



11 April 2005

Clerk to Subcommittee on
West Kowloon Cultural District Development
Legislative Council Secretariat
3/F Citibank Tower
Garden Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Sir

Submission on the Proposals to the West Kowloon Cultural District

We welcome the opportunity to give views on your proposal for the development of the West Kowloon District. I forward herewith a submission which summarizes our views and feedback on your consultation paper.

In preparing this submission, we have also consulted other Zonta Clubs in Hong Kong and incorporated their views in the submission. The submission therefore represents the views of the following Zonta Clubs:

Zonta Club of Hong Kong
Zonta Club of Kowloon
Zonta Club of Hong Kong II

We hope that our observations are helpful and wish you every success in achieving your purpose.

Yours sincerely

Agnes Chan
President
Zonta Club of Hong Kong

Encl.



**Submission on the
Proposals to the West Kowloon Cultural District**

1. Introduction

1.1 Proposals for the development of the West Kowloon Cultural District have engendered a great deal of public interest, owing to the importance and size of the project and the proposal to award the entire development to a single developer. Also, attention has been drawn to the fact that the project will place the responsibility of cultural development in the hands of developers.

1.2 There are currently three sets of proposals on view at City Hall: World City Culture Park (Henderson Land), Sunny Development (Sino Land), and Dynamic Star International (Cheung Kong/Sun Hung Kai), all of which incorporate the canopy feature which was the winning design by Norman Foster in an international competition held in 2001. All three designs contain a mixture of commercial and residential developments with performance venues and four museums, tentatively designated: Museum of Modern/Contemporary Art, Museum of Design, Museum of Moving Image (Film), and Ink Museum (Chinese paintings). The developers have variously sought the advice of major western museums (Guggenheim, Pompidou) regarding the set-up and governance of its museums, and engaged international architects to help with their design.

1.3 A fourth proposal for the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) has been put forward by Swire Properties in which it has deliberately omitted the canopy, and not conformed to specifications. This proposal aims to treat the subject of cultural development in a more holistic manner by:

- (a) Re-developing the waterfront HK Cultural Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui;
- (b) Proposing the construction of a new museum complex on the Tamar site;
- (c) Developing the West Kowloon site primarily as a residential area with parks, performance venues and a cruise ship terminal;
- (d) Re-developing the former Kai-Tak airport site as a marina with low rise residences; and aviation museum; and
- (e) Enhancing the natural beauty of Victoria Harbour by converting all shoreline areas into park land.

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Due to the favourable response of the public towards this proposal, Swire has arranged to display their design in Pacific Place for public viewing until the end of March. We hope that the Government will keep an open mind and carefully examine and consider the content of this proposal.

1.4 While the government is currently seeking public views on the WKCD project, it is a good moment to set aside concerns about the details of the development, and re-consider the project in terms of its fundamental purpose and objective: **How can the WKCD project best serve the needs of the arts community as well as the community-at-large in a broader sense?**

1.5 To answer this question, one must first look at the needs of the arts community.

2. Museums

2.1 Hong Kong currently has 21 museums, ranging from the main Hong Kong Museum of Art in Tsim Sha Tsui, the History and Science Museums in TST East, the Heritage Museum in Shatin to smaller museums such as the San Tung Uk Museum in Tsuen Wan. They are all under the administration of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and thus form part of the Government, staffed primarily by civil servants. Attendance figures at most museums (apart from the Science and History Museums) reveal that they are under-utilized, although bus service is provided in some programs to bring school groups to the museums.

2.2 While most museums are by nature not cost effective and require subsidy from public funds, they enrich the quality of our lives and our culture. To serve this valuable public role, museums must be able to offer programmes which are of interest, relevance and educational value, and be able to reach the community by promoting its utilization and becoming part of the day-to-day life.

