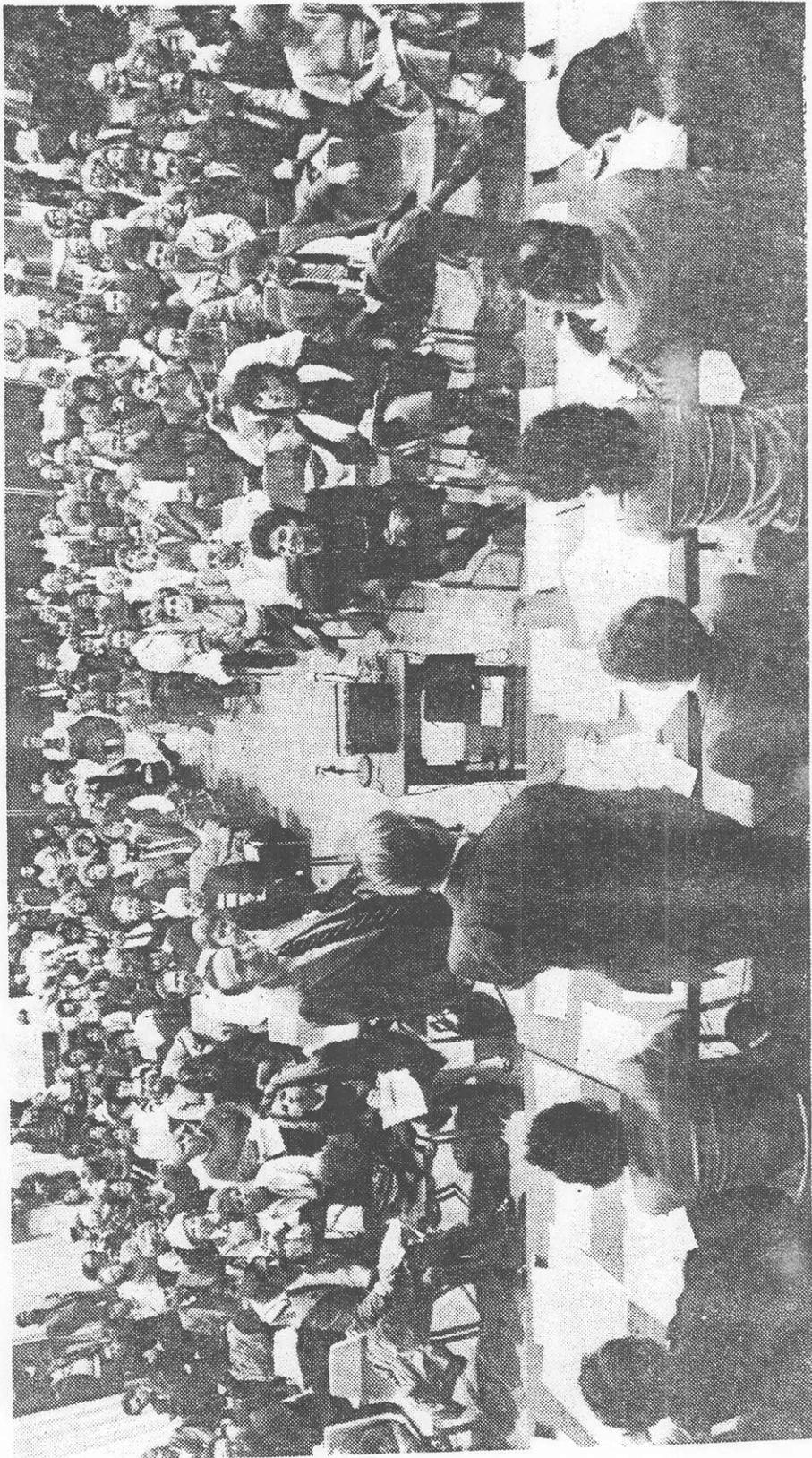


SRO crowd hears debate on SIDC site



A crowd packs a hearing room in Sea View Hospital and Home, where a task force takes public opinion on what to do with the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook.

