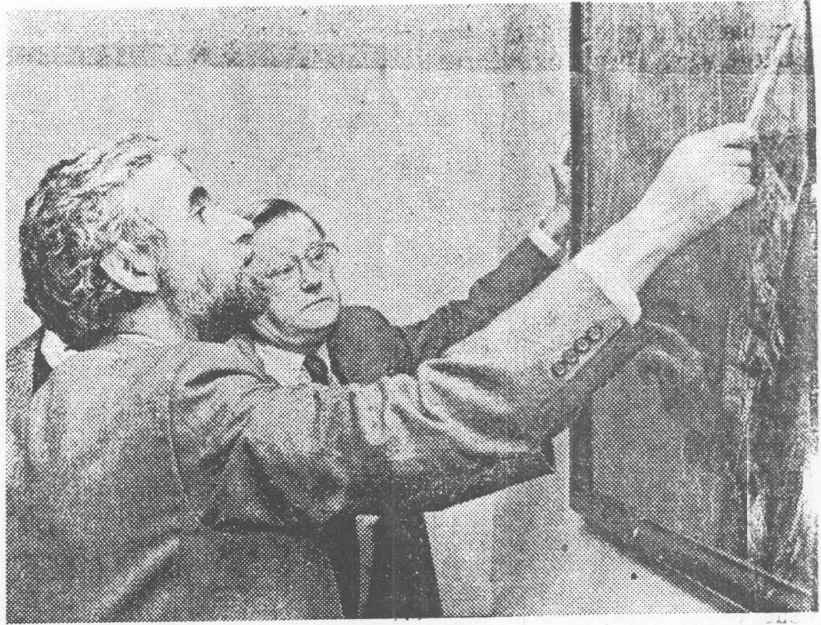
Meanwhile, James Walsh, director of Staten Island Development Center (SIDC), said he heard nothing to change his judgment that Corson's Woods is the best place to build the four group homes, which will serve a total of 72 mentally retarded, physically handicapped adults.

Corson's Woods is considered one of the Island's best undeveloped woodlands, and the area has been tagged by the City Planning Department for inclusion in the Greenbelt. The Parks Department and local environmentalists want the area left alone and maintained as a natural preserve.

But the woods, bordered by Forest Hill Road on the east and the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation on the north, are controlled by the state as part of SIDC.

The debate over the land was to continue this morning in state Supreme Court, which issued a temporary injunction Nov. 11 to stop SIDC from clearing the woods. The court action was initiated by the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, an Island environment group; the Protectors were joined in court last Thursday by the Parks Department, represented by the city corporation counsel.

At that time, the city asked Justice Norman Felig to continue the temporary injunction



Henry Stern points to a map while talking with Edmund Murphy, chairman of Community Board 2.

S.I. Advance Photos by Frank J. Johns

until today so the corporation counsel and parks department could review its legal options. Late yesterday, Stern told the Advance the city would ask the judge today to extend the injunction once more and force the SIDC to consider alternatives to building in Corson's Woods.

Stern and Walsh dominated yesterday's meeting, with Stern pressing for relocating the construction site while Walsh denied that any other feasible site exists.

Walsh said he selected Corson's Woods for the homes because a residential community is located directly across Forest Hill Road. "If we build elsewhere (on the SIDC property), the group homes will not be considered community residences," he said, noting that SIDC is un-

der federal court mandate to place clients in community homes as quickly as possible.

Because of earlier objections by the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, Walsh said he looked at two other sites for the homes — the area north of the Institute for Basic Research on Forest Hills Road (termed Site 2), and a strip of land located between Little League fields and a private drive from Forest Hill Road into the SIDC campus (Site 3).

But in a letter dated Aug. 16, the state Facilities Development Corp. said the alternate sites were unsuitable: Site 2 was rejected because of muck and underground springs, and Site 3 was deemed too narrow and is without sewer services.

"Only the Pilcher Street site