

October 30, 2001

Our Ref. No. UW/Letter/052

The Legislative Council
Room 109
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road Central
Hong Kong

Attn: Mrs. Rita Fan, G.B.S., JP
President

Dear Sirs,

***The Solution to Hong Kong's Economic Recession:
Development of North West New Territories***

In view of the present economic crisis, we suggest the government to look into the plan of development of North West New Territories. We believe this plan will allow a steady economic growth for the next 20 years, for the benefit of Hong Kong at large.

A. Development of North West New Territories

Observations

1. The area of land, mostly flat, for the North and West New Territories from Sha Tau Kok to Tuen Mun North identified as development, is in the region of about 130 sq.km which is just slightly less than the total area of the present total developed area in Hong Kong. If such development is planned for one-third of the density of the existing population, the whole development can take at least 2 million people.

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2. Most of the land are flat area or slightly sloped and will be served well by rail system in the future. Thus no extensive infrastructure will be required making physical development not difficult.
3. Previous planning on the area by government is considered piece meal with focus only on Hung Shui Kiu and Kwu Tung Areas covering less than 10sq.km. A more comprehensive plan is needed to cover the whole area.
4. The land is scattered with open garages and open container storages which need to be tidied up. Historical buildings on the land have to be conserved.

Recommendation for action

1. Patches of land adding up to 130 sq.km should be developed as low density zones to house 2 million people in the coming 20 years. As the development in the less than 5sq.km area in Hung Shui Kiu will generate 27,000 employment opportunities, this plan will provide various and numerous job opportunities for people in Hong Kong, safely and steadily bringing Hong Kong into the next economic boom.
2. The 3 main objectives of this recommendation is to:
 - (i) Harmonize urban development with environmental protection, allowing economical growth with the building of world class city.
 - (ii) Integrate cultural heritage with modern technology, maintaining our historical roots with real estate development.

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- (iii) Incorporate infrastructure into economic development in both local and national scale.

3. There are 3 'Nots' to this recommendation:

- (i) Not led by sheer land administration, but is a project with integrative and balanced approach using urban design and community participation to achieve the objectives. This also means a great degree of freedom for design and development with government not attempting to formulate the building form as per existing lease conditions and building code.
- (ii) Not led by transport, but is a thorough consideration for the various needs of people regarding work, open space, quality of life, community and amenities facilities.
- (iii) Not led by commercial decisions, especially catering for big developers, but provides opportunities for small developers, even an individual from the community, to participate in developments.

4. There are 3 physical characteristics for this recommendation:

- (i) Spontaneous growth of city with a well considered base of urban design and integrative planning.
- (ii) Super deck for environmental friendly city with buildings, amenities and pedestrians on the deck but vehicular transport, building services and utilities facilities under the deck.

- (iii) A new type of low-rise developments containing features such as pitched roofs, double internal volume of spaces, terraced or stepped housing. For instance, such Canadian or European like buildings can be established, say, in Kam Tin and San Tin areas. Such area can be made up of small lots which can be purchased by the individual for development.
5. The government should carry out the followings as the initial steps:
- (i) Make a comprehensive plan for the development of NWNT, addressing potentials and constraints.
 - (ii) Set up government offices in NT to solve issues relating government with the community. This is to avoid government offices being centralized in the city and to initiate development by the presence of government bodies in the NT.
 - (iii) Explore transport and development linkage with China from the Pearl River Delta Region to connections with great cities such as Shanghai and Beijing.

B. Associated development of heritage sites

Observations

1. The NT villages, such as the 5 major clans of Tang, Man, Hou, Liu and Pang, form the cultural roots of Hong Kong. Combination of folk stories and physical relics will make a living history, contributing to culture, tourism and education.

