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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY SUPPORTS CITY'S CONEY ISLAND GOALS
Seeks Expansion of Outdoor Amusements, Keeping Surf Avenue Low-rise

New York, NY, July 1, 2009 – Vin Cipolla, the President of the Municipal Art Society of New York, a private, non-profit membership organization that fights for intelligent urban planning, design, and preservation, today testified before the City Council, strongly supporting the city's goals for Coney Island and suggesting improvements to the rezoning plan in the areas of urban design and preservation.

"I am here today to urge the Council to adopt the city's plan for Coney Island – the city's plan is the greatest hope for revitalizing Coney Island, which can not be lost to private development interests," said Mr. Cipolla. "Coney Island is the last great oceanfront park land opportunity in the region --- and Coney's continued demise would be a tragic loss to the citizens of New York, to the country and to the world. MAS strongly believes that the city -- that the public -- must own enough land at Coney Island to ensure a vital amusements district."

"We believe there is enormous opportunity in this area and we strongly support the city's goals toward revitalizing Coney Island," said Mr. Cipolla. "We believe there is enormous opportunity in this area and we strongly support the city's specific goals toward revitalizing Coney Island."

MAS commissioned a report from the real estate advisors RCLCO to study the economic viability of an amusement park in Coney Island. They found that the economics do not currently allow for the creation of an amusement park on privately-owned land and that public investment in Coney Island could have enormous potential public benefit, as it did in places like Times Square and Millennium Park in Chicago.

"MAS believes the city is the only entity that can make this amusement district work and we fully support the city's efforts to acquire private property in the amusement area," said Mr. Cipolla.

Mr. Cipolla said "We hope the City Council will vote to approve the city's plan. We also hope the city will continue in its diligent efforts to consider the following recommendations from the MAS study – so that Coney Island becomes the very best it can be giving New Yorkers the benefits they deserve from all the future development. Our recommendations have been three:

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 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 3.5 million 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 s.f. 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. **Protect Historic Resources:** The historic buildings at Coney Island 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. 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. 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.

MAS believes that steps should be taken to protect significant historic structures. 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.

MAS worked with the staff of the offices of City Planning and Economic Development, amusement experts and with community and cultural groups to identify the best ways to restore Coney Island as a world-class amusement destination. For more information on MAS work at Coney Island, visit <http://imagineconey.com/>.

The Municipal Art Society of New York, founded in 1893, is a non-profit membership organization that fights for intelligent urban planning, design and preservation through education, dialogue and advocacy. For more information, please visit www.mas.org.

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