

CSI's costly consolidation

Renovation price tag twice as much as new campus

By DON GROSS
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

A recent study suggests that replacing the College of Staten Island's two campuses with a consolidated campus comprised of new and renovated buildings at the site of the old Willowbrook State School may cost more than twice as much as building an entirely new college campus elsewhere in the country.

The study, conducted by the Association of Physical Plant Managers (APPM) in Washington, D.C., an organization of college

planning and development officials, maintains college construction costs across the nation currently average \$100 per gross square foot.

Depending on the building, gross square-foot construction costs at CSI range from \$111 per square foot, for renovation of former dormitories into administrative space, to \$263 per square foot for the college's planned theater and performing arts center.

(The term "gross square foot" is used by the construction industry to refer to the space occupied by a

building — not the building's "net square footage," which is its usable space.)

CSI officials now estimate that actual construction costs of the campus will rise to \$310.1 million by the tentative completion date of 1994, and that it will cost nearly \$90 million more to furnish classrooms and offices and purchase specialized equipment.

In case you're adding, that's a \$400.1 million price tag, more than double the original \$200 million estimates made in 1985 when it was announced that the new CSI

campus would be located on the grounds of the Willowbrook site, which in recent years has been known as the Staten Island Developmental Center.

The entire cost of CSI is being underwritten by the sale of state Dormitory Authority bonds, which are to be repaid with taxpayer money.

Last February, CSI president Edmond L. Volpe announced that the cost of the campus had jumped to \$400 million in the five years since the move was first announced. In October, the City

University of New York (CUNY), of which CSI is a part, budgeted \$404.6 million for the project.

CSI officials are aware that the project's costs are higher than had been expected. They blame high labor costs in the New York metropolitan area, delays and unforeseen, unavoidable changes in the project for much of the added expense.

In a statement read by CSI public relations chief Rosemarie Dressler, Volpe said "every effort

(See CSI, Page A 15)

(From Page A 1)

has been made to keep costs of the new campus down."

In July, Volpe said \$18 million had been trimmed from the price of the campus by scaling back the size of several buildings, including the gym, the pool, the cafeteria, the library, the theater and some science laboratories.

In another statement, Volpe compared the construction costs at Willowbrook favorably with the costs of recent construction at other CUNY campuses, including Hostos Community College in the Bronx, which paid more than \$310 per square foot for a new building.

Experts in the field say gauging CSI's costs is difficult, because few schools close one or two campuses while opening another. However, officials at two schools — one of which is completing such a move, while another is planning one — say the cost of building brand new campuses with more space than planned for CSI should not exceed \$150 million.

Steven Glaznor, a spokesman for APPM, said the \$100 per square-foot figure was arrived at by asking college development officials what it would cost them to rebuild their campuses if they built on unoccupied land.

However, Glaznor did acknowledge that construction costs in New York are higher.

Harvey Kaiser, vice president for development at Syracuse University, an expert on college development and construction, and the author of several articles on the subject, said construction costs for New York City range from \$200 to \$250 per gross square foot for new construction. Kaiser's estimates seem to be in line with the actual figures encountered by CSI planners. The per-foot figures presumably do not include the cost of such extras as demolition and asbestos removal, or other "infrastructure" site work such as sewers and sidewalks.

Construction costs, calculated on a square-footage basis, can vary with the type of building being constructed, according to Kaiser. For instance, a library

with few walls and much open space costs less to build than a science building which requires extensive wiring and plumbing.

Kaiser refused to comment directly on the cost of the CSI project, saying he would first have to see detailed plans. He said the projected \$400 million cost might be justified if it included the purchase price of the land and the cost of constructing an electrical substation to provide power for heating and air conditioning units.

CSI did not have to purchase any land for the new campus. Ownership of the 204-acre site was transferred from one state agency, the Office of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities, to another, the state Dormitory Authority.

