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Staten Island

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City drops out of 'woods' suit

By MARY ENGELS

The Parks Department and city Planning officials decided yesterday to withdraw their motion to join the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods in a Supreme Court action against the Staten Island Developmental Center.

Henry Stern, New York City Parks Commissioner, said: "The city felt it shouldn't sue the state over the matter but instead sit down and talk it over in an attempt to reach agreement."

The issue revolves around the state's decision to build a cluster of group (patient) homes on Staten Island Developmental Center property

in the middle of Corson's Brook Woods.

Last week, the Protectors, a local environmental group, obtained a show-cause order to stop site clearance in a part of the rustic area after they discovered that about 40 trees had been destroyed.

The property in question had been designated in the Planning Department's Greenbelt Report, issued earlier this year, for inclusion in the protected area.

Stern said, "I think it's a shame to cut down all those trees when you can build the same homes a few hundred feet away."

"It seems incredible to me that here you have a 300-acre facility where there is so

much prairie, and they choose to build these homes right in the middle of the only woodland there is on the property. It defies reason."

Stern also said he and city planners hope to meet with state officials in an attempt to reach a solution "so we can find a way to both build the group homes and save the trees."

James Walsh, director of the Developmental Center, said he was pleased with the city's decision to meet with him "at the bargaining table, not in the courthouse."

However, Walsh maintains that the site chosen for the group homes "is the best

sited for our clients purposes."

He added, "We will be building them with a minimum loss to the trees."

Supreme Court Justice Rose McBride yesterday reversed decision on the court action initiated by the Protectors.

In a related development, Stern said he was happy to see that two Staten Islanders had been chosen for the new posts of Greenbelt administrator and assistant. They are Tom Paulo, who directed the Staten Island Office of City Planning's report on the Greenbelt, and James Rossi, who is in charge of the High Rock Park Conservation Center.