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**Statement of Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick
Before the New York City Arts Commission
Regarding the Redesign Plans for the North End of Union Square Park**

May 15, 2006

I would like to express my disappointment with the flawed and inappropriate plans submitted by the Parks Department for the redesign of the north end of Union Square Park. In a community that is bereft of substantial park space, yet over-saturated with dining establishments, it is terrible that the Parks Department has proposed to privatize the historic pavilion structure that defines the North Plaza by installing yet another restaurant. The pavilion is by far the most aesthetic feature in the north end of the park and has traditionally served as a gathering place for rallies, speeches and public performances. This important, artful structure belongs to our community and must remain open and accessible to the public year round.

Although the Parks Department argues that the pavilion is seldom used for the purposes of organizing today, they neglect to mention that one of the main reasons for this underuse is their Department's failure to properly maintain the structure. For years, the pavilion has been left in disrepair with visible signs of deterioration. In addition, the Parks Department has installed fencing and Parks equipment inside the pavilion, deterring any sort of use by park patrons and organizations. If the city had provided the appropriate funding to the Parks Department over the last decade or more, there might have been the funds available to restore the structure. The pavilion could provide an invaluable amenity to our neighborhood and I am confident we would see a surge in its use if it was restored, much like the south end of Union Square experienced when it was refurbished.

Although I believe we are all in agreement that the playground space in Union Square needs to be extended, I remain concerned that certain features of the Parks Department plan will interfere with maximizing this much needed playground space. For example, the comfort station that is being proposed by the Parks Department for the playground patrons will remove even more open space from this relatively small park. This restroom structure would not be necessary if the restrooms in the pavilion remained open to the public, as opposed to restricting their access to restaurant patrons only. In addition, by

extending the playground along the southern end of the pavilion, the plan creates a fluid connection from the playground to the pavilion. This design encourages children and their caretakers to make use of the pavilion while in the sunken playground and serves as an extension of this play space. However, by installing a restaurant in the pavilion, the Parks Department's plan restricts access to the pavilion for playground patrons, minimizing the open space for children and their caretakers.

It is quite clear that installing a restaurant in the pavilion will negatively impact the community's use of Union Square while also limiting public access to a historic and park enhancing structure. Maintaining the pavilion for public use must be a critical component of any design plan for Union Square, which the Parks Department has failed to do. For these reasons, I strongly encourage the Arts Commission to reject the Parks Department plan presented today.