

"About 95 percent of the people in that area are all senior citizens," said one resident. "And these people are very fearful for their lifestyle. My mother lives above me. I cannot see her living next door to a home for the mildly retarded. I feel sorry for the kids, but I also feel sorry for my mother."

After other residents voiced opposition, Monsignor John Servodidio of St. Joseph's R.C. Church, Rosebank, delivered an emotional speech in favor of the proposals, telling the audience they couldn't ask for better neighbors.

"Sir, your mother would be the safest woman in the community. These are peaceful people of joy," he said. "You won't hear any loud radios, no souped-up cars, no teenage parties. Most of you have no idea about them (the group home residents); like they might get out

and rape old ladies. Well, we have school teachers arrested for molesting people, even clergy."

In response, New Dorp resident Richard Cicero said he attended the meeting to find out information on the group home since he hadn't heard of the proposal until early this week.

"I respect Father John immensely and I want him to know that most of us aren't against the mentally retarded. But I came here to find out what this program is all about," he said. "I didn't even know it was a house only for the retarded."

Ms. Hodum agreed her group "erred" by not informing the immediate community. To that end, a van will be provided Monday for anyone interested in inspecting a similar Staten Island Aid facility. The van will be in front of the Kells-Grennie American Legion

Post at 2750 Amboy Rd. at 7:30 p.m.

South Beach residents also complained about not being informed of the McClean Avenue proposal, which is slated for 10 adults with moderate mental retardation. Some feared the nearby Stapleton Houses residents wouldn't interact well with the clients; others feared for their property value.

"We tried to blanket that community with information," said On Your Mark director Eugene Spatz. "We're an Island-based organization and you will have an ear if any problems should arise. We're here to work with you."

No Grant City residents were on hand to hear the SIDSSO proposal, which calls for an eight-bed group home, half for the mildly retarded and half for the profoundly retarded.

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