

Producer makes pitch for home port

■ Panel will vote Friday on a 6-month trial permit for movie studio

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A Great Kills movie producer made his pitch for the construction of a movie studio on the Stapleton waterfront during a joint hearing of the city's Franchise Concession Review Committee and the Economic Development Corp. yesterday.

In a brief statement to the panel, which met in Manhattan, Robert DiMilia, a partner in Stapleton Recreational Properties Inc., said studio space is greatly needed in the New York area.

He also insisted his company would maintain waterfront access for Island residents at the former Navy home port.

"We see this as the first step ... [there will be] destination attractions so the community can enjoy the waterfront," he said.

DiMilia's longterm proposal includes studio tours, a health club, marina, restaurants, shops, a catering hall, and even a riverboat.

The committee will decide whether to grant a six-month permit to allow DiMilia's investment group — which includes actor Danny Aiello — to use a 47,000-square-foot building and a portion of a second building, beginning in January.

The permit is for a short-term trial period, after which the city will decide on granting permanent occupancy. The plan would then become subject to the city's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, or ULURP.

The monthly rent would be \$1 per square foot, and the city reserves the right to terminate the lease with a 30-day notice.

Yesterday's hearing was more notable for those who were absent than for those who showed up.

Staten Island Borough Hall's representative on the panel, Lee Covino, did not attend.

All four other boroughs were represented, along with staff members from the mayor's office, the comptroller's office and the city Office of Management and Budget.

The only Staten Islander to show at the hearing was Jerry Cammarata of Rosebank, the city youth service commissioner and the Island's representative to the city Board of Education. He told a reporter he was there to support the proposal, but he did not speak at the hearing.

Marlow and Robert Walker of Harbour Entertainment and Brian Palmer of Amerifund International, two of Stapleton Recreational Properties' partners, also attended. Aiello was not present.

Assemblyman Robert Straniere (R-South Shore) sent in a written statement supporting the proposal.

There were no comments or questions on DiMilia's proposal from the panelists. The panel will vote on the permit during a public hearing scheduled for Friday at 10 a.m. at 22 Reade St., Manhattan.

In his statement, Straniere pointed out he had been the only elected official to support the movie studio for about a year.

"With St. George becoming a magnet for new media and re-

cording industry firms, the synergistic opportunities that will be presented by developing Stapleton Studios will be limited only by the imaginations of the creative professionals who settle here," he wrote.

Reached at his office, Straniere said he was "delighted" to see the proposal had reached this point.

"Staten Island will no longer be known as the borough of the landfill or the ferryboat, but as the movie and film capital of the Eastern U.S.," he said. "There is such a demand for space that they are now shooting commercials in Bayonne, of all places."

Straniere said he decided to support the construction of a movie studio because it had the potential to create over 5,000 jobs and contribute to the local economy, with the least amount of capital expenditures from the city.

Cammarata said he supported the movie studio because of the opportunities for education.

"I can only see great things that can benefit our school system," he said.

Island schools can use the facilities for lessons on math, science and literature, he said. Other Island business centers, like the Teleport and Visy Paper, have made similar contributions to the school community, he said.

"Any time a large business comes to Staten Island, I think it's a learning opportunity for students," he said.

Borough President Guy V. Molinari said he was upset by the failure to have a borough representative on the franchise panel.

"I was terribly distressed," he said.

Molinari said Covino, who oversees contracts, had been injured in a recent automobile accident and had asked another person to attend the hearing, but that person did not show up.

"It's the first time that it happened in 12 years. We should have been represented," he said.

Molinari, however, is not a supporter of DiMilia's plan. He said the issues that concern him include the impact the studio will have on the surrounding community and the consideration of potentially better uses for the former home port.

"Since September 11, that property has an enhanced value to the city of New York," he said.

Molinari said past experience has shown that the borough should not rush to grant a permit. Arnie Bagelicious, a frozen-bagel factory which previously used the 47,000-square-foot building, created few jobs for Islanders, he said.

DiMilia said the six-month trial period will show the upside of a studio.

"We have to demonstrate that we can make money and bring productions to the site. If we don't perform, everybody will know it right away," he said.

DiMilia estimates the company will spend a minimum of \$250,000 to \$500,000 to make initial renovations. He is in negotiations with MTV to bring a 26-episode show which will be similar in format to the media giant's Total Request Live concert program.

Should he be successful in the six months, the company will move for a permanent lease for the entire home port, he said. The project would cost about \$125 million and create over 5,500 jobs, he said.