

Hong Kong, February 12, 2007

Panel on Planning, Lands and Works
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road, Central,
Hong Kong
(Fax: 2869-6794 / email: cshiu@legco.gov.hk)

Re: Developments Creating A Walled Effect – 27 February 2007

Honorable Chairman and Members,

As our submission for the captioned meeting, we enclose herewith a list of questions we have asked the Secretary of Housing, Planning and Lands.

Herewith we so submit for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Zimmerman
Convenor
Designing Hong Kong Harbour District

Enclosed: Letter to the SPHL regarding "Asia's Walled City."

12 February 2007

By Mail and By Fax

Honorable Michael Suen
Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands
18/f Murray House
Garden Road, Central
Hong Kong

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Hong Kong – Asia's Walled City

Public calls for reducing density have been captured during the Metroplan Review (1999-2001), the 2030 Study and the Council for Sustainable Development (2004).

Today, a growing number of neighborhood organizations are highlighting the blight of ever larger building complexes appearing around Hong Kong. Many of these wall type buildings are appearing along the harbour-front 'wrapping' and 'shielding' the districts behind them.

The result is:

1. A loss of sun light;
2. Poor air ventilation;
3. A loss of visual corridors;
4. A strain on our transport facilities (specifically our road networks);
5. A rapid deterioration of the public domain – the street level environment;
6. Given Hong Kong's unique topography (and as we can't move the mountains and have decided to keep the harbour) the ever increasing density is leading to permanent traffic congestion;
7. In addition, SARS has alerted the community to the possible public health and hygiene issues related to ever increasing building intensity and overall density.

Why is our planning system controlling density with plot ratios failing?

Despite plot ratio controls specified on outline zoning plans, ever bulkier buildings are appearing throughout Hong Kong, often excessively bulkier than existing buildings in the same areas, under the same planning controls. In relation to this our questions are as follows:

- 1. Why are ever more buildings appearing which are ever larger and bulkier than others in the same neighborhood?**
- 2. What are the reasons why these buildings are bulkier?**
 - a. Is this due to larger plot sizes? If so, why are plot sizes so much larger for new developments? What are the planning benefits and costs?
 - b. Is it the result of the policy to finance rail, transport facilities, cultural venues and urban renewal with property development rights immediately linked to these sites?
 - c. Is it due to the different plot ratios being applied? If so, why?
 - d. Are there other reasons? If so, what is a comprehensive list of relevant factors?
- 3. Has the Government done any survey of such bigger and bulkier buildings? If so, can an overview(s) be made available prior to 27 February 2007?**
- 4. Has the Government done any analysis of such buildings? If so, what were the reasons identified for the additional bulk?**
 - a. Is there a significant gap between the permitted plot ratio and the final plot ratio of these buildings? What is the cause of the difference in these plot ratios?
 - b. For KCRC and MTRC related developments, how much of the final plot ratio is the result of station and rail facilities? And how much is caused by other factors?
 - c. What is the impact of free gross floor area granted? For what reasons is free gross floor area granted?
 - d. Are developers charged a premium for excessive gross floor areas? If yes, how are these calculated? Have these, or are these, charged at full market value? If not, why not?
 - e. Are excessive gross floor areas taken into account with lease modifications?

5. Does the Government agree with the community voices that there is good reason for concern about the ever growing number of bulkier buildings?
- a. If not, why not? If yes, what are the many problems and what is the Government planning to do about this?
 - b. Will the Government rethink plot size and permitted plot ratios, and amend the outline zoning plans and lease conditions to that effect? If not, why not? If yes, when?
 - c. Does the Government plan to implement a 'planning certification' system such as considered during the 199a Comprehensive Review of the Town Planning Ordinance? If not, why not? If yes, when?
 - d. Does the Government plan to cap excess GFA? If not, why not? If yes, how?
 - e. Does the Government consider adhering to plot ratio controls, limiting the final plot ratio to the permitted plot ratio?

Yours sincerely,



Paul Zimmerman
Convenor
Designing Hong Kong Harbour District

Note: A copy will be submitted to Panel on Planning, Lands and Works, Legislative Council, meeting 27 February 2007 regarding "Developments creating the wall effect".