

## Commissioner sees pooling of resources

# CSI move to SIDC urged

By JULIE MACK  
Advance Staff Writer

The head of state services for the mentally retarded says he hopes the College of Staten Island acquires land soon to be vacated by the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) in Willowbrook.

The move would provide an "absolutely wonderful opportunity" for the college to pool re-

sources with programs serving the handicapped, said Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), which operates the SIDC.

"I have already talked with the chancellor (of the City University of New York) and the president (of CSI) about sharing resources, like the Institute for

move. I'm almost tempted to ask them as one of the conditions to help us run the community-based services."

SIDC is scheduled to close in 1987, and after that, Webb plans to keep only 90 acres of the 382-acre campus — the retained area will include the Institute for Basic Research, four group homes proposed for construction, and existing group homes

housing about 75 clients.

The bulk of the campus — including almost 50 brick buildings which once housed more than 6,000 clients — will be turned over to the state Office of General Services. A state task force is currently considering the future of the property.

CSI has expressed interest in acquiring part of the land to

consolidate its two campuses. Although City University officials are still drafting a formal proposal, Webb said the college wants about half of the approximately 300 acres available. Of the remaining land, Webb said he supports local efforts to establish recreational facilities for the retarded, including an Olympic-size pool and a 60-acre camp. The commissioner added that SIDC's ball fields will probably be maintained for public use, and he hopes other areas will be preserved as natural woodlands.

The woodlands issue is particularly touchy because Webb wants to build the four proposed group homes on a portion of the Corson's Brook Woods area, a 40-acre tract which environmentalists and city officials have tagged for inclusion in the Greenbelt. The Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, a local environmental group, is seeking a permanent court injunction to prevent the state from building there.

Assuming the group homes are built there, Webb said he is willing to turn the remaining 31 acres of Corson's Woods over to the state Department of Environmental Conservation to ensure that the land will not be developed further.

Despite the headaches sur-



Arthur Webb

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rounding Corson's Brook Woods, Webb said his agency is successfully phasing out the SIDC. "We've done incredibly well in the past three, four years," Webb said. "We had 978 patients last year and we now have about 740 clients. We hope to be down at 560 in April '85.

"We have all the money we need to close Willowbrook, probably in 1987, and we have it all outlined where the patients are to go — to group homes here, to group homes there," he said. "I really, honestly think we are in the final stage of fulfilling the consent decree."

The Willowbrook Consent Decree was signed by then-Gov. Hugh Carey in 1975 to settle a lawsuit charging neglect of SIDC patients, which then numbered more than 5,000. Under the decree, the agency agreed to reduce the patient population to 250 by 1981 — a deadline since pushed back — and to place the clients in community residences.

Efforts to fulfill the agreement have been slowed by public resistance to group homes, Webb said. "When we've gone before community boards, there have been times we've been rejected out of hand."

The agency also must deal with layoffs during the phase-out of the SIDC, Webb said. "We've got 1,600 staff people now at SIDC, and we'll be decreasing that number by 600 within the year and a half.

"Most of these workers are Staten Islanders. Most are women. Many of are single parents or this is a second job in the family, which makes it difficult for them to relocate. So we have an economic and a social issue to be concerned about here," he said, adding that unions are pressuring the state to use SIDC workers to staff new group homes.



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Not only would more group homes resolve labor problems, but the homes are also desperately needed — for both patients coming out of institutions and for people now living at home whose families cannot care for them any longer.

"We just can't keep up with the demand" for group home beds, Webb said, noting that some families must now place their children in out-of-state facilities.

"We're going to be dealing with this kind of pressure for the next 10 years before we catch up," he said. "It's not a good situation."

*(The Advance Editorial Board for this meeting consisted of Les Trautmann, editor; William Huus, associate editor; Mark Hanley, editorial page editor; Mark Davis, editorial writer, Martha Bendix, copy editor, and Julie Mack, copy editor/staff writer.)*



*"I would insist on a cooperative relationship" with the College of Staten Island should it be relocated to land around the Staten Island Developmental Center.*