2.3 It is helpful to refer to the characteristics of successful museums and take steps to rectify our current situation:

- (a) Museums are location-sensitive. Venues which are not easily accessible cannot expect high attendance rates on a regular basis. Examples are the Heritage Museum in Shatin, Hong Kong Film Archive in Sai Wan Ho, Museum of Coastal Defense in Sau Kei Wan, etc. (Museums built in WKCD may well fall into this category). Although this does not mean that less accessible museums are of lesser

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value, however, better programmes, publicity and transportation are needed in their case. By contrast, the HK Cultural Centre and HK Museum of Art in Tsim Sha Tsui, both occupy very advantageous and accessible positions on the harbour-front and could benefit greatly from re-development.

- (b) Major art museums need good collections. Many art museums worldwide depend on private donations as an important source for art works. This usually involves a combination of tax incentives by the government, and a close relationship between curators and private collectors. The fact that HK museums are government institutions diminishes the incentive on the part of museum staff to cultivate such relationships. Without this “culture”, it is difficult to expect any museum to acquire good collections on a self-financing basis. The HK Museum of Art in Tsim Sha Tsui has the potential to greatly enhance its collection through donations from private art collectors in Hong Kong. New museums, such as those proposed for the WKCD however, would be lacking a basic collection and would have to rely on the creativity and ingenuity of its curators to present good temporary exhibitions. Successful examples of this are the Macau Museum of Art and the Tate Modern in London.
- (c) How should our museums be administered? Many of the museums in Hong Kong still operate in the same manner as in the 60s and 70s, which reflects the passive and backward thinking of top museum staff. Consider the possibility of taking all existing museums out of the Leisure and Culture Services Department, and setting up an independent, quasi-government Museum Authority consisting of full-time paid government representatives, arts administrators, curators, artists, financial advisers and fund-raisers to oversee its administration. Such an Authority would be charged with negotiating/overseeing and subsequently administering these cultural facilities. Individual museums may continue to receive the same government funding support, and keep the current staff structure, but in time greater flexibility may be introduced to the management and financial structure of the museums. This independence will have the effect of stimulating motivation and creativity among the staff. The new Authority can be charged with negotiating and overseeing the cultural developments in WKCD site, as well as other related developments. At a later date it may also be in charge of administering these facilities.
- (d) How would the cluster of museums in WKCD be funded? The revenues from private development on WKCD (or in other designated areas such as Kai Tak) may be earmarked specifically for arts and culture development which include

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new building or renovation of existing buildings as well as other related resource requirements listed as follows:

- Museums
- Performance venues
- School & studio facilities for artists
- Fittings for each facility
- Set-up cost for art collections
- Recurrent cost for these facilities

This can be achieved through either a guaranteed provision coming from the developer for a specified period, or a fund from the sale of land in the surrounding area, or an endowment consisting of properties in the area which would generate adequate income per year.

(e) Are four new museums necessary? Four museums are being proposed for the WKCD. They are to be designated: Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art, Chinese Ink Museum, Museum of Design, and Moving Image respectively. Before embarking on this ambitious building plan, it is worthwhile to consider the following:

- (a) Is West Kowloon an easily accessible area for museums and will the location attract good attendance so as to make them sustainable?
- (b) Will the four museums, on their own, possess significant collections and attract sufficient public interest in those subjects?
- (c) Is it cost effective to build and operate four separate museums on the same site?
- (d) Would it be more viable instead to build one single Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art with different departments and ample exhibition space, together with an art school and studio spaces for artists-in-residence/educational facilities attached?

3. Publicity

3.1 Lack of publicity is one of the main reasons for the poor attendance of some current museums. Placing advertisement posters in bus stops and public areas throughout the territory, regular newspaper advertising of future events, are ways of reaching out to a wider public. The same applies to performance venues. The Government, when granting

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land leases or modifications, should consider retaining rights to advertise Government events and services in prominent locations, in the same way as APIs in TV channels.

3.2 The Tourism Board should consider a more systematic approach in publicizing museums and performances, bearing in mind that different venues are under different streams of staff or organization. The Tourism Board may also make reference to some international cities, such as London and Paris, which provide bus services that take visitors around to museums and sights. Users purchase a day pass and can get on and off at any of the designated stops along a circular route during that day. Promotional pamphlets for museums, concerts and performances can be made available at the airport arrival hall next to a ticketing booth catering for all shows in town.

