

# Group Homes Proposed in Hampton

*Matthew Sturdevant*

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A state agency might pay to build two or three group homes for people who are mentally retarded at the former Virginia School for the Deaf, Blind and Multi-Disabled campus on Shell Road.

A state-appointed committee is coming up with plans to build 18 cottages across the region that will house some of the mentally retarded — also called intellectually and developmentally disabled — residents at the Southeastern Virginia Training Center in Chesapeake. These are not the same people who were students at the school in Hampton.

The General Assembly approved money to demolish the campus of cottages in Chesapeake. As a replacement, the state plans to spend \$23.768 million on a 75-bed facility in Chesapeake at the training center site and the rest of the residents will be dispersed to 96 beds in group homes across the region, two or three of which could be at the Hampton school site.

Rich Sliwoski, director of the state Department of General Services, said he'll decide in October or November where the group homes will be built. Construction could start soon thereafter and finish in late 2010 or early 2011, he said.

The legislation requires that state officials try to find existing state-owned land to build the group homes, and the former school site fits that description. For 100 years, the state school educated black children who were deaf and blind. It closed in June 2008, and questions linger about what to do with the 76.34-acre property which is assessed at \$13.9 million.

The committee in charge of looking at locations for the group homes will make a recommendation on Sept. 30 to Sliwoski, said Chuck Hall, who serves on the committee.

Hall is executive director of the Hampton- Newport News Community Services Board, and representatives of community service boards in Hampton Roads serve on the committee.

Of the \$23.768 million to rebuild the training center and add new group homes, the state will pay \$1 million for each of six "waiver homes" and \$200,000 for each of 12 intermediate care homes which provide active treatment for the residents, Sliwoski said. A waiver home is for moderately disabled residents while an intermediate care home is for people with severe disabilities.

By taking half of the Southeastern Virginia Training Center residents out of that facility and putting them in homes across the region, this is the first successful, major transition in Virginia from an institutional housing situation to a residential setting for people with mental retardation, Hall said.

The benefit, he said, is that group homes cost about one-third to operate as an institution and the group homes can be closer to the residents' families.

Hall would like to see two duplexes built at the Hampton school site, housing as many as 16 people.