

Arts, social groups have

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their say on secession

Opinions differ over funding levels on independent Island

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Concerned about losing funding in an independent city of Staten Island, cultural arts groups and social service providers requested support from the local secession panel during a 4½-hour public hearing yesterday.

Speakers offered mixed opinions on secession — some believing their needs could be better met in a separate Island city, while others were concerned that their purpose would be neglected.

But more than either favoring or opposing the issue, speakers were intent on convincing the commission of the importance of their respective services and the need to sustain them.

"Museums open doors to the diversity of the universe, thereby encouraging creativity and visionary thinking," said Hedy Hartman, president of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and

Sciences.

She was concerned that arts funding would be overshadowed by the new city's need for law enforcement, sanitation and transportation services.

Loretta McGinn, executive director for Meals on Wheels of Staten Island, noted that the program serves 500 house-bound Islanders, serving 280,000 meals each year. Forty-four percent of its budget — about \$525,000 — comes from the city, she noted.

The public hearing at Stapleton's First Central Baptist Church attracted about 50 people and was particularly geared to draw comment on social and municipal services, health, housing and libraries.

The Staten Island Mental Health Society, said executive director Kenneth Popler, "has major concerns about its ability to continue to provide services as part of the city of Staten Island."

Pointing to a secession study that said Staten Island gets \$170 million more in city services than it raises in revenue, Popler said he was concerned that his agency's funding would be cut to fill that gap. Of his \$10 million annual budget, about \$3 million comes from the city.

Noting that New York City is a leader in funding for social services for children, he said he feared that an independent Island would be less sympathetic to the cause.

Striking a very different tone were service providers who believed they would receive better treatment under an independent Island government. They said they would not have to compete with so many other agencies for funding, and not have to fight the city's huge bureaucracy.

Dorothy Doran, executive director of the Staten Island Center for Independent Living, lamented

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