

Board 1 panels split on group home

Residents oppose West Brighton home for retarded adults

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Community Board 1's human resource committee approved a plan for a group home in West Brighton last night, but the West Brighton area committee called for a state hearing on the matter during a joint meeting attended by about 100 area residents.

The coed home for 10 retarded young adults is scheduled to open in the spring at 71 DeKay St.

On Your Mark Inc., a non-profit organization that works with retarded people, will open the home, said the group's director, Eugene Spatz.

Before the votes were cast, more than 30 area residents spoke against the plan before board members in College Hall, in the College of Staten Island's St. George campus.

Their reasons for opposition included fears that property values would drop, the home would create parking problems and local children would taunt the mentally disabled residents, inciting violence.

"I just don't want to come home one night

and find someone sitting on my doorstep," said one DeKay Street resident.

"I'm concerned because I have three young children," said area resident Cathy Filipowicz.

Spatz conducted a presentation, which included a short film profiling the work of On Your Mark. In the film, some of the people scheduled to live in the home were pictured competing in athletics such as gymnastics and weight lifting.

Amid heckling, Spatz said: "I think you'll find the house a very integral part of the neighborhood."

The West Brighton area committee requested a state hearing based on the high level of community opposition to the plan, its costs and an insufficient amount of time to gather "meaningful community input," committee chairman Chris Rooney said.

In its resolution, the human resource committee poked a hole in the area committee's resolution, arguing that the grievances it listed were not legitimate cause for requesting a state hearing on the matter.

Because the committee felt the area was not

over-saturated with similar group homes, it approved the plan.

The people scheduled to move into the home range from age 18 to 25 and are at what On Your Mark officials call an advanced level. Some of them work, others go to school and all of them are involved in recreational activities on weekends and during evenings, Spatz said.

While it is the only home of its kind, it remains one of six group homes scheduled to go before Board 1 in the next few months and one of 25 group homes on the North Shore, officials said.

Board member Daniel Singletary voiced opposition to the lack of collective planning in siting such facilities between city and state agencies and their contractors.

"People have to know what they're going to get," he said.

Funding for the project will be provided by the state Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Spatz said.

A contract has been signed by the owner to buy the house for \$245,000, and renovating the home to suit state regulations will cost about \$160,000, he said.