

## **Introduction to the Planet-Time Alternative Vision for WKCD**

As part of the public consultation period that began with the presentation of the plans and models of the short-listed respondents to Government's Invitation For Proposals ("IFP"), for the development of the West Kowloon Cultural District ("WKCD"), Mr. Marinov and his research and development company, "**Planet Time**" have formed an interdisciplinary team that seeks to address some of the challenges that the proposed development presents.

We think that all interested parties can agree that the proposed development of the WKCD presents both tremendous opportunities and tremendous challenges and should acknowledge the great significance of the WKCD in shaping the identity of Hong Kong as a vital and vibrant Asian capital of the 21st century.

Currently, there are three short-listed respondents to the Government's all of whom have done an admirable job in presenting a comprehensive vision for the site that conforms to the extensive parameters for development detailed in the IFP.

However, in the spirit of the public consultation period, and after careful consideration of the responses of the short-listed proponents, we have worked to formulate a new vision for the WKCD which seeks to better address the many challenges which such an important development presents.

While we share many of the same elements in our different approaches to the development of the WKCD, we are currently operating outside of the development constraints according to which the short-listed responses were shaped and have been able to draw from the publicly voiced concerns and criticisms of the different approaches.

For example, we are free to pursue alternative ideas to the Foster-style canopy – we currently favour a series of interconnected geodesic structures that are evocative of a dragon's body and which utilize the latest and most innovative construction methods and materials.

We also believe that a casino should be part of the development - it is noteworthy that Singapore has recently allowed for the construction of a casino in an effort to promote tourism and economic development near the "Esplanade" center that Singapore built in 2002 to serve as a cultural hub – the parallels to Hong Kong and the WKCD are not lost on us.

Our initial vision for the site as outlined in the seven-minute video segment entitled, "Enter the Dragon" was a response to the government-mandated public consultation period that seeks to address the technical, conceptual, cultural, environmental, financial, and administrative challenges that the proposed development presents. Our work on the project is based on seeking an innovative and integrated solution to these challenges, conceived by an interdisciplinary team, that constitutes part of the public

consultation process and which also incorporates feedback from individuals and community groups representing a broad spectrum of public interests and concerns. While addressed to a greater or lesser extent by the short-listed respondents, there are many challenges to the proposed development that beg for truly long term and innovative solutions. These challenges include:

- Environmental issues with respect to both air and water pollution;
- Lack of a truly innovative response to the cost and aesthetic issues that are raised by a canopy-type design concept as detailed in the Foster conceptual plan;
- A demonstrated and sustainable vision for the promotion of the arts, culture, public open space and the more general idea of the collective or public good which might be measured expressed in terms of community and economic development.

The conceptual plan and model created by the Planet Time team takes an insightful look at all of these issues, and offers real solutions:

- Environmental questions about the pollution caused by the cross harbour tunnel are taken seriously, and the plan seeks to integrate waterfront development and new public space with broader community goals of creating a less-polluted harbour;
- A financially viable and architecturally innovative approach to the canopy concept;
- A hybrid of public and private development that utilizes creative financing and revenue sources that would ensure the long term vitality of cultural development at the site;
- The incorporation of the views and feedback expressed in the public consultation process by both individuals and community groups representing a broad spectrum of public interests

Planet Time wishes to remain flexible and espouses an organic approach to development. It is not a necessary component of the Planet Time vision that a single developer be chosen for the entire project. Indeed there are many inherent tensions in the development of public works and arts and cultural facilities by a private developer. Development and subsequent management of “world-class” cultural facilities by a single private developer greatly increases the risk that the resulting development will fall short of its potential and may even result in a “white-elephant.”

The Planet Time team continues to work on the details of its vision and to present this vision to public, private, and government bodies.

## **Overall Design Concept**

Our overall design concept celebrates Hong Kong's Chinese culture and heritage – the main dome that will cover the “cultural headland” and the smaller interconnected structures represent a dragon. With the addition of the 488m People's Pagoda, we will have one consistent structural design running through the whole site. Our design philosophy has even been endorsed and refined by a local feng shui expert.

While allowing for individual buildings, structures, and open spaces to be developed separately by different developers through the Government's usual tender process, we believe it is critical to embrace the canopy concept as the unifying element which will serve to define and identify the WKCD as a whole.

Our design incorporates the idea of an all-weather canopy, but we do this in an innovative way that no other developer has proposed – by using environmentally friendly geodesic architecture. This allows for a total alfresco experience with shelter from Hong Kong's fierce sun and drenching summer rains, due to both shade and a cutting-edge environmental control system that are innovative architecture and construction materials will provide.

This canopy will harness the intensity of the sun's rays to create spectacular illuminated visuals by day and we will use our own revolutionary, patent-pending technology to create the world's largest animation and imaging screen on the ceiling of the dome, even by night.

In addition to the aesthetic and environmental advantages afforded by the geodesic construction and the use of space materials and engineering (as seen in recent projects of a global stature such as the UK's Eden Project and the Beijing Olympic swimming pool), we project a significantly greater area of the site to be covered, at a lesser cost than seen in the three short-listed responses to the Government's IFP.

