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Board takes some heat for residence plan OK

■ **Oakwood neighbors scream their objections and a chair is flung across the floor**

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A chair and some harsh words were tossed around last night by opponents of a home for developmentally disabled people in Oakwood, after Community Board 3 voted overwhelmingly to support the home.

The residents raised their hands, screaming, "We oppose it, we oppose it, listen to us" as the full board approved by a 32-0 margin the home proposed by Manhattan-based United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) for 102 Champlain Ave. Four members abstained.

Immediately following the vote, as a budget committee presentation began, the approximately 75 Oakwood residents rose en masse, screaming at board members as they made their way to the door.

One audience member went so far as to fling a chair along the floor on the way out of the auditorium of PS 25 on the grounds of the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, Mount Loretto, Pleasant Plains.

During a meeting of the Community Resources Committee last week, board members voted unanimously to support the Champlain Avenue residence, as well as a UCP residence at 31 Englewood Ave., Charleston. The full board also voted — without any public opposition — to support the Charleston home last night. Both sites will house four residents in the mild to moderate range of mental retardation and cerebral palsy.

Oakwood residents remained

calm during the public session of the meeting, addressing the board members with concerns about staffing of the Oakwood ranch home, which will house three residents in their 20s and one woman in her late 40s.

"We welcome the residents of this group home," Marc Berger said. "We want to know that the help are not criminals, but decent people. We understand from last week's meeting that there are no background checks, no fingerprinting and no drug testing of staff. We would like to see some type of background check done."

UCP is not required by law to conduct drug tests, and fingerprinting is only required for staffers who work with children.

Berger presented board members with a petition signed by 200 Oakwood residents. At least seven Oakwood residents addressed board members in a composed manner on other issues, including an increase in traffic in the neighborhood after the residence is established, decreased property values and the potential for staff members or their associates to rob other homes on the block.

John Antoniello, chairman of Board 3, announced that a bill was introduced in Albany to address the subject of drug testing for staffers of residences funded by the Office of Mental Retardation

and Developmental Disabilities. Thunderous applause followed the announcement.

Following the meeting, Berger and his neighbors didn't conceal their anger as they questioned the board's judgment in approving the residence.

"What kind of process is this?" Berger asked, as he and his neighbors gathered in the hallway outside the auditorium.

"How can the community board say yes when the community says no?" asked Isabel Cifone, who created the petition and fliers distributed to neighbors announcing the public hearing. "The board failed to inform us. If we knew about the meeting we would have had more time to organize. We would have had better speakers to represent us."

Ms. Cifone claimed that the board only passed out fliers to several Oakwood residents. She also said she received anonymous phone calls from people saying they would bomb or set fire to the community residence.

Marie Bodnar, district manager of Board 3, disputed the claim, saying, "We made every effort to contact the residents." Ms. Bodnar said letters were sent to the Oakwood Civic Association and notices were put in the Advance regarding the public session.

"It's too bad they feel we didn't

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do our job," she said. "We went above and beyond what we have to do."

Residents, citing four other homes in a six-mile radius, contended the area is saturated with community residences, a common complaint wherever community residences are proposed. They said nobody has given them a clear definition of the Community Residence Site Selection Law — also known as the Padavan Law.

"The only issue that this board has to decide on is oversaturation, which is defined not in miles or distance," said William D'Ambrosio, chairman of the board's human resources committee. "Oversaturation is defined basically in the terms of if the community residence will substantially change the character of the neighborhood. That's the only issue and, quite frankly, it won't change the area."

Rosemarie Zuliani also voiced her concern over the safety of the area's senior citizens. "Besides having young children on Champlain, we also have lots of senior citizens who are afraid to leave their homes for fears they are being watched when they leave," she said after the meeting.

Quang and Van Nguyen moved to the block from Vietnam on Wednesday, having no idea what was to become of the home di-

rectly next door. The couple have a 12-year-old daughter and a 9-year-old son.

"It makes me scared and it makes my kids scared," said Mrs. Nguyen. "I want my kids to have a happy day and good dreams. My kids are my life and I want them to have an American future. I don't want them to be scared and mess up school. I don't want them to worry they can't go outside."

Residents also said after the meeting that they want adequate lighting on the street and a written guarantee that 102 Champlain Ave. will never be converted to a halfway house or used for substance abuse or mental health rehabilitation programs. They also suggested the principal and faculty of PS 50 on Adelaide Avenue should have some input.

They claim the Charleston home received no community opposition because it is in an industrial, not a residential area.

In reality, there are several homes on Englewood Avenue in Charleston, where the other UCP home is slated, and the Charleston Civic Association — which sent a letter to officials welcoming the UCP home — represents scores of families living in the area. Charleston is a mixed-use zone where residential and industrial uses co-exist.

In a less heated exchange, resi-

dents of Brooke Avenue, also in Oakwood, voiced their concerns that what was a two-way street up until Sept. 7 has now become a dead end. The city recently planted two massive concrete barricades to close off a portion of the street near Grayson Avenue because it turns out the patch of road was actually a privately owned lot.

The owner's decision to shut it down is perfectly legal, but residents feel the closure will limit and restrict access for emergency vehicles, sanitation trucks and school buses.

The full board unanimously approved the proposal that the city buy the property from the owner, restore the street and open it for community access.

"We have now created a situation where a person purchased a private parcel of land for \$7,000 and limited access to all, especially service vehicles including fire, ambulances, sanitation and plowing," said Ilyssa DeCasperis in an address to the board members. Ms. DeCasperis said a FedEx package was returned to its sender because the carrier could not find her home.

Approximately 25 residents of Brooke Avenue showed up at the meeting, with two speaking publicly for the group. They still don't

understand why the portion of Brooke Avenue had official city street signs and was paved if it wasn't a real thoroughfare.

While they were pleased with the board's support, they are still angry over the situation.

"There is a no parking sign directly in front of my house," said Rosemary DeCesare after the meeting, saying the sign was put up yesterday. "I have nowhere to park and I have three cars." Ms. DeCesare said her garage and driveway take care of two cars, but she is left with no place to park her car. She said when she returned after the meeting that she would most likely have to block her driveway for which she could get a ticket — that is if the police can get down the block.

"We're one family with five cars; where can we go?" asked Elizabeth Flynn. They only parking option, Brooke Avenue residents said, is to park on what they call a dangerous area of Hylan Boulevard.

Also attending the meeting were representatives from the offices of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Borough President Guy V. Molinari, state Sen. John Marchi (R-Statens Island), Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano (D-Mid-Island), and Councilmen Stephen Fiala (R-South Shore) and James Oddo (R-Mid-Island).