

# Group home plan draws complaints

## Residents say North Shore overburdened

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Whether it's drug dealers, illegal apartments or group homes, West Brighton residents think their neighborhood has plenty — so many, in fact, that they'd be pleased to share the wealth with other areas of Staten Island.

A proposal for a group home on Bement Avenue and discussion about problems on Taylor Street drew about 60 people out last night to ask a question that has become a common theme on the North Shore: Why does Community Board 1 have the lion's share of social services and problems?

The group home, which would house six developmentally disabled adults at 323 Bement Ave., is planned by On Your Mark. All the residents at last night's Board 1 joint West Brighton area/human resources committee meeting at the Staten Island Zoo said they felt the organization itself was well-run and many claimed they didn't have a problem with the people who would live there. Most, however, objected to the siting because they feel the majority of social services unfairly wind up on the North Shore.

"It's not right! Look down in Tottenville. Instead of talking, they'd be having a riot down there," said West Brighton resident John Competiello, referring to an October meeting on a Great Kills group home that drew strong protests at Community Board 3. "We're talking civilly here, and we get stuck with everything."

"What's wrong with the South Shore?" another resident chimed in. "What is it, God's country?"

Some parents said they felt having developmentally disabled people living nearby would jeopardize their children's safety, a

comment that caused Board 1 member George Doyle, the parent of a disabled teen, to leap to the program's defense.

"If I ever come to the point where I can't take care of my son, he'll probably have to go to New Jersey or upstate. We don't have enough services for Staten Island kids. And most of you in the room have friends with handicapped or mentally retarded children. Think about that," he said.

The committees didn't take a vote on On Your Mark's plan because there weren't enough members present, but said they would pass on the comments to the full board.

After the On Your Mark proposal had stirred up the crowd at the Zoo, the committee addressed another situation in West Brighton: problems with drug dealing and illegal apartments on Taylor Street.

Neighbors on that block said one homeowner had subdivided her home to the point where there were people sleeping in the cellar, and claimed she was running the residence as a sort of privately owned group home for mentally disabled drug addicts, but without adequate supervision of the clients.

The house is connected to a series of homes, and residents in those dwellings said they feared the number of people created a fire hazard for all the nearby structures.

Police Officer Tim Ferguson of the 120th Precinct said that as a result of community complaints an officer had been assigned to the block, and patrol cars go through as well. He advised the group to contact the Fire Department about their concerns too.