

Work begun on state's group homes

BY ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Construction work has begun for the Richmond Complex, three group homes for the mentally retarded that is being built on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

A formal groundbreaking ceremony has been set for Sept. 17, although workers have already started pouring foundations at the site.

Site clearance work for the three structures began on state-owned property off Forest Hill Road near the New/ Springville Little League fields about a month ago.

The Richmond Complex was

the focus of a two-year battle which came to halt after the state agreed to drop its plans to build the houses in Corson's Brook Woods. That section of the state-owned property had been designated for inclusion in the Greenbelt core because of its environmental importance.

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Development (OMRDD) is sponsoring the \$5 million project, which is designed to accommodate 48 mentally retarded adults in a home-like setting. These individuals are the last remaining at the developmental center, which is scheduled to close as soon as the new community-based homes open.

Lou Ganim of the OMRDD said the first of the three houses is expected to be ready for occupancy in March, and the other two by June. In all, one 12-bed home and two 24-bed homes are to be built, each staffed 24 hours a day.

To settle the dispute with environmentalists, OMRDD shifted the construction site out of the woods to a less sensitive area near Executive Way, a street on the developmental center grounds that intersects with Forest Hill Road.

As part of that settlement, OMRDD announced a "comprehensive plan" to provide services to the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled in the

borough. In addition to the three group homes, other facilities would be built in stages at various locations throughout the Island.

These include a "secure unit" residence for 24 people who were ordered into the custody of OMRDD by the criminal courts; a multi-purpose community treatment center to provide day and recreational programs for clients of state and voluntary facilities, and a 72-bed unit at the South Beach Psychiatric Center for individuals with multiple disabilities.

OMRDD Commissioner Arthur Webb is expected to attend the groundbreaking ceremonies.

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