

# Home-building proposal could result in court battle

By MARY ENGELS

Talks were held yesterday in an effort to ward off a court battle between city and state officials over the state's right to build group homes for patients at the Staten Island Developmental Center.

The area in question was proposed for environmental protection as part of the Greenbelt.

The meeting, held in the office of James Walsh, the executive director of the center, resulted in an impasse that will require all parties to return to Supreme Court today to present their case.

Walsh said the site, off Forest Hill Road, was chosen "because it was the only area of the huge complex which adjoined a residential neighborhood."

"WE HAD looked at alternative sites," he said, "and, on the basis of findings by the Facilities Development Corp. (a state agency), found them to be not feasible for our purposes."

Parks Commissioner Henry Stern questioned why another site—a portion of Forest Hill Road south of Field St.—could not be used.

Walsh replied, "Because it had a variety of things wrong

with it, including lack of sewers, lack of proper recreational space, and too narrow a road to work around."

The issue erupted over a suit brought against the center by a local environmental group, the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, that obtained a show-cause order last week to stop site-clearance on a part of Corson's Brook Woods on the Developmental Center property. Dick Buegler, the Protectors' president, said the land had been designated in the Planning Department's Greenbelt report for inclusion in the protected area.

THE COURT action was triggered by the reported discovery by the Protectors that "Numerous trees, some as large as two feet in diameter, had been cut and removed from the site as well as several shrubs that had been cleared away in the area."

Walsh said yesterday the proposal for the homes had first been announced last November. "Since that time," he said, "we went to the various agencies involved—Community Planning Board, Land Use Committee—and told them what we were planning. We strongly oppose changing our stand now and will support the development of that area for what we consider to be the best programmatic goals for our clients."

Stern was still not satisfied. "I believe that the action taken, along with the proposed destruction of more than 90 trees in that area, will certainly destroy the woods for all practical purposes," he said. "We will continue to press for an alternative site."

The court case will resume at 9:30 a.m. today before Supreme Court Judge Royal Radin.