

## group home plan near SIDC up in air

By JULIE MACK  
Advance Staff Writer

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.

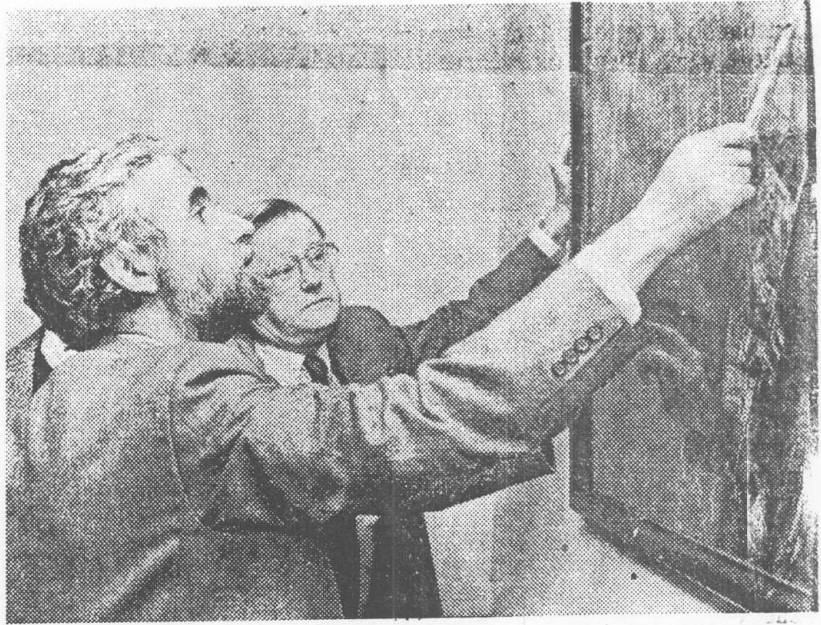
Meanwhile, James Walsh, director of Staten Island Development Center (SIDC), said he heard nothing to change his judgment that Corson's Woods is the best place to build the four group homes, which will serve a total of 72 mentally retarded, physically handicapped adults.

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.

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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.

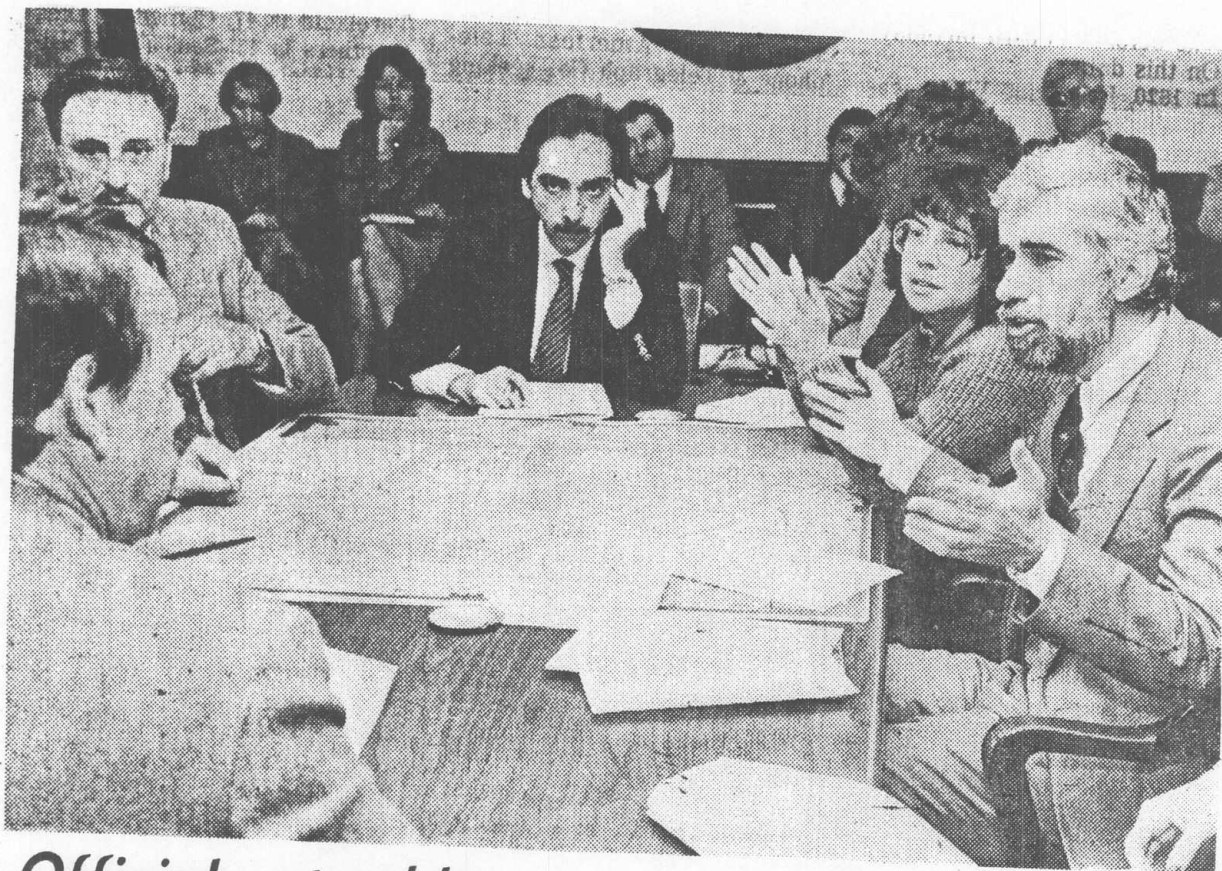
Walsh said he selected Corson's Woods for the homes because a residential community is located directly across Forest Hill Road. "If we build elsewhere (on the SIDC property), the group homes will not be considered community residences," he said, noting that SIDC is un-

