



Study will look at whether Staten Island gets fair share of city services

Staten Island Little League

Mayor Bill de Blasio speaks to borough cops during Staten Island Little League opening day in April 2015. (*Staten Island Advance/Bill Lyons*)

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CITY HALL -- Is Staten Island getting its fair share? The "forgotten borough" may soon find out.

The College of Staten Island will study and evaluate city services provided to the borough with \$20,000 in the budget for fiscal year 2016, which began July 1. The discretionary funding was allocated by Staten Island's three Council members.

The study is meant to determine if Staten Island receives an equal portion of services compared to the other boroughs, though the specific parameters have yet to be drawn out.

The formal evaluation is the brainchild of Council Minority Leader Steven Matteo (R-Mid-Island) and his predecessor, former South Shore Councilman Vincent Ignizio.

"Staten Islanders often feel that our home is the 'forgotten borough' because it seems we are consistently overlooked when it comes to getting resources and services," Matteo said.

He and Ignizio believed that there was a need to determine if that moniker is still deserved.

"The data gathered in this valuable study will help inform my colleagues and I as we continue to advocate for Staten Island's needs," Matteo said. "I look forward to meeting with CSI to discuss the parameters of the new study."

Michael Kress, vice president for information technology and economic development at the college, said in a statement that a team of faculty experts and student interns will be assembled to work on high performance computing systems for the project.

"The College of Staten Island remains dedicated to analyzing the needs of our community to ensure that the

Island is equally benefiting from the many services provided to the boroughs of New York City," said Kress, who also heads up the High Performance Computing Center at CSI.

Councilwoman Debi Rose (D-North Shore) agreed to include the study in the borough-wide allocations.

"I look forward to seeing the results of this in-depth study, which will serve as a useful tool for us as we engage in future budget negotiations and aim to better meet the needs of Staten Islanders," Rose said in a statement.

Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito (D-Manhattan/Bronx) had to sign off on all discretionary funding to be included in the budget, including the study, before passage.

"The City Council is proud to work with the Staten Island delegation to support Staten Island and make sure all New Yorkers receive their fair share of city services," Mark-Viverito said in a statement.

Still, the study is a disagreeable development in Mayor Bill de Blasio's relationship with Staten Island.

Spokeswoman Amy Spitalnick pointed to the de Blasio administration's expansion of Staten Island Ferry service and increased funding for road repairs, as well as Hurricane Sandy recovery efforts, when asked about the project.

"Mayor de Blasio has made major investments to improve the lives of Staten Islanders and ensure the borough receives the attention and services it deserves," Spitalnick said, adding, "We welcome all additional data, and will continue to partner with elected officials and communities to further improve services on Staten Island."

SECESSION SENTIMENT

The study brings to mind a central argument behind the unsuccessful Staten Island secession movement.

The campaign began decades ago when a federal lawsuit and court decisions led to a new City Charter that significantly decreased the borough's representation. Without a Board of Estimate and a meager three-member delegation in the City Council, Islanders wondered whether they would lose a meaningful voice in the new government and if they'd be better off going solo.

A state law allowed a commission to study the feasibility of an independent city of Staten Island. **That body concluded that providing current services to such a municipality was possible with existing revenue levels.**

Though a majority of Islanders voted to secede from New York City, the measure ultimately failed in the state legislature.

SHORTCHANGED?

The sentiment behind secession remains. This is particularly felt under de Blasio, who lost the borough in the

2013 mayoral election and remains ideologically separated from many locals. (A poll released on Wednesday found only 19 percent of Island voters approved of de Blasio's job handling, though the margin of error for the borough was high.)

"It's always something that bothers Staten Islanders -- whether they get their fair share," said Richard Flanagan, a political science professor at the College of Staten Island, when he was told of the study.

Flanagan said that there's a case to be made that the borough ends up on the "wrong side of the coin" in the city's budgetary considerations. A study would definitely help local elected officials at the negotiating table when arguing for more borough support.

The detailed evaluation could also fuel another discussion about secession, though a state measure is needed to formally begin that process again.

"The suggestion that somehow Staten Island is being shortchanged is part of the mythology of the borough," Flanagan said of the study. "But I think it might be a little more complicated than that."

The timeline of the evaluation is unclear.

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