

# Plan to house retarded draws complaints

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Pleading oversaturation in the community, more than a dozen Princes Bay residents last night voiced concern over a proposed 10-bed community group home that would house mentally retarded persons.

The proposed site at 425 Seguine Ave. would be a seven-room community residence for males and "possibly females," according to Jerry Weber, deputy director of community services for the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC).

Weber and a second SIDC representative, Tom Noonan, made the proposal during a public hearing hosted by Community Board 3's Human Resources Committee (HRC) in the board office.

According to Weber, the "clients," ages 21 and up, would all be from Staten Island. Six currently reside in the Staten Island Developmental Center, while four live in private homes on the Island.

The home would be staffed "24 hours a day, seven days a week, and would have ample direct-care staff, plus any clinical staff needed through an agreement with Richmond Memorial Hospital or a private company," Weber said.

The prospective residents "are all in day programs — either in workshops or day treatment programs. A number of the clients are travel-trained and a number are picked up and dropped off by a staff van," Weber said.

Valerie Myers, of Johanna Lane, voicing her objections to the plan, said that in addition to the group home, the community already has to deal with methadone patients from Richmond Memorial Hospital, the incoming detoxification program and "everything else that walks up and down the block."

One woman added that she feared the travel-trained residents "those able to commute to their workshops without assistance — wouldn't have the 'street

smarts" to take care of themselves.

"The diagnosis is mental retardation. They wouldn't end up at South Beach Psychiatric," Weber said.

"We have recreation people who take them to movies, theater, trips to Rockefeller Center or wherever else," he added.

John Stack, a member of Board 3 in attendance, felt very uncomfortable about the proposed location, which measures 56 feet by 90 feet. His comments drew loud applause.

"If you raised your eyes one little bit, or talked to anyone in the area, you would have learned before all this what is present and near," Stack told Weber. "You are living in the shadows of these problems. Certainly, it seems unwise to even have made the move. Apart from the fact that you're adjacent to a hospital where medical services would be readily available, I see nothing else that favors you, nor particularly that favors your clients."

"You're duping us by saying your clients are going to be invisible — but they're not. I see no place for them to recreate on the property. It's very limited, and I think it's unfair to them. I think you should take a look at what you apparently have seized without much thought."

Helen Shkymba, whose daughter is mentally retarded, accused the community residents of overreacting.

"They're not mentally ill. It's easy to be afraid of the unknown, but you don't make a dossier on those who live next door. The system for the retarded has improved during our lifetimes. I think your hostilities should be directed toward the methadone program."

Weber said afterward he thought the questions asked by the community were valid, but "I think we addressed their concerns."

The committee will submit its recommendation for a vote at the next full board meeting, Jan. 27.