Also, the new campus will be able to utilize the power plant used by the former Willowbrook State School. Thus far, \$11.8 million has been allocated to refurbish the power plant.

Ever since Richmond College, a two-year upper college located in St. George, merged with Staten Island Community College in Sunnyside, to form CSI in 1976, there have been efforts to unify the campuses.

At one time, the school planned to move into a 110-acre site in Ocean Breeze. The plans went as far as transferring ownership of the land from the state Department of General Services to the state Dormitory Authority.

But these plans were scrapped when the state announced it was closing the Staten Island Developmental Center. Officials said the Willowbrook site offers better transportation and reduced construction costs because the school might be able to use existing buildings.

However, even that solution had its drawbacks. Peter Capone of Edward Durell Stone Associates, the firm that drafted the master plan, pointed out that the size and conditions of existing structures did not allow for their use as a cafeteria and student center, something called for originally.

Current plans call for renova-

tion of 14 buildings into classrooms and offices. The 12 academic buildings will cost \$59 million while the tab for the two administration buildings is put at \$18.5 million.

Five new buildings will go up on the site — a theater and performing arts center for \$39.7 million; a \$34.5 million science building; a \$20 million library; a \$21.5 million gym and day-care center; and a student center, which is expected to cost \$17 million.

A cost estimate provided to state budget makers last week by college officials, shows CUNY also will pay \$9.4 million for demolition of 16 of the site's 30 buildings; another \$18.6 million for "infrastructure" work, including installation of water and sewer lines, electrical cable and computer lines; and \$30.4 million for "sitework" — construction of roadways leading to and from college entrances, parking lots, foot paths and landscaping.

Also budgeted is \$18.1 million for asbestos removal.

The new campus will contain 596,878 net square feet of space (not the greater gross square footage, used to calculate costs), up from 438,282 square feet of space, a gain of 158,647 square feet — or more than 26 percent. More than half the space gained, 82,000 square feet, will be used to house college administration and business offices — a figure development experts say is not out of the ordinary.

