

Group homes continue on bumpy road to approval

Angry residents make opposition known

By **KERRY DIAMOND**
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Eltongville and Bay Terrace residents packed Community Board 3 headquarters in Great Kills last night to voice opposition to group homes proposed for their neighborhoods.

The board's human resources committee conducted the public hearings, during which representatives from the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office (SIDDSO) and Inde-

pendent Living Association (ILA) gave presentations on group homes for the developmentally disabled they hope to site in the two communities.

The first hearing concerned 62 Justin Ave., Bay Terrace, where SIDDSO has proposed to house eight moderately to severely retarded adults. Kathy Kennedy-Shields, SIDDSO planning and development director, said the clients will be from Staten Island.

The second hearing dealt with the residence at 524 Lamoka Ave.,

Eltongville, where the not-for-profit ILA wants to house 10 moderately disabled adults.

ILA associate executive director Arthur Palevsky could not guarantee that the residents would be Staten Islanders.

The human services committee voted to approve both sites, but for the Eltingville site members added a provision stating that only Staten Island clients should be housed there.

According to the Padavan law, which makes provisions for the placement of developmentally

disabled group homes in residential neighborhoods, the committee could only reject the sites if there are too many similar group homes in the neighborhood or if the nature and character of the site would substantially alter the neighborhood.

About 100 residents attended the hearings to address their concerns, which ranged from plunging property values to the creation of mini-Willowbrooks to the coming and going of group home staffers 24 hours a day.

While the majority of people

were there to oppose the sites, two people spoke in favor of them. One was Laura Kennedy, a New Brighton resident with a 9-year-old daughter who is developmentally disabled.

"You cannot be afraid of the residents. These homes will enrich your neighborhoods," she said. "Group homes are getting a bad rep. We're talking about the retarded. You have to bear in mind what retarded means."

Many residents and board members criticized the two agencies for their presentations, saying not enough information was

given to answer the questions that keep arising about group homes, such as safety records and property values.

"They have no real presentations. What they do is very unorganized. They have no statistics on home sales or on how the sites are selected. It couldn't hurt them to have these things," said a Totenville resident who lives near the site of a proposed group home.

The human resources committee will be holding a public hearing at 8 p.m. Feb. 11 to discuss another proposed group home at 107 Jumel St. in Great Kills.