



PRESS RELEASE

PRESIDENT OF THE BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

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TESTIMONY BY BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARTY MARKOWITZ TO THE NYC CITY COUNCIL ZONING AND FRANCHISES SUBCOMMITTEE REGARDING THE CONEY ISLAND PLAN

GOOD MORNING CHAIRMAN AVELLA AND SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS.

WORLDWIDE, THE WORDS “CONEY ISLAND” CONJURE “AMERICA’S PLAYGROUND,” RENOWNED FOR ITS OUTLANDISH AMUSEMENTS, BEAUTIFUL BEACH, BUSTLING BOARDWALK, FOOD, ENTERTAINMENT AND UNIQUE SENSE OF AFFORDABLE FAMILY FUN.

AS YOU MAY KNOW, I GREW UP IN POVERTY IN BROOKLYN—AND CONEY ISLAND WAS WHERE I SPENT SUMMERS AS A CHILD. MY MOTHER TOOK ME AND MY TWO YOUNGER SISTERS THERE BECAUSE IT WAS FUN AND AFFORDABLE—AS IT IS TODAY, AND AS WE MUST ENSURE IT REMAINS FOR FAMILIES IN THE FUTURE.

WE ARE NOW WELL INTO THE VERY ACTIVE 2009 SEASON, AND I’M PROUD TO SAY THAT ALL THE CONEY STAKEHOLDERS HAVE STOOD TOGETHER TO SAY LOUD AND CLEAR THAT CONEY ISLAND IS INDEED “REALLY FUN—AND REALLY OPEN!”

AS WE SPEAK, FAMILIES ARE EXPERIENCING THE THRILL OF DENO’S WONDER WHEEL AND THE WORLD FAMOUS CYCLONE ROLLER COASTER, THE ENERGY OF OUR GREAT MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM “THE CYCLONES,” FRIDAY NIGHT FIREWORKS, AQUATIC ADVENTURES AT THE NEW YORK AQUARIUM AND THE SIDESHOW WACKINESS OF “CONEY ISLAND USA. THANKS TO THE MAYOR AND TACONIC, WE’VE GOT RINGLING BROTHERS “CONEY ISLAND BOOM-A-RING,” AND THOR EQUITIES HAS BROUGHT US THE “FESTIVAL BY THE SEA.”

COMING SOON, OF COURSE THERE IS THIS COMING WEEKEND’S NATHAN’S HOT DOG EATING CONTEST, AND LATER ON THIS SUMMER THE SIREN FEST — AS WELL AS THE SEASIDE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES WHICH I HOST AT ASSER LEVY PARK—WHICH WILL PRESENT THIS SEASON CREDENCE CLEARWATER, GLADYS KNIGHT, HALL AND OATES, BLONDIE, PAT BENATAR, AND DONNA SUMMER! — TO NAME A FEW.

LET’S FACE IT, AS WE CONTINUE TO WORK TO ENSURE CONEY’S BRIGHT FUTURE, WE DON’T ALWAYS AGREE ON EVERYTHING. BUT CONEY ISLAND IS BIGGER THAN ALL OF US.

THIS CITY HAS BROADWAY, THE STATUE OF LIBERTY, THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE—AND YEAH, CONEY ISLAND. IT WAS HERE BEFORE WE WERE EVER THOUGHT OF, AND WITH OUR STRONG COMMITMENT, IT WILL BE HERE AND THRIVING LONG AFTER WE'RE GONE.

WE MUST PROTECT IT—AND ENSURE IT A 21ST CENTURY HEYDAY.

AS WE MOVE FORWARD, I AM TEMPTED TO OFFER THE CITY COUNCIL THE SAGE ADVICE OF YOGI BERRA WHO SAID, “WHEN YOU COME TO A FORK IN THE ROAD, TAKE IT!”

I AM SURE ALL OF US WISH THAT THE DECISIONS THAT MUST BE MADE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CONEY ISLAND COULD BE THAT SIMPLE. THERE ARE REAL DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BETWEEN THE MAYOR AND THOR EQUITIES, THE MAJORITY PROPERTY IN CONEY ISLAND'S AMUSEMENT AREA. TODAY, THOSE DIFFERENCES MAY SEEM INSURMOUNTABLE – JUST AS THEY SEEMED TO BE WHEN THE COUNCIL AND THE MAYOR SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESSED PLANS FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF WILLETS POINT IN QUEENS.