4. Performance Venues

4.1 Performance venues, unlike museums, are less location-sensitive. Current plans for the WKCD would be suitable for performance venues. In addition, serious consideration should be given to providing a “home” for major performing groups, such as the HK Ballet, the Symphony Orchestra, etc. for practice and rehearsal venues which they are currently lacking. With the large spaces available in West Kowloon, this is a good opportunity to build such facilities to enhance the development of performing arts groups.

4.2 There is currently a need for better programmes and training facilities in the performing arts. The Government should have a policy on the extent of support to arts and performing groups, and decide how far its support to these groups could fit into the work of arts training institutions.

4.3 The Government should also explore the alternative of adding new rehearsal facilities to existing structures such as the HK Academy of Performing Arts and the HK Cultural Centre.

5. Artists' Communities & Academy of Visual Arts

5.1 In China, particularly Beijing, there are a number of highly successful artists' communities in which artists live and work in close proximity to each other. This close contact between artists is highly stimulating and helpful to artists who otherwise tend to



work in isolation. Certain museums in China have even set up adjacent studio facilities where established artists are invited to work as artists-in-residence.

In Hong Kong, a similarly active community of artists would enhance the cultural identity of local artists, give them a focal point of interaction and exchange, and add great cultural value and interest to our community. The location of an artists' 'village' would best be decided by consultation with the artists themselves. However, the WKCD would not be a suitable site for such a community, as it would be artificial and removed from the artists' natural neighbourhoods.

5.2 There is a strong momentum for the development of an Academy of Visual Arts in HK bringing together the fragments scattered in various institutions. This is the only opportunity for HK to build such an institution adjacent to a museum. Example of such successful partnerships is the Art Institute in Chicago.

6. The Canopy

6.1 The canopy as designed by Norman Foster was part of a broad concept for an undefined cultural area. At that time none of the facilities had been clearly thought-out. Appealing as the concept may have been, the reality is that the canopy will be very expensive to build and even more difficult to maintain. It may or may not trap excessive heat underneath it, it may or may not prevent vegetation growth from lack of rainfall. It will certainly block views across the harbour. In the current context, the canopy is an irrelevant and almost undesirable feature.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The WKCD project presents the Hong Kong government with unique challenges and opportunities: The opportunity to take the lead in guiding the future development of the arts and culture, tempered by a deeper understanding of what the needs of the arts community and the community-at-large are and how they may be best served. We also have the opportunity to beautify our harbour which is the most unique and visually magnificent feature of all. There is a strong feeling in the community against further reclamation works on the harbour and the government would do well to heed this.

7.2 We urge the Government to approach the concept of the WKCD with great caution. In view of the value of the 40 hectares of land on this harbour-facing site and the

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recurrent financial burden on the Government if the project fails, the Government should look at WKCD from a more global angle. We would like the Government to discontinue the current tender process and redefine the requirement and specification of the WKCD.

In summary, we hope that the Government will review and consider the following before taking any further steps:

- (a) review once again whether the facilities it plans to build on West Kowloon are those needed by the community, including a new museum complex which would combine different but related subjects in modern art as a showcase of modern culture;
- (b) examine if the proposal of allowing non-core developments (i.e. residential and commercial) would provide an “incentive” for private developers to make use of the project to pocket the profits from the sale of such developments, instead of focusing on the sustainable development of arts and culture;
- (c) devise a more reliable monitoring authority to oversee the planning and construction of the project, as well as the implementation of the objectives set out in this project;
- (d) review whether West Kowloon is suitable as a comprehensive cultural district in terms of its location and land value;
- (e) review whether the land could simply be made a combination of parkland (without any canopy), and possibly some residential areas which could be designed to house performance venues which also provide “homes” for major performing groups;
- (f) consider the need for an Academy of Visual Arts; and
- (g) examine the feasibility of setting up a quasi-government Museum Authority to oversee the management, funding and operation of all government-funded museums;

Finally, we urge that the government take this opportunity to preserve and beautify the harbour.

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