

Civic Party Position Paper on Cultural and Heritage Preservation

1. Cultural and Heritage Preservation built on Determination and Vision for Cultural Advancement.

In drawing up policies for 'Heritage and Cultural Preservation', a determination and belief in the value of 'culture' is fundamental. Our approach should be multi-ethnic and open-minded with particular emphasis on nurturing local culture. Public forums and discussions should be held, and a road map be drawn as how to best educate the public in understanding what 'culture' means for our city. We should then follow by establishing a development proposal that is flexible, rational, open, forward thinking, adaptive, inclusive, energetic, and could best serve both the public and private interests.

We should learn from successful examples abroad, so Hong Kong could develop a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted cultural scene based on a deep understanding and appreciation for local 'culture'. We should seek to undertake policies which are democratic and open. Only through this mind set and attitude can our cultural policies become truly meaningful, effective, sustainable and open.

2. Adoption and Acceptance of International Standards on Cultural and Heritage Preservation.

International conventions have been held over the years in an effort to establish detailed guidelines, standards, planning, management and protection strategies for cultural heritage and historically valued sites; e.g. the **Venice Charter** of 1964, **Burra Charter** of 1999 and the **Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China** issued by China ICOMOS in 2000. The government should study these precedents, and adopt aspects that are relevant when drawing up the blue print. The government needs to recognize that current policies are seriously outdated and not inline with public expectations.

We need to establish a set of sophisticated assessment standards when assessing built sites and cultural heritage. The government's method of assessing the value of our built heritage basing on simplistic data such as issues like building age is no longer adequate.

Public education is also important in helping them to better judge and appreciate our heritage. Information should be made available on legitimate historical, aesthetic, scientific and societal information. The government needs to recognize that the public's participation is vital, and better public education is fundamental to involve them.

3. Cultural and Heritage Preservation and City Planning should be considered in an integrated manner.

In the past, city and traffic planning processes have overlooked the importance on preserving built and cultural heritage. The Queen's Pier Incident serves as a perfect example, and it demonstrates that our policies are no longer inline with public aspirations.

The government should establish a mechanism that could detect potentially sensitive issues of concern to the public when doing city planning.

This is needed to avoid future similar conflicts between preservation and development. A balance between the two is possible and that an attitude should be instilled that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Through insightful planning and public engagement, our city could be developed in a more sustainable and open manner.

4. Policy Coordination between Cultural and Heritage Preservation and Land Policies

To encourage re-vitalization of privately owned built heritage sites, the government should consider conciliatory measures such as land exchanges, plot ratio transfers, monetary compensation and tax exemptions to handle the pressures faced by private owners when balancing between commercial development considerations and responsibility in cultural preservation. Private owners should not have to feel that they need to bear the brunt of the financial burden in any preservation initiative. The government should bear part of the burden, and play an active and supportive role in developing new ways to re-use and re-habilitate run down sites.

The government should take a lead role in protecting and re-vitalizing government owned heritage sites, and should be forward thinking when developing new ways to re-habilitate sites with sustainable functions while staying true to preservation. The government should not only emphasize on short term non-sustainable commercial return when devising schemes, but should pro-actively consult and study to develop schemes which would satisfy preservation initiatives, and infuse new life and long-term financial viability.

5. Expand the Definitions and Scope for Cultural and Heritage Preservations

Heritage preservation should expand from accessing individual buildings to include large building groups/blocks/areas and neighborhoods (from 'single points' to 'lines' and 'areas') in order to preserve communities which are so essential to the 'spirit' of a place. We feel this has been constantly over-looked by the government.

The strength in Hong Kong's built environment and heritage comes from its communities of people and buildings. Emphasis should expand from protecting individual elements, into protecting areas and neighborhoods. These are the essence of our cultural heritage or Indigenous traditions (e.g. festivals, collective memories, and customs). It can only be done through keeping our communities alive.

6. Reviewing Existing Regulations to encourage "Adaptive Reuse"

Limitations imposed by Hong Kong's 'Building Ordinances' have in the past prevented flexible and innovative solutions in re-using our historic buildings, making re-habilitation efforts sterile. In order to encourage new innovative solutions without compromising public health and safety issues, different statutory bodies need to work together with professional entities, in establishing a set of guidelines and building ordinances that are more forward-looking and flexible. Unconventional innovative solutions should be encouraged, so vitality, cultural enrichment, and commercial viability can be fused.

7. Establishing a 'Natural Heritage and Cultural Foundation'

The government should set up a 'Heritage and Cultural Foundation' to ensure that an adequate and sustained financial source in developing and maintaining sustainable heritage revitalization schemes is available. The government should allocate a fixed ratio income from profits made in annual land sales. The foundation should also be done in a constructive partnership between the public and private sector.

The government needs to play a central and active role as the primary stake-holder in this foundation, to ensure it would function as a long term operation that is also open and transparent.

8. Democratization and openness in political and administrative mechanisms and operations

In the face of such a lack in strategy, initiative, transparency, public engagement and legislation on the topic of Heritage and Cultural Preservation, the need for reform is urgent and dire.

The government should consider reforming our 'Antiquities Advisory Board' into a 'Heritage and Cultural Preservation Board' with actual statutory powers entrusted to it

through legislation. Clear jurisdiction in the protecting and promoting and preserving cultural heritage needs to be drawn up.

The new Board should be based on a dual cross-governance model with district councilors representing the interest of the public on one side, and government appointed independent official secretariats and non-government professionals/experts on the other side. The Board should be chaired by a non-government professionals/expert.

The Board's decision making process should be transparent, and democratic. They should operate in the interest of the public, and pro-actively encourage and be open to on accepting new innovative ideas. They should be forward thinking and play a central role in coordinating government departments in projects. They should consult for and propose new 'Building Ordinances' that are more conducive to innovative solutions. Lastly they should help promote public education and involvement when strategizing preservation efforts and promoting cultural appreciation.

Civic Party
17 April, 2007