

Board 3 to consider group home application

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ADVANCE SOUTH SHORE BUREAU

An Annadale townhouse may be the new home for three developmentally disabled adults if a not-for-profit agency receives Community Board 3 approval.

The Center for Family Support, which has offices in New Dorp and in Manhattan, has proposed operating a group home at 12 Challenging Dr. for three young adults who have moderate developmental disabilities, said Steven Vernikoff, the agency's executive director.

The agency has yet to purchase the two-bedroom townhouse, which is in a housing complex. If Board 3 grants approval, Vernikoff said the agency will proceed with its purchase of the home.

The facility must be approved through a site selection process in which Board 3 is required to vote on the issue according to the Padavan Law. The law provides for the placement of group homes for the developmentally disabled in residential areas.

Oversaturation of similar homes in the area or the proof that the home will substantially alter the character of the neighborhood are the criteria needed for a community board to vote down a home, said Ron Byrne, spokesman for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

A meeting will be hosted by Board 3's human resources committee March 21 at 7:30 p.m. at its Rossville headquarters to address the issue.

The reason for operating a group home for so few residents is so the disabled can live in more of a family-like setting, Vernikoff said.

"There has been a change in the past year . . . we try to put people in smaller units where it's easier to make a home environment," he said.

Byrne said smaller group homes are also more cost-effective.

"First and foremost, when it comes to living in a group home — smaller is better to the taxpayer.

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You're able to use conventional housing," he said.

He said larger residences, which traditionally house an average of 14 people, often are in need of costly renovations. There is also an abundance of smaller homes on the Island, he said.

"Houses for three or four people are more plentiful. They're smaller, more intimate, and open up more affordable housing for persons with disabilities."

The future residents of the Annadale home currently live on Staten Island with their families, Vernikoff said. He couldn't say how old the residents are or if

they are male or female.

If approved, the home would have at least two staff members working at the facility 24 hours a day. The residents don't need constant medical attention, and would be going to work or school during the day, he said.

Vernikoff said he doesn't foresee any parking problems since there would be so few staff members at the location at one time.

As to why the agency chose a townhouse for the group home, Vernikoff said, "We try to buy what we like." The agency also liked the Annadale location.

"It seems like a nice community. We think it [the group home]

will enhance the community," he said.

Should the agency ever decide to terminate its operation at the residence, the townhouse would be put back on the real estate market, Vernikoff said.

The Center for Family Support operates seven other small group homes in the Bronx, he said.

The Center for Family Support is a 40-year-old not-for-profit agency, which originally provided services to families with children who have developmental disabilities. The agency has expanded its services to include a number of out-of-home services for individuals who can no longer live with their parents.

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