

coordinator for the newly formed New York State Committee for Community Living, blasted Webb's description of the sites and called the plan "a financial albatross."

"We're getting 'sort of community-like' instead of 'right in the neighborhood,'" the St. George resident said.

Other opponents, among them four former Willowbrook residents, said that anything short of fully integrated community homes is a "stopgap" and "just another institution."

The testimony of the former residents hushed the restless crowd and brought tears to some as the four read prepared texts in nearly incomprehensible, halting speech.

Bernard Carabello, who spent 18 years in Willowbrook, called the former conditions at Willowbrook "dehumanizing."

"Institutions are horrible. They dehumanize human beings," he said, struggling to gain control of himself.

"I'm afraid we're beginning to step back into the dark ages. The issue is not SRUs, the issue is integration. I don't care how much we sit and debate how good institutions are. There is no way you can convince me. Animals in zoos got better treatment than human beings in institutions," he said.

Carabello's remarks came after Assemblywoman Connelly told the crowd "not all institutions are bad." She also said that the quality of care at SIDC had greatly improved in the aftermath of a scandal at the facility in the mid-1970s that led to a 1975 court decision ordering that it be phased out.

According to Ganim, the Corson's Brook site is "the bottom line" of the master plan devised to phase out SIDC by 1987.

Although the Corson's Brook Woods plan was designed and partially funded before the statewide SRU plan was begun last year, he said, further funds are included in a capital budget request now before the state legislature and thus could be withheld.

OMRDD is faced with spending millions to upgrade current large institutions, including SIDC, to continue to meet federal regulations and receive federal Medicaid funds on which it vitally depends, Webb said.

But in order "not to throw good money after bad," Webb said, OMRDD wants to divert capital funding for such upgrading into the SRUs. Opponents want the money to go directly into community homes.

During the hearing, Genevieve Benoit of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council voiced the group's support of the homes, provided that they lead to placement in community units. The New Dorp resident, also representing A Very Special Place, blasted opposition on environmental grounds as misleading.

"Our feeling on Staten Island is that the requirements for an environmental impact statement is another expression of opposition to group homes in their (opponents) back yard," she said.