

Board takes some heat for residence plan OK

Page
#1
(Continued)

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

By **STEPHANIE SLEPIAN**
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

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

FPT
TO
DR
9/28