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Sect to participate in hearing today?

By BILL PRESCOTT
Sun staff writer

The Clearwater City Commission opens the second half of its public hearings on the Church of Scientology at 9 a.m. today.

The next four days have been set aside for the sect to present its side of the story. As of Sunday, however, church spokesman Hugh Wilhere said no decision had been reached as to whether the organization will take advantage of its half of the forum.

This past week, Tampa attorney Paul B. Johnson, the sect's attorney, said it is likely he will make

a statement to city commissioners this morning when they gather in City Hall.

During the hearing's first four days, 16 witnesses told stories that alleged the Church of Scientology is a world-wide operation that routinely engaged in covert criminal activity against government officials, ex-Scientologists and others considered "enemies" of the sect. They also charged the sect deceives and brainwashes its members.

One of the main bases of operations, several witnesses said, is Clearwater.

The City Commission approved spending \$110,000 to hold the hearings by hiring Boston attorney Michael Flynn as a consultant and to pay the witnesses' travel and lodging expenses. Among the witnesses were Ronald DeWolf, the son of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, and Scott Mayer, a former sect senior executive who said he handled world-wide infiltrations, conspiracies and smuggling for the church.

This past Tuesday, Flynn challenged the church to present witnesses and evidence for commissioners to examine. As the first phase of the hearing

wound up Saturday, commissioners said they hope sect representatives will appear today to shed light on allegations.

If they do not, City Manager Anthony Shoemaker said, the panel likely will use the time to examine reams of documents Flynn introduced into evidence. During the course of the hearings, the lawyer produced affidavits from about a dozen ex-Scientologists, sect policy letters, enemies lists and orders for covert activities he said originated in Clearwater.

Many of the documents were

seized in FBI raids on the sect in 1977.

The stated purpose of the hearings is to aid commissioners in their decision whether city consumer-fraud and charitable-solicitation ordinances are needed. Flynn's contention is that Scientology engages in deceptive trade practices in sales of books and services.

Sect lawyer Johnson repeatedly has called the public hearings an "unfair" violation of the group's First Amendment rights, a "witchhunt," and a "mockery."



HUGH WILHERE
... Scientology spokesman