

Wives group wins variance for shelter

By John Koster
Staff Writer

TEANECK — Shelter Our Sisters, the group that provides temporary living space and counseling for battered wives, last night received a use variance to house wives and their children at a former Luther College dormitory.

The board of adjustment voted 7-0 to allow the group to use a former dormitory, which was originally a large, single-family house. It was remodelled by the college, but the campus has been largely abandoned since 1977.

The SOS group, now in smaller Muhlenberg Hall off River Road, has seven wives and 12 children living with two staff members. Funding for SOS activities will come from several county and state sources and a federal grant.

The group hopes to relocate in the dormitory, Grandland Hall, which could accommodate 30 people. The board of adjustment had closed a hearing on June 7 after a dozen residents spoke in favor of the proposal and five residents objected.

SOS, which started eight years ago,

To house women in old dormitory

has been widely praised for protecting battered wives, helping them sort out their problems, and, possibly, to establish new lives after the dissolution of dangerous marriages. The group has been using Muhlenberg Hall, with the cooperation of Luther College authorities, for the past six months.

In another matter, a 7-0 vote crushed a variance bid by dentist Milton Bell, who had sought to turn his office-residence at 765 Queen Anne Road into a full-sized medical building and the building lot next door into a parking lot. Bell's neighbors had argued, successfully, that this would be a further intrusion into their residential neighborhood.

"This town is a good town, and we want to keep it a town, not a commercial

establishment," said one neighbor outside the meeting.

Bell argued at two previous hearings that he should have the right to expand his building, already operated under a variance, because the neighborhood is dominated by the much larger Alexander Summer building and other offices. The neighbors felt that turning his house into a 12,000-square-foot building with a 40-car parking lot would have a domino effect on commercial development of the residentially-zoned neighborhood.

Outside the board of adjustment meeting at the Eugene Field School, the neighbors assembled to try to raise another \$1,000 to pay the expert witnesses they had hired to oppose Bell. Their mood was expansive after besting Bell, whom they regard as a political and economic power in Teaneck. Some neighbors said they first met their neighbors socially when they joined together to oppose the commercial expansion.

"I've lived in London, in Mexico, and in Ridgewood," said one woman with neighborhood pride. "But there's no place I'd rather live than Teaneck."