

HONG KONG ALTERNATIVES

An advocacy group unaffiliated with any commercial or political groups, committed to the development of the West Kowloon Cultural Site as a Culturally integrated Green Park for best interests of the Hong Kong people.

TO : The Honorable Alan Leong
Chairman
The Subcommittee of the WKCD
Email : cshiu@legco.gov.hk

SUBJECT : HONG KONG IS LAGGING BEHIND CHINA &
GLOBAL CITES IN GREEN POLICY

Dear Mr. Leong,

Views & Recommendations from Hong Kong Alternatives

I acknowledge with thanks your letter dated May 3, 2006 to the undersigned to solicit views on the way forward for the WKCD. As the Hong Kong Alternatives has been consistently advocating an integrated CULTURAL GREEN PARK for the WEST KOWLOON SITE, it is encouraging that the government has made some positive moves in the direction. Nevertheless, the lack of government pronouncement about a world class green park is of concern to the HKA. In this regard, I would like to articulate our views again on:

I. Rationales of a WKCD CULTURAL GREEN PARK

Hong Kong - A Green City?

China launched the “Promoting a Green China is Everybody’s Business” campaign in the early 90s, and most impressive results have become evident across the country, from southern cities like Zhuhai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Xiamen, Ningbo and Shanghai to northern cities such as Beijing, Qingdo, and Dalian. New waterfront parks, promenades, and public green spaces have enriched and improved the quality of life in these cities and districts.

Hong Kong has made many claims to be Asia's “World City”, yet has not embarked on a similar campaign to “Promote a Green Hong Kong”. In many respects, Hong Kong is falling behind in comparison to mainland cities, let alone to other world cities such as

London, New York or Singapore. Hong Kong currently has some of the lowest per capita parkland per resident, with less than 10% of the amounts found in London or New York.

Hong Kong would do well to follow the precedent set by many international cities, including Chicago, New York, Singapore, Sydney and Vancouver, which have emphasized greening the city centers as well as their waterfronts.

(Please see Appendix for images of some of these World and China Cities waterfronts developments).

In all of these cities, the leadership in both public and private sectors has realized the importance of a more sustainable and greener urban development plan. It provides not only a healthier lifestyle for its residents, but also will create places that can compete to attract and retain business and tourism.

Hong Kong lags behind in adopting a greener urban development plan, and must realize its claim on “Asia's World City” is slipping away. The WKCD site therefore represents a golden opportunity for the SAR Government to reclaim that title. While the government decision to discard the most recent WKCD tender proposal is a step in the right direction, it must still direct the development toward a world-class Cultural Green Park, and away from another speculative development. The residents of Hong Kong have expressed their strong support for a green park with cultural facilities, and have shown little desire for any residential or commercial development on the WKCD site.

Public Support for a WKCD CULTURAL GREEN PARK:

Hong Kong Alternatives (HKA), a citizen advocacy group unaffiliated with any commercial or political groups, has canvassed extensively in favor of a Cultural Green Park at the WKCD site. HKA aims to give voice to the silent majority of the public that supports a world-class harbour front park for Hong Kong.

As a public service, HKA co-sponsored a public opinion survey by the University of Hong Kong in early January 2006. The findings, presented in a press conference by Professor Robert Chung Ting-yiu on January 23, received widespread press and TV coverage on January 24th.

For clarity, the key findings are summarized below:

1. Public Awareness of the Original Zoning of the WKCD site: 59% of the survey respondents were unaware of that the WKCD was originally zoned for a green park, with no speculative development.
2. Cultural Green Park: Over 81% preferred a Green Park with cultural Facilities for the WKCD while only 11% preferred cultural facilities with residential and commercial development.

3. Cultural Authority: Majority support for an independent Cultural Authority Board to supervise the planning, development and management of the Cultural Green Park.
4. Asia's World City: The HKU survey revealed that the majority of the public believed Hong Kong is at best comparable to major Chinese cities like Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai in terms of sustainability and green parks, but 64% found Hong Kong to be far behind international cities like London, New York, Sydney, Toronto, and Vancouver.

While the government has taken preliminary steps to address the public concerns regarding the WKCD, Hong Kong Alternatives is still deeply concerned with the lack of the government clarity on the "GREEN PARK" component, as mandated by the general public.

Green Park Benefits:

The WKCD site commands a panoramic view of the Hong Kong Harbour, Lantau Island, and on a clear day, the spectacular sunset that makes Hong Kong the Pearl of the Orient. It is therefore too valuable of a site to be auctioned off to private developers, even if tendered to multiple parties.

To improve the quality of life for Hong Kong residents and to create legacy for future generations, the WKCD site must be developed into an integrated Cultural Green Park along the entire waterfront. The world-class park should provide plenty of space for: open green areas, recreation and nature trails, water features, public spaces such as a speaker's forum; amphitheatres and venues for performances and other cultural arts, park side cafes/restaurants, and other unique features directed at both locals and tourists. The WKCD site has the potential to become a focal point for the social and cultural life of Hong Kong.

