

# CB2 approves 2 group homes

## Facilities in Grasmere, Dongan Hills to serve developmentally disabled

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Community Board 2 last night voted resoundingly in favor of two group homes in Dongan Hills and Grasmere after an impassioned public session.

At times, the verbal crossfire became heated between those in the standing-room-only crowd of more than 75 at the board's monthly meeting, held in the nurses' residence on the grounds of Sea View Hospital and Home. Five police officers stood watch over the meeting, which was concluded without incident.

At issue were proposals to locate two group homes for developmentally disabled and mentally retarded Staten Islanders: one, a residence for 10 adults at 70 Benton Ave., Dongan Hills; the other, a home for 12 similarly handicapped senior citizens on Hylan Boulevard near Steuben Street, Grasmere.

Both homes would be operated by A Very Special Place, a New Dorp-based not-for-profit organization, and monitored by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Speakers opposing the homes said both locations were in high-traffic areas that would put potential residents at physical risk. They also questioned the cost-effectiveness of the homes and argued that Dongan Hills and

Grasmere are already oversaturated with group homes and other social service facilities.

While opponents repeatedly said they had nothing against handicapped people living in their neighborhoods, some of those who spoke in favor of the homes defined the opposition as based on prejudice.

Monsignor John Servodidio, pastor of St. Joseph's R.C. Church in Rosebank, compared prejudice against retarded people to prejudice against any minority group.

"If you're a God-fearing person, the retarded have a God-given right to live where they want to live," he said. "If you're not a believer, they have a Constitutional right to live where they want to live. We have a responsibility to protect this right because, remember, when one person loses a right all of our rights are in jeopardy."

Most members of the board seemed to agree with Monsignor Servodidio, giving their approval to both homes. For the Dongan Hills home, the vote was 35 in favor, four against and two abstentions. The Grasmere home passed by a majority of 33 to six, with two abstentions.

Included in the crowd that attended last night was a group of people there to petition the board for assistance in getting a traffic light installed at Victory Boulevard and Wild Avenue near PS 26, Travis.

Earlier this month, city Department of Transportation (DOT) officials said the intersection did not warrant a traffic light. However, the DOT may be amenable to declaring Victory Boulevard between Travis Avenue and the West Shore Expressway off-limits to truck traffic, officials said.

But a ban on truck traffic would be unenforceable and provide little protection to the hundreds of school children who walk up and down the "drag strip" in front of PS 26.

"We cannot accept a Band-Aid solution, such as a truck ban on Victory Boulevard, for such a major problem as we have in front of our school," said Judith Horowitz, principal of PS 26. "Victory Boulevard between Travis Avenue and the West Shore Expressway is a drag strip for cars as well as trucks."

A number of Travis merchants are also against a truck ban, saying it could hurt their businesses.

The board agreed to discuss the issue next month at a meeting of its traffic and transportation committee.

Councilman Fred Cerullo, who initially approached DOT about installing a traffic signal at the intersection, said last night during a phone interview that he was in the process of requesting DOT to reconsider its opposition.

In other business, the board approved a revision of its bylaws in order to make them adhere to the new City Charter. Among other things, the revision eliminates secret ballots and streamlines the board's committee system.

The board also approved a resolution stating its opposition to any present or future budget cuts to Staten Island's schools by the city Board of Education.

In another matter, the board voted to reserve its opinion on the city Sanitation Department's request to the state Department of Conservation to increase the height of a portion of the Fresh Kills landfill in Travis by 50 feet. The board will vote on the whether to give its approval to the proposal after a discussion between board members and Sanitation Department officials that has been slated for March 10.