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



## **Officials at odds**

**Parks Commissioner Henry Stern, right, gestures as he poses questions to James Walsh, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, with his back to the camera on the left. Stern and Walsh discuss a proposal to build group homes in a wooded area off Forest Hill Road. For details on how they disagreed and more pictures, see Page A 5.**

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(Corson's Woods), understandably with some disturbance to nature, seems to provide the desired cluster arrangement (of homes), screening and shading," the document concluded.

Stern asked at the beginning of the meeting to see a copy of the Facilities Development Corp.'s conclusions, and was rebuffed by a lawyer from the state attorney general's office who said he did not want to release the letter at "such a public meeting." Stern was told he could have a copy of the letter after the meeting.

"But the whole purpose of this meeting to is discuss whether alternate sites are available and we can't do that without see the documents," Stern said. "If that's your feeling, why not adjourn the meeting right now?"

When Stern made motions to leave, Walsh stopped the meeting to get copies of the report.

Stern also battled Walsh over the definition of community placement, and questioned why homes at Corson's Woods would be considered community residences while houses built several hundred feet away on Site 3 would not. Walsh said homes on Site 3 would face the private drive instead of Forest Hill Road; according to SIDC's agreement with the federal court, community residences for the retarded must face other homes in the community.

But Stern argued that the Corson's Woods site is still isolated.

"This site (in Corson's Woods) is located 300 feet across a heavily traveled road from other homes," Stern said. "I know what community placement is, and this doesn't seem to be it.



Discussing the proposal are Stern, left, and SIDC Director James Walsh.

"Do you believe that people from these homes (across Forest Hill Road) are going to interact with people from the group homes?"

Marilyn Mammano, Island planning director, said she was unimpressed by the two-page document from the Facilities Development Corp. in which the agency's staff listed their reasons for rejecting the other sites.

"They base their assumptions on factors that can be moved around," she said. "Given enough time to do some basic site planning, I can't see why we couldn't do something with one of these two other sites.

"There's no question that all of

us here want you to fulfill your court mandate," Ms. Mammano told Walsh. "But to base your decision on where to build the homes on this document seems a little shaky, if you ask me."

Walsh said even if proposal could be developed for the other sites, "I would strongly oppose moving the homes. Based on my experience, I really believe this (Corson's Woods) is the best place to serve our clients."

But Stern concluded that by building the homes there, "there's no question that the woodlands, for all practical purposes, will be destroyed.

"We are not persuaded that this is only alternative."