

division of the Staten Island AIDS Task Force.

Ann Deinhardt, director of the Society for Seamen's Children, which runs foster-care, day-care and teen counseling programs, said Staten Island appeared to have less demand for social services than the rest of the city. "That can lead to denial that the problems exist," she said.

"I really think the people of Staten Island are Garboesque: They want to be left alone," added Jack Schierenbeck of Camelot Counseling Centers, a substance-abuse treatment clinic. "We, around this table, represent pariah groups. I'm sure with secession we'd have less congestion at motor vehicles. We may have better public transportation. But I doubt we'll have better drug treatment or homeless shelters or deal with problems like this with a generous hand," he said.

"Most people came to Staten Island to get away from these problems," he added.

But others, echoing the widespread complaint that Island needs have historically taken a back seat to the needs of the four more populated boroughs, said local social services could fare better if Staten Island stood on its own.

"When you're 400,000 people out of 7 million (people), they don't see you. Our problems are overshadowed by the size of (New York City)," said Thomas Tierney, deputy administrator for the Staten Island Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

Tom Naples, president of the Alliance, speculated that an independent Staten Island would have more money to burn. "We give a lot of money (to the city), but the percentage coming back is not proportionate," he said.

Jane Ernst, deputy executive director of the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, Mount Loretto, said she felt that a new city would allow local service groups to set a new agenda.

"I really think that it's an opportunity, if Staten Island seizes it, to do some very special things," said Ms. Ernst, an Island native who now lives in New Jersey.

But others said the city offers certain advantages. Kenneth Popler, executive director of the Staten Island Mental Health Society, which gets half its funds from the city and half from the state, said New York City provided a national model for the delivery of social services.

Staten Island would lose the city's expertise, he said, if secession is ultimately approved.

Among facilities the Island currently lacks but could build if it sets off on its own, said some panelists, were a city hospital, a walk-in medical clinic for children under 12 and an acute-care facility for children needing psychiatric care.

Jo Kelly, executive director of the Staten Island Teen Pregnancy Network, said the Island also