5.1. Advance Photo by Steve Zaffarano

By JULIE MACK
Advance Staff Writer

A spirited debate over the proposed relocation of College of Staten Island highlighted a public hearing last night on disposition of soon-to-be vacated property at Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

The hearing, sponsored by a state task force studying redevelopment of the Willowbrook site, also drew environmentalists, advocates for the retarded, animal lovers, Little League supporters and members of the Jewish community, who lobbied for their proposals for the 300 acres of state-owned property.

In all, more than 30 people addressed the task force during the hearing, which attracted a standing-room-only crowd. Despite the crowd, it was an orderly meeting, interrupted only by occasional applause.

The issue which drew the most response was College of Staten Island's (CSI) request for 187 acres to consolidate its present campuses in Sunnyside and St. George.

The proposal drew fire from Arthur Careccia of the Ocean

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Breeze Civic Association, who argued that the college should build its consolidated campus at a 110-acre site in Ocean Breeze. CSI had been planning to relocate to Ocean Breeze until last year, when the Willowbrook site became available.

"If the college doesn't go to Ocean Breeze, we will have been sold out," Careccia said. "That land was condemned years ago and people lost their homes so that CSI could have a site for a new campus... it put a hardship on a lot of people."

He expressed anger that the land now may be sold for "high-rise development."

Those feelings were echoed by Edmund Murphy, chairman of Community Board 2, which has endorsed the Ocean Breeze site for CSI consolidation. Murphy said Ocean Breeze offers better educational opportunities for the college because of its proximity to Staten Island Hospital.

Moreover, he claimed that Victory Boulevard, the main access road to the Willowbrook site, could not handle traffic generated by the college. "If we have 7,000 to 8,000 vehicles (going to the college) every day, they've got to get there somehow," Murphy said. "I don't understand the logic. We are putting ourselves on a highway to chaos."

But Willowbrook-area residents at the hearing ignored the



Office of General Services Commissioner John C. Egan reminds the group that his office has no jurisdiction over the controversial Corson's Brook Woods as he presides at hearings on SIDC land.

gloomy predictions.

"I live in Willowbrook and any traffic problem would be mine," said one speaker. "But it doesn't bother me, because I would feel good about the college being there."

"Community Board 2 doesn't represent me or my neighbors," said Philip Stern of Willowbrook. "We would welcome CSI

in our midst.

Willowbrook resident Robert Levine said he would rather have the state transfer the property to CSI than sell the land to developers. "The college proposal has the overwhelming support of the Willowbrook community," he added.

The college proposal was also endorsed by environmentalists, a representative from the CSI student body, and an advocate for the mentally retarded.

Ronald Clohossy, a CSI student, said the majority of students think Willowbrook is the best site for the new campus. "The three overriding thoughts among students are time, money and a central location," Clohossy said.

He noted that the Willowbrook site would be less expensive for the college to develop, and could be developed more quickly, because existing buildings could be renovated. Moreover, Willowbrook is more centrally located for Island students, he said.

Sonia Braniff, representing the SIDC Board of Visitors, said that CSI's relocation to Willowbrook would have a "positive effect" on clients who will continue to live in group homes on the southeast corner of the Willowbrook campus.

She said her group was excited about plans for the college to form a working relationship with the retarded population, by providing technical assistance and offering educational programs on retardation to college students.

