

Paulo to ask \$1 million for Greenbelt study

By JIM BUELL
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Protection of Corson's Brook Woods is of vital importance to the future of the Staten Island Greenbelt, the Greenbelt's administrator told the Island's leading conservation group last night.

"This is not just a skirmish in the woods," said Thomas Paulo, speaking for the first time about the state's attempt to raze part of the woods, located on the grounds of Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook, in order to construct four group homes for the retarded. "It deals with damage to an area that's part of a much larger area we've been trying to protect for

years."

The future of the 40-acre woodland was a prime topic at last night's annual meeting and natural areas symposium of the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, held on the eve of a state-sponsored hearing on future uses for the Staten Island Developmental Center's property. The meeting took place in the Staten Island Museum, St. George.

The environmental group has been to court several times to halt work at Corson's Brook since November, when contractors destroyed about 40 trees in preparation for building the group homes on four of the 40 acres. Attorney Terence Benbow, counsel for the Protec-

tors, also discussed the status of those efforts at the meeting.

While lauding the legal work, which has resulted in the granting of a temporary injunction against the project, Paulo commented wryly, "We're not out of the woods yet."

"This is in fact the first assault on the Staten Island Greenbelt we've had in a number of years," he said, noting that the woods were singled out for protection as part of a 2,000-acre Greenbelt as early as 1982, in a study he authored for the Island Office of the City Planning Department. Paulo now supports creating an expanded Greenbelt

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of 3,500 acres.

Protectors President Richard Buegler said his organization does not oppose the group homes, but wants the state to build them elsewhere on the developmental center's property so the woods will not be harmed.

Despite the threat the group believes is posed by the construction, Buegler and others at last night's meeting noted that much has been done to protect the Greenbelt over the past year. Among the gains he cited were Mayor Edward I. Koch's appointments in November of Paulo as the Greenbelt's first administrator and James Rossi as his assistant.

Another victory to which Buegler pointed was the city's formal establishment in December of the 144-acre Blue Heron Park Preserve in Annadale.

"A year ago we couldn't have anticipated all this, and yet it's here," he told the approximately 80 members and guests.

Paulo said that in the coming year, his office will seek \$1 million from the state to provide for a management plan and an overall master plan for the Greenbelt. A big chunk of that funding, he said, would go for topographical surveys of all lands included in the Greenbelt's core area. He

also hopes to use some of the money for setting up a visitors' center, preparing road and trail signs, and writing and distributing a brochure about the Greenbelt.

In addition, the Greenbelt planner reported he is close to agreement with the Richmond County Country Club in negotiations for a conservation easement, which would ensure that the country club does not develop its land in a manner inconsistent with the adjacent Greenbelt. The country club would receive certain tax benefits in return, he said.

Buegler and Benbow urged fellow Protectors members to attend tonight's public hearing on future uses for the Staten Island Developmental Center property, in order to voice their opposition to construction within Corson's Brook Woods. The meeting will be at 7 p.m. in the Sea View Hospital and Home auditorium.

They also urged the members to write letters against the construction to Gov. Mario M. Cuomo and other public officials.

Also at the meeting, Herman Zaage presented a slide show depicting hikes which the group has led through the Greenbelt and other undeveloped Island areas over the past 20 years.