

Residents protest group homes

Many at CB3 meeting bring up the homeless shelter issue

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Nearly 100 South Shore residents crowded into Community Board 3 headquarters in Great Kills yesterday for an emotional public hearing on three proposed group homes for mentally retarded adults.

Angry residents who oppose the homes shouted out questions and became hostile at times as they criticized the community board and Mayor David N. Dinkins, and expressed concern that the borough is turning into "a dumping ground" for the problems of New York City.

Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office (SIDDSO) will be operating two of the homes, one proposed for 40 Nash Court, Great Kills, and the other for 770-772 Drumgoole Road West, Annadale. The Brooklyn-based Independent Living Associ-

ation will operate the home at 192 Butler Avenue, Tottenville.

Arthur Palevsky, associate executive director of Independent Living, addressed the group first, followed by Kathy Kennedy-Shields, SIDDSO planning and development director, and Jim Thomas, SIDDSO team leader.

Palevsky said eight developmentally disabled residents would be housed at the Butler Avenue site, with a minimum of four staff members on site 24 hours a day. Thomas said 10 adults would be placed in SIDDSO's two group homes, with a minimum of two staff members on site at all times. Thomas said the adults were severely to profoundly disabled, but according to a site area information sheet given to the community board, the adults are listed as severely to mildly retarded.

Some audience members worried that the number of staff at

each home was not sufficient while others linked the issue of the group homes to the proposed city homeless shelters. "What's the difference between the homeless and the mentally retarded? We're talking about hiding a city problem," yelled one woman.

Although the agency representatives said they were affiliated with New York state, not the city, audience members kept yelling about Dinkins.

"Dinkins wants to destroy Staten Island. Put the homes in the South Bronx," said one man.

Many suggested that Dinkins put the group homes and the shelters in his back yard, not theirs.

Children's exposure to the group home residents was also a concern.

"Why must my children have to see these people? Put them in Mariners Harbor near the Procter & Gamble plant," yelled one man.

Assemblyman Robert Stranieri, who was in attendance, and numerous audience members criticized the agency representatives for poor presentations and vague explanations.

The board's human resources committee met following the hearing and rejected the Butler Avenue and Nash Court sites, citing too many group homes of the same nature in the immediate area.

They accepted the application for the Drumgoole West home because it was not in violation of the Padavan law.

According to this law, the board can only reject a group home for the developmentally disabled if the area is saturated with similar facilities licensed by state agencies, and if the nature and character of the area would be substantially altered.

Stranieri said he has never seen such opposition to group homes for the mentally disabled.

"This is definitely backlash from the homeless shelter issue," he said.