

Arts, social groups have

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE ■ FRIDAY, JULY 24, 1992

their say on secession

Opinions differ over funding levels on independent Island

By CRAIG SCHNEIDER
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

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

2
3
Dor

the inadequate services provided to the Island's handicapped. A handicapped person, she said, must make an appointment three days in advance to get a ride for the van service that accommodates the handicapped, but the person will not know whether a van is available until the night before.

"I am concerned that we are not receiving our fair share of assistance," she said, adding, "I believe that if Staten Island were to secede, a better quantity and quality of services would be provided."

Commission members, who are examining ways to cut bureaucracy in a new Island city, asked several speakers whether they favored combining certain agencies, such as cultural arts, parks and recreation. They received mixed reactions.

Some speakers said such combinations could eliminate unnecessary layers of management and decrease bureaucratic red tape,

while others felt uneasy about mixing what amounted to separate interests.

In opposing such consolidations, Kathe Frantz of the Staten Island Cultural Coalition imagined a recreation department gym trainer being assigned to move fragile artwork.

As speakers tried to impress the commissioners with the need for their services, Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano commented that they might be overestimating the commission's power over them. He noted that the commission has

no funding power regarding a post-secession Staten Island. Such funding would come from officials elected at that time. However, the commission will be drafting scenarios for service delivery that could outline a menu of agencies and create a pro forma budget.

The secession commission purposely held yesterday's hearing in a minority community, hoping for more involvement. Commission-

ers noted that the hearing featured the greatest minority turnout of all their meetings.

Helen Settles of Stapleton, however, criticized the commission for being biased in favor of secession and being biased against minorities.

She said, "When you talk about housing, do you mean that people of color will have an equal chance at decent affordable housing without the discriminatory 'steering' to certain sections of the Island? I think not."

Other speakers at the hearing included:

Peter Barbero, chairman of the Snug Harbor Cultural Center; Mary Anne Corrier, borough coordinator for the New York Public Library; John Kastanis, executive vice president of Bayley Saton Hospital; Robert Witkowsky, director of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Service; Paul Galvin, deputy executive director of Camelot Counseling Center; Kate Bennet, executive director of the Staten Island Children's Museum; Diane Arneith, executive director of the Staten Island AIDS Task Force; Lucille Herring, president of the Sandy Ground Historical Society; Philip Straniero of the Staten Island Council on the Arts; Terry Rafferty and William Kammann of Project Hospitality; Mark Herman; Ron Sheppard; David Jones and Joseph Peller.

2 of 2
Jep