



Media Contact:           Shea Communications LLC  
George Shea, Alexis Schneider 212 627-5766

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY SUPPORTS CITY'S CONEY ISLAND GOALS  
Seeks Expansion of Outdoor Amusements  
Opposes Changes that Would Create 10,000-SF Stores

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**Brooklyn, NY, May 6, 2009** -- The Municipal Art Society, a private, non-profit membership organization that fights for intelligent urban planning, design, and preservation, today testified before the City Planning Commission, supporting the city's goals for Coney Island and suggesting improvements to the rezoning plan in the areas of urban design, zoning and preservation.

During the past several months the Municipal Art Society has worked with the staff of the Brooklyn Office of City Planning, amusement experts and with Coney Island community and cultural groups to identify the best ways to restore Coney Island to its position as a world-class amusement destination.

Lisa Kersavage, Director of Advocacy and Policy for MAS, said certain recent changes to the city's plan have been very positive, most notably the Brooklyn Borough President's recommendation for creating a design committee to ensure outstanding architecture. She also highlighted other changes that would seriously harm the district.

"The proposed change to expand the size of retail units to 10,000 square feet would transform the amusement area into a large-scale shopping district, undermining its role as a district of world-class amusements and small local businesses," Kersavage said. "We strongly urge the City Planning Commission to limit the size of stores."

Among MAS's specific recommendations for improving the rezoning plan:

1. **Ensure Surf Avenue has a low-rise South Side by moving the hotels to the North Side of Surf Avenue.** Coney Island is first and foremost a seaside resort, and it's critical to retain the sense of openness, views of the horizon and taller amusements. The vast majority of people arrive at the Stilwell Avenue Station, and Surf Avenue functions as their point of entry into the amusement district. Erecting high-rise buildings there would create a visual obstacle for those visitors. Furthermore, Surf frequently functions as a public space for the events like the

Mermaid Parade and Nathan's Hot Dog eating contest, which we all agree are critical to Coney's success. Those events need an abundance of light and air and a feeling of openness in order to thrive.

Further, high-rise buildings along the south side of Surf Avenue would have the effect of "privatizing" the amusement area behind them, which would feel more like the backyard of private buildings rather than public spaces. The MAS recognizes that the City has recently changed their zoning text to lower the height limit of the base buildings on the south side of Surf Avenue to 45ft which we believe is a positive step. But we recommend moving the hotels to the north side of Surf Avenue and amending the zoning to keep the south side of Surf Avenue low-rise (below 25ft).

2. **Expand the size of the open-air amusement district to accommodate the potential attendance.** MAS commissioned real estate advisory firm RCLCO to identify the key characteristics that would ensure that an amusement area in Coney Island would be successful (which we have submitted for the record). RCLCO estimated that the potential attendance for Coney Island was 3.5M annual visitors or 15,000 visitors at any one time. This requires approximately 25 acres of land set aside for open-air amusements based on a conservative requirement of 75 sf per person. MAS believes the City should set aside more than 12 acres of land for open-air amusements. Acquiring additional land and utilizing 5 acres of publicly owned land could expand the area of outdoor amusements from 12 to 24 acres.
3. **Keep the Boardwalk active with Street life.** The proposed plan seems to envision the open-air amusements directly abutting the boardwalk. MAS believes that the existing bars and fast food establishments enliven and activate the boardwalk and help to create the feel of an urban "street"-like feel. We therefore believe that boardwalk restaurants, amusements and bars should be retained in the new plan.
4. **Protect Historic Resources:** Noting that much of Coney Island's historic fabric has been tragically lost over the years, Kersavage said that immediate action is necessary to prevent this trend from continuing.

"Over the course of our public outreach, we learned that much of the public appeal of Coney Island lies in its heritage, and preserving the structures that remain are a key step toward safeguarding this critical aspect of Coney Island," Kersavage said. "The historic buildings represent a fraction of the land available for new development, and there is no need to make a choice between preservation and new development: both can and should be accommodated."

MAS believes that steps should be taken to protect significant historic structures. The value to Coney Island of landmark designation has already been demonstrated: the designation of the Parachute Jump, Cyclone and WonderWheel

as landmarks arguably stabilized Coney Island during a period when it was at risk of vanishing altogether.

Similarly, MAS believes that preserving the existing unprotected historic buildings and structures is essential to the future success of Coney Island. MAS believes the following buildings should be preserved: Nathan's Famous; Henderson's Music Hall; Shore Hotel; Childs Restaurant (now the Coney Island USA headquarters); the Grashorn Building; the Old Bank Building and the Shore Public Theater. The City should also consider protecting the Astrotower, one of the remaining artifacts from the 1964 World's Fair.