

Group home separates crowd at CB3 hearing

Committee approves Great Kills site

By **KERRY DIAMOND**
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Friends and foes of residential group homes faced off yesterday during a public hearing at Community Board 3 headquarters in Great Kills.

The hearing, conducted by the board's human resources committee, concerned the placement of a group home for 10 mentally and physically disabled adults at 107 Jumel Street, Great Kills, by the state- and federally funded Association for Children with Retarded Mental Development.

The human resources committee approved the site but was concerned about the ability of emergency vehicles to maneuver on the narrow street.

According to the Padavan law, which provides for the placement of group homes in residential areas, the committee could only vote against the home if the neighborhood is oversaturated with similar facilities, therefore changing the area's character.

Residents who crowded into headquarters to oppose the group home said it would change the neighborhood because of increased activity from buses trans-

porting clients, shift workers arriving and departing, and family members visiting.

Bruce Eckhouse, human resources chairman, explained that change of character only means too many group homes in the area. Some residents then charged that their presence at the hearing made no difference since that was the sole criteria for the committee's vote. They questioned whether the committee was representing the feelings of the community.

One woman said the developmentally disabled should be in hospitals, not residential neighborhoods.

"It's not a hospital these people need. They aren't sick. They just have personal care needs," explained Thomas McAlvanah, the association's residential services director, during last night's presentation.

Other residents said ongoing construction in the neighborhood would only worsen since the association plans to demolish the existing home at the site and build one that is handicapped-accessible.

Ed Edwards, Giffords Civic

Association president, questioned McAlvanah about the costs of the property and construction of the home. McAlvanah said the information was not available until the proposed site was approved and the deal with the developer completed.

Numerous parents of developmentally disabled children attended the hearing to present positive views on group homes. Some chastised the residents for being more concerned about financial matters than human lives.

"Is there no sympathy in your hearts?" asked Lynn Fogliano of Princes Bay, who has an 8-year-old daughter with Down's syndrome. "There are a lot of young women here who could have a retarded child one day. God help you all if it happens to your family."

A few residents took offense at the comments, including Bob Todaro of Great Kills, who lives behind the proposed home.

"I'm sorry, but it is financial. I put my whole life savings into buying my house," he said.

On Feb. 25 the full board will vote on the group home during its meeting at Staten Island University Hospital, Princes Bay. The community contact session of the meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.