

State may settle campus fight

Cuomo considers creation of special task force

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ALBANY — Gov. Mario M. Cuomo is eyeing the creation of a special task force to determine the future use of the College of Staten Island's property in Sunnyside, sources said yesterday.

Cuomo's office is attempting to settle the political controversy over who will occupy the 42 acres of valuable real estate when CSI combines its Sunnyside and St. George campuses in Willowbrook in 1994. It could also decide which governmental entity should get title to the property and buildings.

Cuomo is looking at establishing a special panel similar to the one set up in the

1980s to deal with the transition of the Willowbrook grounds from facilities solely servicing the mentally retarded to one that will accommodate CSI and state services for people with disabilities.

That panel was set up administratively by the state Department of General Services. John Egan, the current director of the state Dormitory Authority, which now controls the CSI properties, was commissioner of general services at the time and chaired the task force.

"I would certainly say that it is a viable option that should be examined. It's an interesting option," Egan said yesterday.

Mary Ann Crotty, the governor's director of policy management, is now review-

ing the Island land-use issue.

Such a panel could hold public hearings on possible uses for Sunnyside.

Cuomo has quietly intervened in hopes of stopping the political warring between interests of two competing proposals for future use of the CSI site. Touro College of Long Island wants to open a business and liberal arts college there. The Board of Education proposes a multifaceted educational complex.

Republican Borough President Guy V. Molinari is spearheading support for the Board of Education plan and opposition to the Touro proposal. And the Conservative Party has threatened to withdraw its endorsement of any elected official who doesn't back the board plan.

Last week, the Chamber of Commerce, which had originally supported the Touro plan, announced that it would back either

proposal. It had taken political heat from Molinari and others for supporting Touro. Touro has the support of Councilman Jerome X. O'Donovan and has retained the politically connected lobbying firm Davidoff & Molito.

Assemblyman Robert Stranieri, R-Ba Terrace, said yesterday he thinks a task force should be created to hold hearings on what to do with the Sunnyside campus. He suggested that Cuomo name the chairman and Dinkins select a representative on behalf of the city. He agreed all the Island's elected officials and community board representatives should serve on the panel.

At the end of the process, Stranieri said legislation could be approved in Albany to clarify ownership of the buildings and property in Sunnyside, St. George and Ocean Breeze, the initial choice for a CSI campus.

He said they should remain public property and not be sold to any private interests — including Touro.

"These are public properties that should be designated for public purposes — especially with secession," Stranieri said, referring to many Islanders' desire to split from the Big Apple.

"We need modern court facilities. We need state office buildings on Staten Island. In the interim none of the property should be disposed of until the secession issue is determined," he said.