

Discussion to ease group-home tension

Community to find out about sites earlier

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ADVANCE SOUTH SHORE BUREAU

A council representing agencies that run group homes on Staten Island told Community Board 3 last night that it intends to set up guidelines for communicating with the public on the siting of the facilities.

In a separate matter, the board's parks committee voted to support a proposal by Borough President Guy V. Molinari to build a recreational center, which would include an ice skating rink, on a seven-acre plot in Princes Bay, between Lenevar Avenue and Maguire Avenue off the Richmond Parkway.

The center would be located on city property, but built privately and leased to a non-profit group. The motion goes before the full board later this month.

The announcement on group homes, by the Staten Island Retardation Disabilities Council, came during a meeting of the board's human resources committee.

"Maybe by opening up dialogue, we can work together better in the future," said Eugene Spatz, a council member. Currently, each agency has its own style of dealing with the public, and a consistent approach is needed, he said. "We'd like to come up with some specific guidelines."

Some of the issues the council seeks to resolve are how and when to go about contacting neighbors of a proposed group home.

The state requires group homes to go through a formal siting pro-

cess, which includes a 40-day period for community boards to hold a public hearing and submit their recommendations and comments. But due to the controversial nature of group homes, the organizations that operate them are looking to open additional channels of communication — such as walking door-to-door in a community — in order to assuage opposition.

Most of the development of group homes in the near future — 20 in the next two years — will take place in the districts covered by Community Boards 2 and 3, which are south of the Staten Island Expressway, said Kathy Kennedy-Shields of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Office (DDSO).

In the Board 3 area, there are seven existing "intermediate care facilities," Ms. Kennedy-Shields said. Three new ones are on the way soon, two of them on Mill Road in New Dorp and Selkirk Road in Rossville.

The Selkirk home met with some resistance from the community, and board members said part of the reason was that the siting came as a surprise.

Board member Raymond Uszacki suggested that agencies, in order to prevent such confusion and lessen opposition, contact civic groups early in the siting process, if only to introduce themselves. "Walking in cold is not the way to do it," Uszacki said. Another suggestion was to set up advisory boards in the neighborhoods of group homes.