

Special unit for retarded could go elsewhere

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The state still plans to build a residence somewhere in the city for mentally retarded people convicted of crimes, but the exact location has not yet been selected.

Last March, plans called for the 24-bed "secure unit" to be placed on Staten Island, but Ron Byrne, a spokesman for the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), said it now could be anywhere in the city.

"I regret we weren't able to find space on Staten Island," said Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly. "It would have provided employment and . . . help blunt the massive layoffs" when the Staten Island Developmental Center closes this year, she said.

A secure facility is for those deemed "criminally retarded," Mrs. Connelly said, meaning people who have an IQ of 70 or below who have committed crimes. "They are considered competent in understanding what they did. They can't really be put in with the regular criminal element because they are vulnerable," she said, and do not belong there.

She said she still plans to talk with OMRDD chief Arthur Webb about placing the facility here, if an appropriate site can be found.

The decision to build a secure facility was included in a "com-

prehensive plan" for services in the borough released last spring. That "plan" came after a two-year civic battle between conservationists and advocates for the retarded who were fighting over OMRDD's plan to build housing for the mentally retarded in Corson's Brook Woods. The plan to build there was dropped.

The overall plan for services on Staten Island also included a 72-bed facility in South Beach Psychiatric Center for people with multiple disabilities. The renovation will cost \$2.4 million and the space will be ready sometime in 1987, Byrne said.

The unit will take over two floors in Building "C" where PS 37, a school for autistic children, was housed until this fall. When the decision to move the children was announced last spring, the students' parents had expressed concern about where their chil-

dren would be moved.

PS 37, also known as the Seaside Center, relocated in early November to the former Barnes Intermediate School annex in Great Kills, said Christy Cugini, the deputy superintendent of Staten Island schools. "A most suitable location," he added.

The sixth-graders from Barnes who were using the annex are now in the main building, Cugini said. That building was able to accommodate the children because of a drop in the school's population.

"Everyone is happy about it," Cugini said. "It's one of those nice stories that worked out well for everyone."

"Parents were thrilled with it," Mrs. Connelly said. "I got lots of letters from parents thanking me for assistance" in getting the school moved there. "It's much more appropriate for them to be in a regular school setting" than at the psychiatric center, she said.