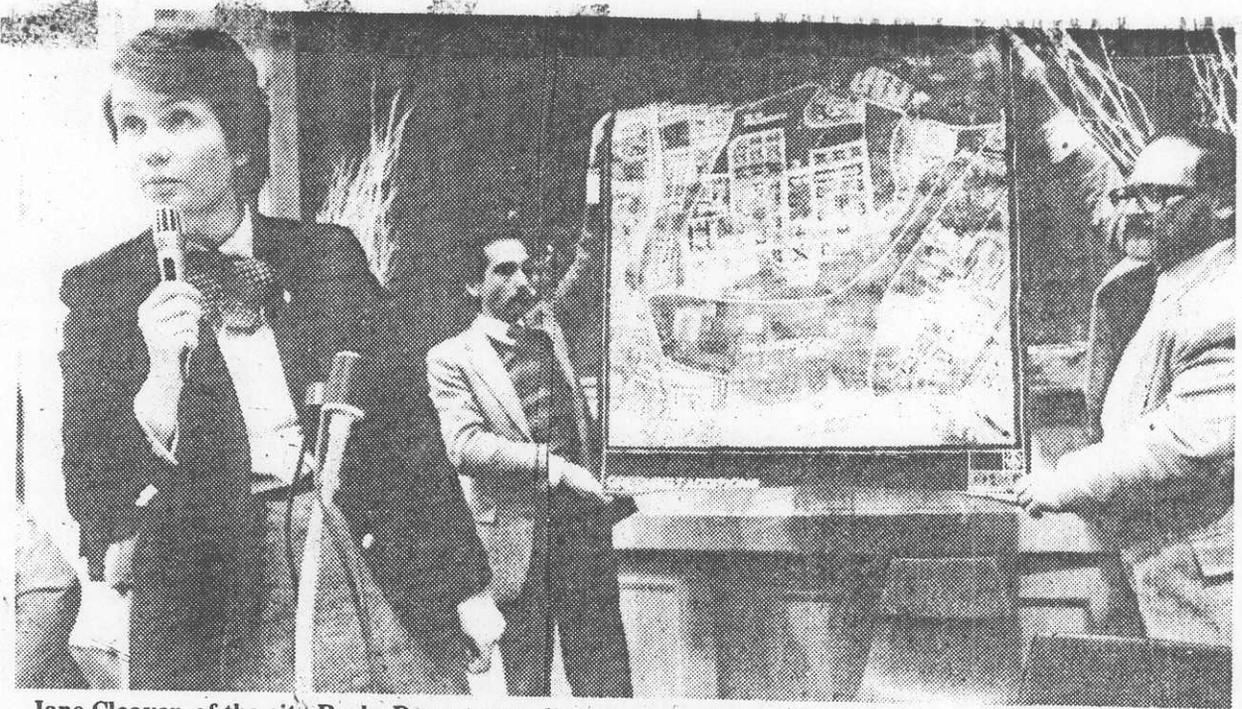
Environmentalists — including Tom Stokes of Friends of the Earth, several members of the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods and CSI's environmental science program — also said they could work with the college plan. The relocation proposal includes preservation of the Willowbrook woodlands.

The environmentalists also spoke about another issue — the protection of Corson's Brook Woods, a 40-acre tract which environmentalists want included in the Staten Island Greenbelt. However, the woodlands are located on a 90-acre parcel of the developmental center which the state is retaining to build group homes for mentally retarded.

John Egan, commissioner of the state Office of General Services and chairman of the Willowbrook property task force, said his panel has no say over Corson's Brook Woods. "The only property I'm allowed to consider is that property which has been declared surplus," he said. "I have no jurisdiction over the 90 acres being retained by OMRDD (the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities)."

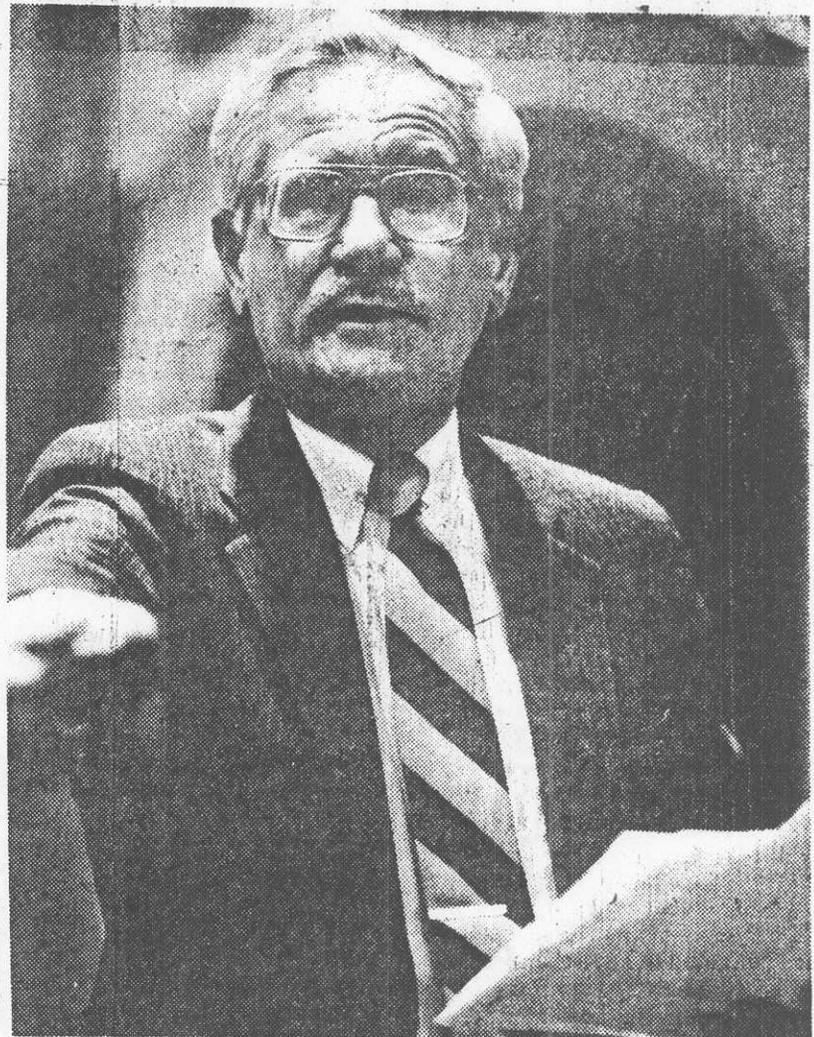
But environmentalists still sounded their plea. One of the speakers was Terence Benbow, attorney for the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, which has taken the state to court to prevent the group home construction.

