

# A Group Home In Bayside Receives Approval Of C.B. 11

"At our meeting on Thursday evening we will examine ways of legal action to keep all group homes out of Bayside," said Frank Skala, the President of the East Bayside Homeowners Association.

by Betty M. Cooney

The Thursday night meeting, to be held in the All Saints Community room at 40th Avenue and 215th Street at 7:30 p.m., follows a recent decision by Community Board 11 to approve a group home at 26-14 Bell Boulevard in the Bayside community.

During the hearing, area residents strongly voiced their objections to the placement of the home.

"This is a one family zone," said Mr. Skala, "no group either mentally handicapped, handicapped or nuns should be here. There are three such homes only one half a mile from here and two are one block apart."

Mr. Skala, who has lived in the Bayside community for over fifty years, said his home is over a mile and one half away from the site, added, "group homes need help, but not at the high expense to the taxpayer."

The home, according to Skala, has been purchased for \$375,000, but it's, "worth less than half that amount." "We pay what fair market is," said Ralph D. Farkas, the executive director of PSCH, "check with the real estate brokers, no house goes for less in that area."

The site on Bell Boulevard that was approved by the Community Board, will provide a home like environment for those who are mentally retarded or are developmentally disabled individuals between the ages of twenty-one and fifty five years of age.

The organization that will own the home has, "no funding of its own," complained Skala. "It's State and City funded and they're broke. There are other parts of the City (for such sites). The City owns other buildings that they are not using. The City doesn't have to pay top dollar. It's a dumb move."

"We're funded by City, State, Federal and private sectors," said Farkas, "we don't object to people objecting, but it's unfortunate for those who refuse to open their eyes to what's going on."

The small ranch house will require, "minimal renovations to the interior of the apartments to conform to New York State and City Fire Codes," according to a fact sheet supplied to the Community Board.

"Besides paying \$375,000 for the home, the Cape Cod attic will be extended for bedrooms for eight people where it was originally made for three to four people. Outside stairs will also be added. It can never again be sold as a house," said Skala.

But Farkas told the Chronicle that, "There's no expansion on the second floor. We just have to square off the back."

The residents of the home will be involved in day programs outside the home for approximately 6 hours each day from Monday through Friday and for an additional two hours during evening group activities. On the weekends the residents will learn to use community

facilities such as movies, plays and sporting events for recreation.

"We've been told that many of the residents are hearing and visually impaired. The location is a major thorough fare," Skala pointed out. During the meeting, residents also expressed concern about vans being used to provide transportation to the residents.

"They say we have the NIMBY (not in my backyard syndrome)," said Skala. "But we've welcomed other group homes to our community in the past. We had the Sheild Institute with 100 to 150 retarded residents and it worked well, but that was the right type of building. We also welcomed the Home of St. Mary of Angels because the nuns promised tight control. Unfortunately, the facility is no longer there because they lost their lease."

Information from the PSCH indicates that the site was chosen in accordance with site selection guidelines of the New York State office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and Section 41.43 of the Mental Hygiene Law.

This law, according to Corey Bearak, a neighborhood activist and attorney, "gives local community boards very little ability to say yes or no. A community board can either approve the site recommended by the agency sponsoring, for example, a group home, suggest one or more alternate sites, or object 1) based on the over saturation of the community board with community residences or facilities or 2) based on the over saturation of the same kind of group homes in the area in proximity to the proposed facility."

Bearak added, "most people come

away from the public hearings with the sense that the decision was really made before the hearing started."

The final vote by the community board was to favor the project with a vote of 24 to 4 for the project with one abstention. "The board really voted on the merit of the case. They couldn't find a reason to reject the site," added Farkas.

Bearak suggested that a real problem solving hearing should be held and not one that, "makes them worse. Heated hearings remain the rule rather than the exception."

Bearak suggests that, "the State agency that licenses the proposed facility in a community, rather than a New York City Community Board notify the community members; hold a public hearing in the community near the proposed site; provide a 60 day comment period following the public hearing; and provide residents the opportunity, presently afforded community boards under existing law, to propose alternate sites and / or present arguments of over saturation. The licensing state agency commissioner's designee would review the site based on the testimony presented."

Bearak also recommended, "a prohibition on the acquisition of any proposed site at a cost greater than the market values of any property based upon its zoned or intended use."

While the embers are still hot from the last board hearing, another hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, August 14 at 8 p.m. at PS. 14, 35th Avenue and 214th Place in Bayside to discuss a 12 bed community residence at 39-01 212th Street. "Another residence will also be discussed," added Skala, "but a time and place has not been set."

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