

Staten Island

Daily News, Monday, June 17, 1985

CLASSIFIED ADS
IN THIS SECTION

Deal on group homes sought

By MARY ENGELS

A visit last week by Gov. Cuomo has encouraged both environmentalists and officials of the Staten Island Developmental Center (formerly Willowbrook) that a compromise can be reached on building group homes for patients in the controversial Corson's Brook Woods area.

The governor visited the site on Thursday at the invitation of the Protectors of the Pine Oak Woods. The environmentalist group had taken the state to court over the issue of constructing buildings in an area designated as part of the protected Greenbelt.

Ellen Pratt, speaking for the group, said, "I think the governor is anxious to do what's best for the whole community and yet satisfy the needs of the disabled, but not at the expense of the Greenbelt."

"THE GOVERNOR'S concern over environmental matters to see if there are alternative solutions showed he wants to do his best for both sides."

The Corson's Brook Woods site has been a target of controversy ever since the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities revealed plans to build two 12-bed and two 24-bed facilities to house severely re-

tarded and multi-handicapped patients back in March 1984.

State officials said the site was selected because "it was already state owned and is part of the Staten Island Developmental Center, and because it is adjoining a residential community, a must in choosing a group home."

Environmentalists fought the project when it was learned that a significant number of trees had been cut down in an area chosen for inclusion in the Greenbelt.

The environmental group took the matter to court and obtained a temporary injunction to stop construction.

An appeals court decision overturned the injunction last month, leaving the state free to begin construction.

Last week the state released an environmental-impact study that showed construction of the four group homes "would not affect the 40-acre woodland tract."

Cuomo promised to look into the question of alternative sites, as well as to review the study prepared by the state.

Cuomo asked the group, "What makes Corson's Brook Woods unique to the extent that it should be preserved?"

Pratt called it "a living museum of rare plants, flora and fauna, many of which are not found elsewhere."

On hand at the meeting was John Cryan, environmental analyst for the state Department of Environmental

Conservation, who brought with him some rare silk moths that he found in Corson's Brook Woods the previous evening.

Commissioner Henry Williams of the Environmental Conservation Department also supported the claims of the environmental group that the area was "unique."

After the meeting, Williams said, "The governor is clearly sensitive to the total issue. The key point is: Can something be done to make sure the needs of the patients can be served without tearing down the woods? I think it's important to advocate both values, and I think we can do it."

Williams said that if it "can't be done at Corson's Brook Woods, we will choose an alternate site even if it costs more."

JAMES WALSH, director of the developmental center, said he felt a "workable compromise can be achieved."

"We are now looking over the plans for the proposed site to see how it can be arranged to not cut down as many trees as originally anticipated."

"We are concerned with the environment, but our main concern is for our clients who have to get situated as soon as possible."

A public meeting on the problem has been scheduled for July 1 at the Institute for Basic Research, 1050 Forest Hill Road.