

SIDC shift puts CSI plan in doubt

By JULIE MACK

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The state agency that operates Staten Island Developmental Center has decided to almost double the amount of SIDC property it will retain when the institution shuts down in two years. SIDC Director James Walsh announced yesterday.

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) will now

keep about 160 acres of the 380-acre campus to house community services for the mentally retarded, according to Walsh. OMRDD originally said it would retain only 90 acres, allowing the remainder of the property to be developed for other uses.

The latest decision means the College of Staten Island, which wants the bulk of the surplus property for a new campus, will have to trim its request, said Assemblywoman Elizabeth Con-

nolly, who had lobbied OMRDD to retain more of the property to allow expansion of community services for the handicapped.

The college requested 230 acres at SIDC for a new, consolidated campus. CSI now has facilities in St. George and Sunnyside. Mrs. Connelly said some of the property to be retained by OMRDD is land wanted by the college, although Mrs. Connelly was unsure of how many acres were involved.

"I think it mostly involved property covered by trees and shrubs," she said, adding that while OMRDD's decision will tighten the boundaries of the CSI campus, "I don't think it's at any great cost to the college."

CSI officials were unavailable for comment yesterday.

The additional property to be retained by OMRDD includes the so-called Warner complex, which consists of the five most modern buildings at SIDC, and the vacant

land north of the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation along Forest Hill Road.

The Warner complex, which contains 200,000 square feet of building space, will provide office and program space for private agencies serving the mentally retarded, Walsh said. He said OMRDD will start soliciting requests from agencies who may want some of the building space. OMRDD has already received a \$250,000 allocation from the

state Legislature to hire a consulting firm which will work with the agencies in devising a master plan for the Warner complex. Walsh said he wants a report by Aug. 15 on which agencies will be using the facilities.

The vacant land may be converted into a camp for the handicapped, Walsh added, noting that one agency has already submit-

ted a proposal to operate such a facility.

Walsh outlined the agency's plan at yesterday's meeting of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council, an consortium of public and private agencies serving the retarded.

Council members termed the state's decision "a real victory," and Walsh noted that the decision to retain the land was a response to requests by the council, Mrs. Connelly and state Sen. John Marchi.

Marchi, Mrs. Connelly, council president Harry Friedland and past president Genevieve Benoit worked with OMRDD in hammering out the details of the plan, Walsh said.

Walsh emphasized that the extra acreage will be used for private agencies and not state-operated services, and that private agencies must develop the appropriate programs. "The one problem is that we've got

this land — we go back to them and say we don't need it after all."

Mrs. Connelly said a final decision has not been made yet on the disposition of the remaining 220 acres at SIDC, although she said that Island legislators are pushing now for preservation of community ball fields, which are used by thousands of Islanders. The college wants to build facilities where the ball fields now stand.

"I told (CSI President Edmond) Volpe that I was concerned that too much of the property is going to the college, especially in terms of the ball fields," Mrs. Connelly said. "I think local legislators recognize that one major issue that has to be addressed are those ball fields and the question of how we accommodate the people who use them. All of us recognize that we can't agree to the college proposal until we work out something on the ball fields.

A public hearing on the Corson's Brook Woods controversy is scheduled for 7 p.m. Monday at the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation on Forest Hill Road, Willowbrook. The hearing, sponsored by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, will debate the merits of the agency's plan to build four group homes in an area of the Staten Island Developmental Center campus that environmentalists want preserved as a natural woodlands.

200,000 square feet of space and I hope we don't have a situation where people say we only have enough programs for 50,000 square feet of space," Walsh said.

"This council, myself and the commissioner (OMRDD Commissioner Arthur Webb) will look awfully foolish if — after-telling the Legislature how badly we needed