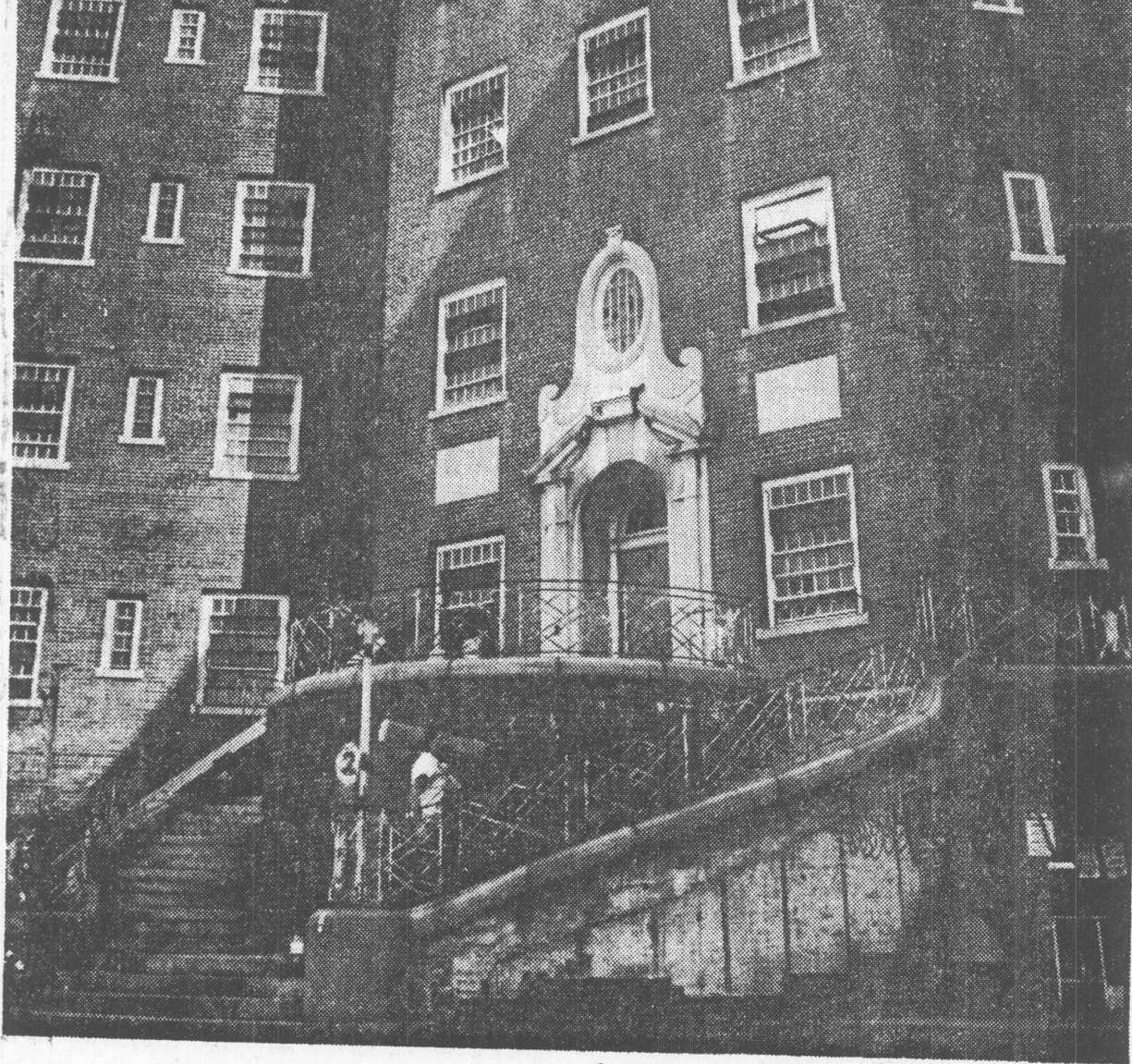
Although uncommon, it is not unheard of for colleges to consolidate their campuses.

Emerson College, a communications arts school in Boston with 2,500 students, located in more than a dozen brownstones scattered throughout the city's Back Bay section, is about to move to nearby Lawrence, Mass.

William Harrold, director of college relations at Emerson, said the school will move to an 84-acre campus that is part of an urban renewal project. The new property, he said, cost \$2.1 million.

Twelve buildings encompassing 500,000 gross square feet of space will be constructed on the new campus, he said, including high-tech radio and television broadcasting facilities and new theaters. The school is best known for its broadcasting and theater de-

Page 2
of
3 pages



ADVANCE FILE PHOTO

Construction workers are shown renovating a building which, when finished, will become part of the new College of Staten Island campus.

partments.

The total cost of the package is \$120 million, according to Harrold.

While no other school in the metropolitan area is building a new campus, one is planning a general overhaul of its existing site.

Gerard Redice, the physical plant manager for Adelphi University, said the Long Island-based school is planning additional dormitories and other buildings for its main campus in Garden City, L.I.

Redice said the school will pay \$145 per square foot for construction of the new buildings.

An additional academic building now going up at Hofstra University will cost even less, according to university spokesman Michael DeLuise.

DeLuise said Hofstra is paying \$80 per square foot for the new building.

Planning and development officials from all the colleges contacted by the Advance said they were pressed for space. None had complaints about the way space had been allocated among the various educational departments and administration at CSI, but all wondered whether the space gained was worth the cost.

In private discussions, one college development officer said CSI would have been better off abandoning the new campus and renovating the Sunnyside campus, perhaps by adding floors to existing buildings.

"All they're getting is consolidation," he said. "They could have gotten a top notch facility for a fraction of the cost by upgrading their existing sites."

Another development officer suggested renting space away from the campuses to ease parking and classroom overcrowding at the Sunnyside and St. George campuses.

Page 3
of
3 Pages