

State may sue on Corson's group home

Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said he will consider bringing suit against environmentalists who are delaying the construction of group homes at the Staten Island Developmental Center if that's what it takes to "protect the rights of the disabled."

Webb, following a meeting with the Advance Editorial Board, discussed the possibility of the state bringing its own suit in the controversy surrounding the building of four homes on part of the state property known as Corson's Brook Woods, a 40-acre tract that environmentalists and city officials have tagged for inclusion in the Greenbelt.

The Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, an Island environmental group, has filed suit seeking a permanent court injunction to prevent the state from building there. The city Parks and Recreation Department has backed the environmentalists in their fight.

Webb termed the controversy a matter of "right versus right."

But he reiterated his commitment toward building the homes, claiming that damage to Corson's Woods would be minimal and that trying to find another location for the homes would disrupt his court-mandated timetable for closing SIDC.

"I'm sort of ticked off at the Johnny-come-latelys" who are now protesting the construction plan, Webb said. "The proposal is not new. We told the community board about it almost three years ago."

After city officials voiced their objections last spring, Webb said, the plan for the group homes was redesigned "to alter the location and so we would cut down 25 percent fewer trees. I would have broken ground in May if I hadn't delayed the project to design new plans."

Webb said his agency would appeal the court's ruling if the environmentalists are successful in their action now pending in Supreme Court in St. George.

He also said he would consider a countersuit charging that the delay caused by the injunction is unreasonable and violating the civil rights of the handicapped.