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THE ISLAND

CB 1 panel OKs residence for developmentally disabled

Eden II School for Autistic Children plans to house 6 youths in home on Dixon Avenue, Elm Park

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Unlike some recent heated meetings, residents remained calm and supportive as a Community Board 1 panel, meeting last night in PS 44, Mariners Harbor, approved a residence for the developmentally disabled in Elm Park.

But a saturation of social services on the North Shore was a top concern, and emotional parents remained frustrated.

Eden II School for Autistic Children in Elm Park plans to house six autistic children, ages 7 to 14, at 21 Dixon Ave., near the intersection of Van Riper Street. The agency is funded by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

The agency presented its plans to build the two-floor home on an abandoned 5,290-square-foot lot to the Human Resources/Mariners Harbor, Port Richmond area committees (including Elm Park, Arlington and Graniteville).

"You act like we need to be pioneers, when we've been generous our whole lives in accepting group homes," said Mike O'Sullivan, a Port Richmond resident, one of approximately 10 people at the meeting. A former schoolteacher, he praised the work of Eden II, but urged them to find another location, recommending the South Shore.

While representatives from Eden II ac-

knowledged that Community Board 1 has its fair share of social services, they explained the site was selected because residents would attend the nearby school located at 150 Granite Ave., also in Elm Park. The residents who would live in the new facility are from both the North and South shores and one is from Manhattan.

Representatives and board members explained that saturation is determined by the existence of similar facilities in an area, and there are no other immediate community residences for autistic individuals.

Representatives of Eden II also explained that the children's needs have become too demanding for parents to handle — especially single parents heading families, or families with other developmentally disabled children.

Tricia DiMaggio of New Dorp, whose son is a proposed resident, said he has 14

food allergies, and that she also cares for another child with a developmental disability. She added that the staffing qualifications are one of her biggest concerns, because her son has no verbal skills to tell her about a problem.

Communities also will know what they are getting—and it won't be rowdy teenagers having loud parties and driving recklessly, added Linda Williams, parent of a 14-year-old proposed resident.

"In reality, you aren't doing us a favor, because they won't do things bad neighbors do. There is a plus side. You know what you are getting," Ms. Williams said.

Although there was sympathy for the parents who must "beg for their children," it was also stressed that the board must "respect the wishes of a community that has been abused."

"I never saw a group home that has made a neighborhood worse," said Marcus Malave, a 30-year resident of Port Richmond.

Founded in 1976 by the parents of six children with autism, Eden II, the agency, serves approximately 80 children and operates a 10-bed adult home in Arden Heights.

Agency representatives said they aren't authorized to conduct criminal background checks or drug testing on staff, but they do screen candidates through the state social services central registry to assure there is no history of abuse or neglect of a minor.

Community residences for the developmentally disabled has been a highly debated topic at recent community board meetings, with residents vehemently opposing homes in many cases, and boards are left to vote on matters over which they have little control.

The full board will vote on the residence on May 9 in All Saints' Episcopal Church, Willowbrook.