Turning to Arthur Webb, OMRDD commissioner, Benbow said: "You have forced us to go to court... We have said 'let's sit down and reason together.' We'd like to work together with you — not in the courts, but in mechanisms like this."



Jane Cleaver, of the city Parks Department, discusses how Staten Island Developmental Center property could be added to the Greenbelt, while Thomas Paulo, Greenbelt administrator, and John Oppenheimer, a professor at the College of Staten Island, hold up a map of the site.

S.I. Advance Photos by Steve Zaffarano



Jim Gallagher, director of real property for the Office of General Services, speaks at the hearing.

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Community Board 2 Chairman Edmund Murphy objects to placing a new, consolidated College of Staten Island campus on the SIDC land.



Audience members listen as proposals for the disposition of SIDC property are discussed.

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Judith Berger, another member of the Protectors, argued that "there are only two botanic treasure houses on Staten Island, and Corson's Brook Woods is one of them. It must be protected. It is not unreasonable for the state to contribute that 40 acres to the Greenbelt."

Other presentations last night included:

- Several endorsements for a proposal by the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council, which wants recreational and residential facilities for the handicapped.

"We need homes for the mentally retarded on this Island," said Thomas Prisco, father of a mentally retarded son. "Our (handicapped) sons and daughters are being shipped out of state because they have no where else to go, and it's got to stop. We should come first — our handicapped children."

- A request to preserve Willowbrook ball fields now being used by local sports teams.

"We should be given some consideration ... Please, when you decide what is to be done with the property, don't forget us," said Berry Pearlstein, of the Middle Island Youth Baseball League and the Mid Island Sports Group Softball League.

A representative of the New Springville Little League said its ball fields are included in the 90 acres being retained by the state and asked the state to redraw its lines, or for nine or 10 acres to relocate elsewhere on the property.

- A request by Staten Island Animal Welfare for a building to house stray animals.

A representative from the organization said the building would help alleviate the dearth of animal shelters on Staten Island. She added that the organization could use the building and its animals as a base for an animal therapy program for senior citizens and the handicapped.

- A request by the Staten Island Horsemen Association for a show area for its operation.

- A request by Moishe Friederwitzer of the Alzheimer's

Disease and Related Disorders Association for a respite center. The center would serve families who need someone to care for an Alzheimer's victim while the family is on vacation or temporarily unable to provide care.

- A request by Young Israel of Staten Island and the Island Jewish Community Center for land to build senior citizen housing, recreational facilities for youths and a group home for the mentally retarded.

Egan said the task force will meet within the month to review the proposals and form its recommendations for Gov. Mario M. Cuomo. Egan said he expects to have a report to the governor by April 1.

"My sense at the moment is that the governor might want to personally come down here" after he gets the report to hold another public hearing, Egan said. "That's the kind of person he is."



William Counihan, Dongan Hills Civic Association, makes a point during the hearing.

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