

SIDC group home plans discussed

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On hand last night to rouse support for additional group homes planned for the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) grounds, Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), addressed the annual meeting of Staten Island Aid, Inc.

The Richmond Complex, as the group homes will be called, and other scheduled changes of the SIDC site, including the consolidation of the College of Staten Island campuses, will transform the "national disgrace" that was once Willowbrook State School "into a seat of excellence," Webb told the group of about 60 that included at least a few skeptical listeners.

Parents of SIDC clients and staff members of Staten Island Aid, a non-profit advocacy group for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled, were among the audience in the Insti-

tute for Basic Research building. Part of a statewide OMRDD plan to build small residential units on existing institution sites, the Richmond Complex will consist of 14 group homes, three of which have yet to be built but have a tentative completion date of March 1987.

Last month the state retracted a controversial plan to construct those three units and another in Corson's Brook Woods on the SIDC site. The three group homes will be built near the woods. The fourth will be built somewhere on the South Shore, SIDC Director James Walsh said after last night's meeting. "We have options on a couple pieces of land," he said. Walsh also spoke to the group.

Opposition to building on the woods site centered on environmental concerns about its wetlands character. After completing an environmental impact statement last month, the state dropped the Corson's plan.

The three new units, scheduled for a June 10 groundbreaking, will provide about 40 percent of the approximately 122 beds in the Richmond Complex.

When the developmental center closes at the end of the year, its 84 Staten Island clients currently housed elsewhere on the Willowbrook grounds will move into existing units of the complex, Walsh said.

Opponents of the plan have called the group homes another form of segregating the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled.

Commissioner Webb said last night the complex is "what's best" for the clients.

"I don't get hung up on whether it's considered an institution or part of the community," he said after the meeting. "Small is better. We're making it as homelike as we can. And many of the residents will go to community-based treatment programs."

Besides the Richmond complex,

the proposed reconfiguration of the SIDC site calls for a multi-service resource center to be housed in a vacant building. The state will keep about half of the 380 acres, reserving about one-third for possible expansion, Walsh said.

CSI will consolidate its Sunny-side and St. George campuses on the rest of the land. Webb said students would be given medical and psychology internships in the developmental facilities.

Expressing concern for her child's security, the parent of an SIDC client asked Webb if there would be a buffer between CSI and the developmental facilities.

"Probably not," he responded. "Why not open it up?"

"The best security is an attitude of respect" toward the clients, he added.

The parent noted that "a lot of people don't have that attitude."