

THE ISLAND

Disabled residences approved in Sunnyside

■ Decision angers some residents

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Despite voicing strong opposition last month, Community Board 1 approved two community residences proposed by A Very Special Place at a board meeting last night in All Saints' Episcopal Church, Willowbrook.

The two sites — 29 and 31 Glenwood Ave., Sunnyside — which are funded by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, would house seven developmentally disabled adults and a maximum of eight staff members in each house.

At a Feb. 16 Human Resources/Silver Lake/Sunnyside committees meeting, many people feared residents from the homes would endanger neighborhood children and lower nearby property values. Some board members opposed the site because there is no required drug screening or state certification for A Very Special Place employees.

But last night, some board members showed a change of heart.

"I went by there, and I don't think parking is an issue. I don't think as many as eight staff members would affect it," said board member John Gurrieri, who suggested the city Department of Transportation could install signs on the block indicating it will have a lot of traffic.

George Doyle, another board member, said A Very Special Place is a good alternative to larger institutions that may mistreat the developmentally disabled, like the old Willowbrook State School.

Board 1's approval of the homes angered some residents who were at last month's committees meeting.

Steve Worona, who lives near the proposed Glenwood Avenue sites, said he went to another A Very Special Place home in Dongan Hills, where he said neighbors told him they had to put traffic cones in front of their houses to ensure they could get parking spots because so many were taken by drivers coming in and out of the community residence.

At the Human Resources meeting, he and his wife, Maureen, showed photos taken of that Dongan Hills home where school buses blocked traffic as they picked up and dropped off developmentally disabled residents.

"They have to meet the needs of the community, but they don't know the community's needs," Worona said.

"I'm fuming," said Mrs. Worona after Board 1 announced their approval of the sites. Worona said he and his wife were made to appear as if they were against the developmentally disabled, but Worona said they were only against the sites near their home.