

CB2 committee votes in favor of group homes

Residents vent anger at 'steam-rolling'; full board to vote Jan. 21

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Community Board 2 last night took the first step toward approving two group homes in Dongan Hills and Grasmere after a public hearing at which residents of the two communities voiced opposition to the proposals.

The board's health committee, which conducted the hearing at board headquarters on the grounds of Sea View Hospital and Home, voted in favor of the two facilities — one, a residence for 10 developmentally disabled and mentally retarded adults at 70 Benton Ave., Dongan Hills, the

other, a home for 12 similarly handicapped senior citizens fronting on Hylian Boulevard near Steuben Street, Grasmere.

The full board is scheduled to vote on the resolution Jan. 21. If the board decides the neighborhoods are saturated with group homes and votes against them, the board's objections would be considered by the commissioner of the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), the state agency that oversees such facilities.

The commissioner's decision then can be appealed through the judicial system.

Those speaking in opposition to the homes last night said Dongan Hills and Grasmere already are oversaturated with social service facilities. Furthermore, they said, opening the homes would lower property values and endanger children.

"This Island seems to be a favorite place to bring these people to," said Anna Marie Galante, a board member and Dongan Hills resident. "You just can't keep coming into these neighborhoods and put them (group homes) in one after another."

Speakers representing A Very Special Place, the New Dorp-

of a Very Special Place.

The new homes would help fulfill the needs of local families who can no longer care for their disabled adult relatives, Ms. Benoit said. The homes would cater only to Staten Islanders, she added.

"We're not putting an advertisement in the paper to attract people from all over the city to live in these homes," Ms. Benoit said. "The people we intend to place in these group homes are from Staten Island."

The hearing became tense at times when some in the audience accused board members, A Very Special Place and the OMRDD of "steam-rolling" through approval of the homes despite community objections.

At one point during the stormy meeting a group of 20 audience

members got up and walked out of the conference room, led by a man yelling: "So long. Keep your meeting and shove it."

The outburst came as Joseph O'Callaghan, a Bay Terrace resident and father of a mentally retarded boy, spoke in defense of the homes.

Kathleen Kennedy-Shields, coordinator for residential development for the OMRDD on Staten Island, said her agency had no intention of bypassing the community.

"We always try to take the concerns of the community into consideration and try to work closely with the community in addressing those issues," she said.