I AM CONFIDENT THAT UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG, SPEAKER CHRISTINE QUINN AND COUNCIL MEMBER DOMENIC RECCHIA THAT A SOLUTION WILL BE FOUND THAT WILL CREATE A CONEY ISLAND GREATER THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN AND RESPECTS ALL OF THE AREA'S PROPERTY OWNERS.

NOW, LET'S GET TO THE MATTER AT HAND.

I COMMEND THE MAYOR AND CITY OFFICIALS FOR THIS CONEY ISLAND PLAN, WHICH PRIORITIZES THE CREATION OF A YEAR-ROUND, AFFORDABLE CONEY ISLAND FOR THE 21ST CENTURY. AND IN MY CHARTER-MANDATED LAND USE ROLE, I WAS PLEASED TO APPROVE THE CITY'S PLAN—WITH SOLID RECOMMENDATIONS THAT I HOPE THE COUNCIL WILL ADOPT.

LET'S START WITH MY CALL FOR MORE AMUSEMENTS.

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY VIEW THAT CONEY SHOULD NEVER BE A PLACE FOR QUOTE-UNQUOTE “BIG-BOX” RETAIL. CLUBS—YES! RESTAURANTS—YES! BOWLING ALLEYS—SURE! A WATER PARK—ABSOLUTELY! A CONVENTION CENTER—WHY NOT? HOTELS—OF COURSE! HOTELS ARE PART OF THE CONEY TRADITION (THERE WAS ONCE A HOTEL SHAPED LIKE AN ELEPHANT!) BUT CONEY ISLAND MUST NOT BECOME A MALL.

CONEY ISLAND MUST BE AN AMUSEMENT PARK—A VIBRANT PART OF THIS CITY'S TOURIST ECONOMY.

TO THAT END, I AM OVERJOYED THAT THE PLANNING COMMISSION ADOPTED MY CALL FOR MORE GROUND FLOOR AMUSEMENTS—THEY AGREED THAT WHEN FAMILIES WALK TO THE BEACH ALONG STILLWELL AVENUE AND WEST 10TH STREET, THEY SHOULD FEEL THEY HAVE ENTERED A VERY SPECIAL PLACE.

MY RECOMMENDATION WENT FURTHER, HOWEVER, CALLING FOR AMUSEMENT SPACE OF 150,000 SQUARE FEET—IN THE SPECIAL CONEY ISLAND DISTRICT—AND I URGE THE SUBCOMMITTEE TO CALL FOR THIS AS WELL. AS I SAID, FAMILIES COMING TO CONEY ISLAND SHOULD BE FILLED WITH AWE AND EXCITEMENT.

IN HIS BOOK “CONEY ISLAND LOST AND FOUND,” AUTHOR CHARLES DENSON DESCRIBES CONEY’S LUNAPARK AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AS A PLACE “FILLED WITH ‘FANTASY ARCHITECTURE,’ TOWERS, MINARETS, COLONNADES, CASTLES, SPIRES, DOMES AND GLOBES—EVERY INCH OF THEM STRUNG WITH LIGHT BULBS—THE PARK WAS KNOWN AS THE ‘ELECTRIC EDEN.’”

I SAY WE NEED TO ESTABLISH A DESIGN COMMITTEE TO ENSURE THAT THE CONEY ISLAND AMUSEMENT AREA REMAINS UNIQUE, CREATIVE AND ICONIC IN ITS ARCHITECTURE, SIGNAGE, LIGHTING AND PRESERVATION OF APPROPRIATE BUILDINGS AND AMUSEMENTS—PRIORITIZING OVER-THE-TOP DESIGN—AGAIN, I URGE YOU TO TAKE UP THIS RECOMMENDATION AS YOUR OWN.

FINALLY, AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, I ASKED THAT WHEN WE IMPLEMENT THIS PLAN, WE “BUILD WITH CONEY, BY CONEY, AND FOR CONEY”—BY GUARANTEEING LOCAL JOBS, AFFORDABLE HOUSING, REWARDS AND RESOURCES FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES WHO HAVE “KEPT THE FAITH” THROUGH CONEY ISLAND’S LEAN TIMES.

