

Public opinion to be sought on SIDC proposals

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Proposals submitted by the College of Staten Island, advocates for the retarded and environmentalists probably will highlight discussion at a public meeting tomorrow on disposition of soon-to-be vacated property at Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

But the state Office of General Services (OGS), which is sponsoring the meeting, has received almost a dozen requests for the state-owned 300 acres — including such varied ideas as building senior citizen housing, a civic theater and a vehicle storage and maintenance shop.

Many of the proposals overlap: Five groups submitted plans for preserving SIDC's woodlands; four include programs for the mentally retarded; three groups want recreational facilities, with two asking for an Olympic-size swimming pool.

Fitting these requests into a comprehensive plan is the job of a task force, headed by OGS Commissioner John Egan, whose members include nine Islanders. The meeting was recommended by the task force, which wants input from the public before drafting its report for Gov. Mario M. Cuomo.

OGS, the agency responsible for surplus state land, must submit a recommendation on how to use the property before the governor's office and the state Legislature can take final action. Agency officials have repeatedly promised to come up with a plan that meets with community approval — hence, the task force and this week's meeting.

The meeting, scheduled for 7 p.m. tomorrow in the auditorium of Sea View Hospital and Home, will allow for discussion of all of the concepts proposed for the SIDC, which for 30 years has housed an institution for the retarded.

The institution is scheduled to close by the end of 1987, although the state plans to keep about 90 acres of the 382-acre campus for group homes and the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation. The remaining property scheduled for redevelopment includes more than 50 brick buildings and some of the best woodlands left on Staten Island.

Proposals for redeveloping Willowbrook are:

- A new campus for College of Staten Island, which has dominated discussion so far. The college is requesting 187 acres to consolidate its Sunnyside and St. George campuses.

CSI has been lobbying for a consolidated campus for more than 15 years, but the state has demurred at the cost until the Willowbrook site became available. There, CSI could renovate existing buildings — saving millions of dollars, according to a consultant's report. The state budget office and OGS are reportedly enthused about the plan, and many involved with the task force assume the college request has the best chance for acceptance.

- Recreational facilities, program and office space and a residential complex for the mentally retarded.

This plan, submitted by the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council and supported by Assemblyman Elizabeth Connelly and state Sen. Martin Connor, proposes a 60-acre camp and a 200-bed residential complex operated by non-profit agencies for the handicapped.

In addition, the council wants 125 acres for a recreational-community center complex to include an Olympic-size swimming pool, tennis courts and running track especially for the handicapped; a theater-auditorium; Island headquarters for the Early Children Direction Center; a training center for families of the developmentally disabled, and an Information and Referral Unit on handicapped services.

The council has a powerful ally in Arthur Webb, commissioner of state services for the mentally retarded and co-chair of the task force. It is Webb's agency that controls the Willowbrook property now, and he has said that any redevelopment plan for the site should give first priority to the handicapped — a sentiment echoed by Egan.

However, Webb does not want a residential complex at Willowbrook; he supports community residences for the retarded. Thus, the council has its best chances in getting recreational facilities, along with space for programs for the disabled and their families.

- Protection of woodland areas.

No less than five groups, including the city Parks and Recreation Department and the Staten Island Greenbelt Stewardship, have submitted proposals on preserving the site's environment. The task force recommendation will probably include a provision for the woodlands, since both Egan and Webb support the concept.

However, a major battle has already erupted over Corson's Brook Woods, a 40-acre woodland tract the city wants included in the Greenbelt. The woods are part of the 90 acres being retained by Webb's agency, and he wants to build four group homes there.