

Boards unite on social service centers

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Representatives from the three Island community boards and several service-providing organizations last night agreed to form a task force to make the siting of social service facilities more orderly.

Meeting at Borough Hall, St. George, the group discussed the problems they have faced working as individual community boards. Agencies approach the boards to place facilities as varied as group homes and drug treatment centers in their communities.

Sheila Brown-Blei, chairwoman of the Community Board 1 human resources committee, said she hopes the task force, the Tri-Board Human Resource Task Force, will plan for problems and find ways to avoid them rather than respond to problems that already exist.

The representatives agreed to meet four times a year, with the

goal of establishing a dialogue between agencies and communities when considering location of a facility on Staten Island.

Ms. Brown-Blei said she asked the others to form the task force because it is important for the three boards to have regular contact with each other regarding the siting of facilities.

Robert Gibbons, the chairman of the Board 3 human resources committee, noted, however, that each board has different problems and needs because of their location and population. He questioned what help the task force could offer.

"We're looking to work together as a community to serve the needs of our community and to equitably share the services among the community boards," said Kathleen Kennedy-Shields, a representative from the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

The group expressed hope that through regular contact with each other, each board will be better

prepared when an agency approaches them individually with plans for a facility.

They also said they hope to work together to encourage legislation that will make the process of opening facilities more uniform and easier for community boards to handle.

Barbara Waldman, chairwoman of the Borough Board Task Force on Chemical Dependency, said: "The problem is that there is different legislation covering different types of facilities. Programs would really prefer a process to go through."

She suggested that the Tri-Board Task Force might be able to establish voluntary guidelines for Island agencies to follow, even if they don't have the power of law, that would make the process easier for both agencies and community boards.

Through this regular contact, the task force seeks to better assess the needs of Staten Island and determine what services and facilities would best meet

those needs.

Among the problems the task force plans to address are chemical dependency and alcoholism, homelessness, mental illness, AIDS services, youth-in-need, mental retardation and developmental disabilities.

"There are so many areas that we're looking at that it boggles the mind," Ms. Brown-Blei said. "But my fear is that if we don't work together as a body, things are going to be thrown down willy-nilly."

If the group can work to organize facilities somewhat, she said, the needs of the community will be better served.

The group is to include the chairmen of each community board and the chairmen of each board's human resources committee; representatives from all agencies that would seek to site service facilities on Staten Island; and all local elected officials.

The next meeting was scheduled for June 24 at Borough Hall.