I CALLED ON THE CITY TO REQUIRE THE FOLLOWING IN ALL “REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS” IT ISSUES:

- THAT THERE BE TARGETED OUTREACH SO RESIDENTS OF CONEY ISLAND BENEFIT FROM NOT LESS THAN 50 PERCENT OF JOBS RESULTING FROM THE CONEY ISLAND PLAN
- THAT UNION LABOR BE USED WHERE APPROPRIATE, AND ALL CONTRACTORS AND EMPLOYERS PAY PREVAILING OR AREA-WIDE WAGES FOR EVERY TRADE AND POSITION
- THAT TO THE GREATEST EXTENT POSSIBLE, CONTRACTS AND SUPPLIERS BE MINORITY AND WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESS ENTERPRISES (MWBE) AND BROOKLYN BUSINESS ENTERPRISES
- THAT EMPLOYERS HAVE A TRACK RECORD OF SUCCESSFULLY PERFORMING SERVICES, PAYING LIVABLE WAGES AND COMPLYING WITH ALL LAWS — HEALTH AND SAFETY, WAGE AND HOUR, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW
- THAT ALL BUILDING SERVICE WORKERS BE PAID PREVAILING WAGE AND SUPPLEMENT RATES
- THAT LIVABLE WAGES BE PAID FOR NON-UNION ELIGIBLE JOBS
- AND THAT DEVELOPERS BE ENCOURAGED TO PROVIDE SPACE FOR SMALL LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS AND BUSINESSES

BOTTOM LINE, IF YOU LIVE IN CONEY, YOU SHOULD BENEFIT FROM ITS REBIRTH.

AND SINCE CONEY RESIDENTS WILL PLAY HOST TO THE WORLD, I HAVE ASKED THAT WE SHOW APPRECIATION TO CONEY FAMILIES BY PROVIDING LOCAL RESIDENT DISCOUNTS FOR AMUSEMENTS TO RESIDENTS OF ZIP CODE 11224. THESE WOULD BE MODELED ON DISCOUNTS PROVIDED TO RESIDENTS OF RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, WHO VISIT KING’S DOMINION AND SOUTHERN CALIFORNIANS WHO GET DISCOUNTS FOR DISNEYLAND, LEGOLAND, AND OTHER ATTRACTIONS.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS ALSO SUGGESTED WE SHOW APPRECIATION FOR BUSINESSES LOYAL TO CONEY—NOTABLY, DENO’S WONDER WHEEL AND GARGIULO’S RESTAURANT—BY WORKING WITH THEM ON SPECIFIC ZONING REQUESTS.

ANYONE WHO KNOWS ME KNOWS THAT AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS NEAR AND DEAR TO MY HEART. THAT IS WHY I RECOMMENDED THAT THE CITY INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE CONEY WEST OR CONEY NORTH DISTRICTS FROM 20 PERCENT TO 35 PERCENT OF TOTAL UNITS THROUGH THE DISPOSITION OF CITY PROPERTIES.

CONEY ISLAND IS INDEED A NEIGHBORHOOD WITH MANY NEEDS, AND I BELIEVE THE CITY SHOULD ADVANCE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION TO BRING A DESPERATELY-NEEDED GYMNASIUM TO PS 188 FOR USE BY RESIDENTS ON CONEY'S WESTERN END.

I ASKED THAT THE ABE STARK ICE RINK OPERATE UNTIL A REPLACEMENT IS CONSTRUCTED AT AN ALTERNATIVE LOCATION. AND I RECOMMENDED TO COMBAT A LACK OF SUPERMARKETS, THE CITY REQUIRE IN FUTURE RFPS THAT THE DEVELOPER OF ONE OF THE CITY-OWNED PROPERTIES IN CONEY WEST OR CONEY NORTH PROVIDE A QUALITY SUPERMARKET FOR RESIDENTS.

IN CONCLUSION, CONEY ISLAND MUST RETAIN THAT SPECIAL AMBIANCE AND "CLASS" (IT CAN CHARM YOUR SOCKS OFF OR BE "IN YOUR FACE").

SO I ALSO ASKED THAT THE CITY LOOK INTO THE FEASIBILITY OF BRINGING BROOKLYN'S EIFFEL TOWER—THE LANDMARKED PARACHUTE JUMP—BACK TO LIFE AS A THRILL RIDE. WHAT BETTER SYMBOL OF REBIRTH COULD THERE BE THAN TO HAVE THIS ICON UPDATED WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY?

IN CONEY, IT'S ALL POSSIBLE.

AS WE KNOW, CONEY ISLAND'S 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY HEYDAYS INSPIRED EVERY SINGLE GREAT AMUSEMENT PARK THAT CAME AFTER IT, AND IT MUST LIVE ON AS A PLACE WHERE FAMILIES OF EVERY MEANS CAN COME TO PLAY—AND TO DREAM.

WE OWE IT TO THESE FAMILIES TO WORK TOGETHER NOW TO GET THE JOB DONE—TO MAKE CONEY ISLAND ONCE AGAIN THE "AMUSEMENT EPICENTER" OF AMERICA—FOR THE REST OF THIS CENTURY AND BEYOND.

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