

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.