Using the same assumptions that were used in, “An Academic Financial Study for The West Kowloon Cultural District”, commissioned by The Hong Kong Arts Development Council, we project an approximate construction cost for the canopy for any of the three short-listed respondents in the range of HK\$2.0 to 2.5 Billion (also assuming that use the Government baseline of 55% site coverage).

Planet Time's approach to the canopy concept will cost, on average, about 60% of the per-square-metre cost of the more conventional construction and design approaches of the short-listed respondents. As currently conceived, the Planet Time solution would provide about 20% more coverage than the minimum required in the IFP:

Projected total coverage of geodesic dome and connected structures: 26 ha  
Projected total cost of geodesic dome and connected structures: HK\$1.5 Billion

## Arts and Culture

Paramount in our conception of cultural development in the WKCD is the notion of the site developing into an area which serves as both an anchor and a catalyst for the sustainable growth and nourishment of the arts in Hong Kong.

We believe it is the aspiration of the people of Hong Kong to be considered residents of a “world-class” city with “world-class” arts and culture. Achieving such a vision will not happen overnight. Presently, only three cities can claim such a position: London, Paris, and New York City. Hong Kong has the potential to take the cultural lead in Asia.

We perceive there to be two overarching concerns for the development of arts and cultural facilities in the WKCD:

- That the physical structures alone, although necessary in the long-term, will not be sufficient to establish Hong Kong as a true global center of the arts and culture. Hong Kong must make a concerted and broad-based effort to formulate a forward-thinking cultural policy that is not simply dictated and managed by a single private developer and a few international consultants but rather, is shaped by a guided evolution of policy and facilities that recognize the particular strengths and synergies of Hong Kong;
- That, in support of the growth of arts and culture in the WKCD (and by extension, Hong Kong) the expense of such support should not be underestimated and in order to be grown and then sustained at a “world-class” level must be able to tap funding sources beyond what can be expected to be generated from the private property development (residential and commercial) portions of the WKCD site.

Planet Time advocates a more flexible and organic approach to the development of cultural facilities in the WKCD. This can be achieved by the establishment of a government authority that can invite and vet individual proposals for cultural facilities/institutions as the need arises within the context of a cultural policy directive. The exact number and nature of the facilities to be built should be open-ended and the development of each should be carefully considered by government and the public.

Utilization rates for many notable Hong Kong cultural facilities such as the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of Art have been in decline and the level of funding for existing institutions such as the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts despite having increased greatly since its inception can still be considered inadequate, especially in terms of a “world-class” school for the performing arts.

“An Academic Financial Study for The West Kowloon Cultural District”, commissioned by The Hong Kong Arts Development Council concluded in May 2004 that the development approach as outlined in the IFP and to which the three short-listed consortiums of private developers have responded is sufficient to acquire art exhibits of

values compatible to those of the Hong Kong Art Museum but that in the long-term, however would be “insufficient to operate the Arts & Cultural portion, if it were run on government principles (those currently adopted by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department); but marginally sufficient, on commercial principles.”

This does not appear to be a good recipe for the creation and continued sustainability of arts and cultural institutions (theatres, museums, and schools of the fine and performing arts) which even approach a “world-class” level.

So, in addition to allowing for a more flexible development of new cultural facilities, where a single “cultural package,” proposed by a single developer does not have to be “accepted blindly,” Planet Time’s vision for the development of WKCD seeks creative solutions to finding adequate funding of the arts in the WKCD.

The most straightforward way to generate additional revenue to help fund the arts and culture portions of the development, is to simply increase the plot ratio of the development (more specifically, to increase the plot ratio of the residential and commercial) and this is why the three short-listed respondents have all proposed plot ratios (ranging from 2.5 to 3.3) which are higher (by 40% to 80%) than the government’s baseline plot ratio of 1.8. Even with these much higher densities of residential and commercial development on the site, funding for the arts by a single private developer will only seek to reach a level that can be supported by the scope of the private development and will have no long-term flexibility or ability to anticipate the kinds of funding shortfalls which may occur if the quest for cultural development does indeed aspire to achieve “world-class” status.

Alternate funding sources can and should be found if a “world-class” cultural development is to be realized and sustained in the WKCD. Planet Time believes that the optimal solution would be the creation of an upscale casino within the “tail” section of the WKCD that would provide a boost to tourism and the local economy while also providing an ongoing revenue source for the arts and culture. An entity like the Jockey Club which has a long history of using such revenue to fund and promote public interests would be an ideal candidate to operate the casino. Tourists could patronize both the arts and the casino, and a tremendous synergy could be created.

Singapore has recently allowed for the creation of two casinos, one of which is to be located in the immediate vicinity of the, “Esplanade” a performing arts center integrated with a large retail mall that Singapore built in 2002 in an effort to become a cultural hub. Merrill Lynch estimates that the proposed casino will generate US\$2 billion in annual revenues.