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2. Adjacent environments of historical buildings need improvement to be compatible with the historical buildings. For instance, the bare ground in front of the Tai Fu Tai 大夫第, at Tung Chau Wai of San Tin, can be paved and landscaped appropriately. Another example is the polluted open ditch adjacent Kat Hing Wai 吉慶圍 should be improved, at least to suit hygienic conditions. Also, the Tsui Shing Lau 聚星樓 is located almost under the West Rail flyover.
3. Some of the historical monuments are still under private ownership, e.g., the Pun UK 潘屋 adjacent Pokoi Hospital, Sin Shut Study Hall 善述書室 and Shek Lo 石廬 in Lung Yeuk Tau, etc. These monuments are being put in a very embarrassing position. They are shut down and cannot be demolished by the owners, but neither can they be visited by the public.
4. Convenience of accessibility made possible by future rail connections will also speed up developments around these monuments. So a plan is required to keep adjacent developments harmonized with historical buildings.
5. In the vicinity of these historical trails, a lot of unsightly garages and container storage areas spoil the tranquility of the rural background.

Recommendations

1. The existing monuments should be well maintained and immediate surroundings to be improved by hard and soft landscaping.

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2. Certain village houses can be transformed or adapted re-used as modern functions, such as museum, gallery or vernacular hotel.
3. Monuments under private ownership should be acquired by government through direct purchase or transfer of development potential. Acquisition is not easy but has to be done.
4. Better signage, trails, supporting amenities, tourist information, etc., should be made for immediate improvement.
5. Plan for future, regarding adjacent developments, should protect the heritage buildings with unobstructive view, which implies low-rise developments in the neighbourhood.
6. Environmental friendly cities, close to these monuments, should have physical form compatible with rural scene, instead of rectangular container like forms, dictated by Lease Conditions for development.
7. Collaboration with different government departments is necessary for promotion and better preservation of our cultural roots. An integrative plan for preservation of cultural heritage and promotion of tourism is expected from government.

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C. Associated development of high speed rail

Observations

1. Mainland China is actively pursuing on the development of high speed trains, possibly Maglev trains, for mass transportation within the country. So the consistency with such development is important for Hong Kong as an integral part of China.
2. The important cities in China are: Beijing at the north, Shanghai at the east, Chengdu at the west, Wuhan at the Centre and Hong Kong at the South. So the natural geographic location makes Hong Kong an important node for train transport.
3. Hong Kong is the first city at the South of China to be an entrepot for sea goods transferred into land goods. Connection to fast train is therefore important. Otherwise, competition from adjacent cities such as Shenzhen and Xiamen may weaken Hong Kong's position as a logistic centre.
4. Fast speed train, like Maglev trains, travels on a straight line with curves having radius larger than 5 km. Therefore, preservation of space for the construction is vital and has to be done immediately otherwise, future urban development will make this route almost important after a few years.

Recommendations

1. From Shenzhen, the train has to enter Hong Kong at Huanggang Port, passing the edge of conservation area at NW New territories, then as a flyover on the existing San Tin Highway and Castle Peak Road from Maple Gardens to Au Tau, where it goes through a tunnel under Tai Lam, emerges

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at Tsing Lung Tau and bridges over to Yam O at Lantau. Here, it will be a train exchange terminal with the existing Airport Rail.

2. Minimum environmental disturbance is caused. The only problem is the conservation land near Huanggang can be made up by an increase of conservation habitat in the adjacent Deep Bay. The train on the existing highway as a flyover has little increase to existing pollution.
3. The location of Yam O is excellent because of proximity to the Chep Lap Kok Airport, the future Disney Land, connection with container terminals at Kwai Chung and future Peng Chau/Kau Yi Chau area. With its immediate connection to the Airport Rail, the transfer of passengers to urban areas is very convenient.
4. Potential development for Yam O is also much improved with expectations for various activities possible.
5. The high speed rail will serve the distant Chinese cities with the container trucks continue to serve the nearby cities around Kwung Tung province.

Enclosed please find a brochure illustrating over suggestion for your consideration and possible implementation.

Yours faithfully,

WONG Wah Sang
Chairman of Urban Watch
Enc.
WSW/cc

.c. Urban Watch Members