The following points provide some of the important reasons why Hong Kong is in need of a major urban green park:

1. High Density Living- As one of the most densely populated urban centers in the world with over 50,000 people/sqm, Hong Kong residents are constantly exposed to stressful environments. Parks and open space can provide refuge from these urban stresses. The HKU survey revealed that 62% of the people interviewed believe Hong Kong does not have sufficient open space and green parks
2. Lack of Urban Parkland/Open Green Space- The urban areas of Hong Kong and Kowloon have an extremely small ratio of per capita Urban Parkland, (est.) .05 Hectares per 1000 people. Other world cities like New York or London have over 10 times the amount of per capita parkland.

3. Environmental Enhancement- Hong Kong is suffering from increasing environmental pollutions. The trees cover from a green park at the WKCD could remove from the air several tons of pollutants annually. Over 90% of the HKU survey want Hong Kong to become a more environmentally friendly city, and creating a major urban park would be an important step.
4. Community/Public Health Interest- Air pollution abatement can help lower the incidence of respiratory diseases such as asthma. According to public health data from China for 2005, 30% of the world's 4 million deaths from chronic respiratory diseases were within China. Parks can also help reduce obesity and enhance senior citizen's health and well-being as they provide much needed space for exercise. Parks can facilitate civic activities and help to foster better community spirit
5. Tourism Benefits- Hong Kong is already well known for shopping and commerce as well as the new home of Disneyland Hong Kong. A cultural green park will become a major new attraction and vantage point onto the city, where international visitors and locals alike will find a stroll along the waterfront front promenade a memorable experience. New York's Central Park, for example, attracts 20 million visitors annually

II. Creation of a West Kowloon Cultural Authority Board

90% of the people polled in The HKU POP survey overwhelming support the planning and development of the WK site by a quasi-Government Authority Board. While the government has been making a sincere effort by creating three subcommittees to look at the Tourism, Cultural and Financial aspects of a revamped WK cultural development, HK Alternatives recommends that:

1. The government appoints a Selection Committee with the mandate to appoint and recommend the Chairman of the Cultural Authority Board, who will then together with the Selection Committee appoint between 10 -15 Board Members
2. Composition of the Selection Committee: The number, preferably no more than 7, shall be distinguished community leaders of highest integrity, politically non-controversial, patrons of arts and cultural promotion; committed to making Hong Kong Asia's World City.
3. The WK Cultural Authority Board will then be charged with the master planning, financial planning, execution, and management of the Cultural Green Park
4. The WK Cultural Authority Board can review/refine the three subcommittees and Create a fourth one, the Green Park Subcommittee

III. Financings of the West Kowloon Cultural Green Park

1. Green Park: As the site is reclaimed parkland and belongs to the Hong Kong public and taxpayers, the question of “how do we pay for it?” should not be an issue at all. As the park design, landscaping, horticulture, and associated amenities are not excessive, public appeal for funding for legacy should be readily feasible; matching fund and other creative financings should be readily accessible.

A typical example of largely “self-financing” would be the “Millennium Park” of Chicago (see attached reference); The Atlanta “Olympia Plaza”, a centre stage during the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympia, was financed creatively and entirely by citizens of Atlanta via sales of centenarian bricks. Therefore, it is the obligation of the government to put the public interest foremost ahead of commercial interest.

2. Cultural Infrastructure: This is a Government investment for the future legacy of Hong Kong. Again legacy of rich benefactors can be readily identified. Most of the world famous cultural facilities were supported through private donations coupled with government financings.
3. Land sales of the sites vacated by the Museums of Science, History, Arts, Space Museum, and the Cultural Centre would generate windfall returns to finance the future cultural hub.
4. Any responsible government should deem it a duty to allot a portion of the taxpayer money for the continuous development and maintenance of green parks. China requires 5% of all property investment to be spent on environmental improvement, and that all industrial development is to set aside 20-30% of the site for greenery. To finance the post war reconstruction, West Germany imposed a “Restoration Tax” on all taxpayers following the WWII in order to restore the church ruins and other cultural facilities destroyed during the war.

VI. The Government’s Underlying Principles for the WKCD (ref. questions 11 &12)

7a. HKA would like to know whether the government is still intent on speculative development.

9. Since the government has no intention to locate the CACF along the waterfront of Victoria Harbour, does it mean that this most valuable piece of real estate will be for speculative development? If so, this would be contrary to the public view.

Thanks again for your patience to review our comments above.

Yours sincerely,

(email signed)

Ken Wai

On Behalf of the HK Alternatives

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Attachment:

- 1. World Cities Waterfront***
- 2. China Cities Waterfront development***
- 3. Chicago Millennium Park – Self-financing Plan***
- 4. Hong Kong Alternatives' proposed Cultural Green Park concept***

World's leading cities make their waterfront green
and accessible to the people :
BOSTON AND CHICAGO



World's leading cities make their waterfront green
and accessible to the people :
TORONTO AND VANCOUVER



World's leading cities make their waterfront green and accessible for the people :
SYDNEY AND SINGAPORE



China cities are aggressive on GREEN promotions :
GUANGZHOU AND SHANGHAI



Ningbo



Green Parks funding by Corporations & Charity - CHICAGO MILLENNIUM PARK



A West Kowloon Cultural Green Park – Hong Kong meeting the GREEN challenge!



WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL GREEN PARK

A Cultural Green Park featuring a wide range of Cultural Facilities and a world class Urban Green Park.

A concept presented by the Hong Kong Alternatives (www.hkalternatives.com)

