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***For Immediate Release:***

## **Municipal Art Society Protests Bill to Allow Advertising on Sidewalk Sheds**

Advertising, Currently Prohibited by City, Would Likely Increase Presence of Scaffolding

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**New York, NY, January 26, 2009** -- The Municipal Art Society, a private, non-profit membership organization that fights for intelligent urban planning, design, and preservation, today testified against a bill before the City Council that would allow advertising on sidewalk sheds and undermine previous efforts to improve the appearance of the sheds.

Sidewalk sheds -- scaffolding mandated by law to protect pedestrians during construction on a building -- are necessary for public safety. However, the sheds interfere with pedestrian traffic, harm street-level retailers and create a blight on the city's streetscape, and so it is in the public interest to have them up for the shortest duration possible.

The city has always prohibited advertising on the sheds. However, a new bill before the City Council would remove restrictions on sidewalk shed advertising, further cluttering the visual landscape and providing an incentive for building owners to leave sheds up longer than necessary to extend the advertiser's presence and increase revenue.

"Sidewalk sheds are often left up for years even when no work is being done on a building," said Vanessa Gruen, Director of Special Projects at the Municipal Art Society. "This bill would overwhelm the Department of Buildings by forcing it to enforce required permits." Gruen said that by creating a greater burden on the overtaxed staff of the Department of Buildings, the bill has the potential to diminish DOB's ability to function effectively and to address the life-threatening situations that ought to be its focus.

"This legislation is an imposition on public space with little benefit to the City," Gruen said. "It would be a gift to landlords and outdoor advertising firms at the expense of New Yorkers."

Gruen said the bill would have a harmful impact on the pedestrian experience, creating congested dark spaces, interfering with the business of street level retailers and destroying mature trees that cannot survive when these sheds surround their trunks (some trees actually are cut down to make room for the sheds).

Gruen said that the permitted advertisement will by no means be discreet or subtle. The Council bill would allow the sidewalk sheds to be as much as eight feet tall (conveniently the length of a sheet of plywood) and the advertisement could run the full length of the shed, which on some construction sites can be a block long with the shed wrapping around the corners of the building.

“Given the likelihood of limited revenue generation for the city, what public interest is advanced by this legislation?” Gruen asked. “DOB is already saddled with too many enforcement procedures for which they are under staffed. To add this additional burden will greatly diminish DOB’s ability to function effectively and to fully assess life-threatening situations.”

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

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