

## THE ISLAND

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# Residence for developmentally disabled gets support

But some Port Richmond residents raise issues of saturation and safety

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While there were a few heated words exchanged, Port Richmond residents offered support last night for a proposed residence for the developmentally disabled during a meeting of a Community Board 1 panel in PS 44, Mariners Harbor.

But the support was mixed with concern over what some at the meeting called the saturation of social service agencies on the North Shore and the safety of the residents in an area where they said violence is on every corner.

Community Resources presented its proposal to house six developmentally disabled adults at 1589 Castleton Ave., at the corner of Faber Street, to the Human Resources and Mariners Harbor/Port Richmond area committees (including Elm Park, Arlington and Graniteville). About 20 members of the public attended.

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former president of  
the Port Richmond  
Civic Association

"Our intention is to do major renovations, including siding, roof work and major, major renovation inside the house to make it home for six men and women," said Dana Thomas Magee, executive director of Community Resources. "We hope to make a difference and add to the community."

The residents voted to support the residence in what the board called a community consensus vote, but many said they feel the area is being invaded by social services agencies.

The four committee members in attendance voted to support the residence. The votes taken last night will be evaluated before the full board makes its vote.

"We are really concerned that there are a lot of group homes in Port Richmond already and now we are being asked to take another," said James Maloney, former president of the Port Richmond Civic Association. "We feel we've got our share. What everyone doesn't want, we take. Other communities should take these homes."

While Magee acknowledged that Community Board 1 has a large number of social service agencies, he explained that saturation is determined by the Padavan Law, which determines saturation by the number of similar facilities in the area, not just the number of social service agencies.

Magee pledged his commitment to work with the community to improve the quality of life in the area and said any problems that come up in the residence will be taken care of immediately.

But even with Magee's pledge, residents

questioned whether the agency will live up to its promise.

"The fact of the matter is, I think Port Richmond residents are really frustrated that many of the agencies are not doing anything as promised to improve the quality of life," said Beryl Thurman, president of the Port Richmond Civic Association, frustration evident in her voice. "I can't say the presence of social service agencies has improved the quality of life in Port Richmond."

The residents in attendance all said they welcome developmentally disabled individuals in the area, but worry for their safety, citing an increase in gang violence and drugs.

"I guess my concern is the area itself and the increase of gang violence," Ms. Thurman said. "I understand there will be 24-hour personnel to make the house safe, but my concern is outside the house. With the warmer weather, the initiation process begins and these people will be easy targets for gangs."

Magee said he appreciated the concerns of the community, but said it will not sway the agency from moving into the area.

"We are aware of the problems," he said. "We've walked the area at night and we are very familiar with it. We think we can make a stabilizing influence. We understand what the community is saying and we will be very cautious."

Debi Rose, a member of the Human Resources Committee, said in an interview after the meeting that she empathized with the residents but thinks they are using arguments about saturation and crime as shields.

"I think communities are getting smarter, in terms of NIMBY [Not In My Backyard] not being a viable excuse for defeating a site of a project," she said.

Community residences for the developmentally disabled have been controversial issues at Island community boards recently.

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, which oversees the residences and the agencies that run them, requires community board input for such projects, but not approval.

In March, Community Board 3 resoundingly rejected a proposed residence for the developmentally disabled at 119 End Pl., Greenridge, arguing it would isolate the inhabitants on the remote street, alter the peaceful environment and limit integration because of the very deep-rooted and intense resistance of the community.

Proponents of the residences argue that fear and misinformation about the developmentally disabled are primarily behind the strong objections of area residents.

Magee came to last night's meeting prepared, telling audience members that the house will have around-the-clock supervision by highly trained professionals who have undergone thorough background checks.

Two people undoubtedly in favor of Community Resources moving into 1589 Castleton Ave. are Patricia and John Falotico, the current owners of the home. They are moving to a bigger house in New Jersey because they need more space for their two children. Crime, Mrs. Falotico said, is not the major reason they are leaving Port Richmond.

"There is crime everywhere," she said.

But the Faloticos have an even more important reason for wanting their home to be converted into a home for the developmentally disabled.

"I'd really like to see it," Mrs. Falotico said. "I have a son with some disabilities and I hope that in 30 years, he has a place like this to go."

A representative from the office of Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly (D-North Shore) attended the meeting.