

Submission from Tsim Sha Tsui Residents Concern Group

To: panel_dev@legco.gov.hk

From: Mary M

Date: 02/28/2012 10:19PM

Subject: Legco Panel on Development - 10 March - Enhancing Land Supply

Enhancing Land Supply

It is obvious that this so called public consultation is deeply flawed, with particular regard to reclamation.

The 'consultation' is still at Stage 1, quote 'we are particular interested in knowing public views on the following: Option of increasing land supply through reclamation outside Victoria Harbour'. Stage 1 should therefore be to gauge public sentiment with regard to the possibility of reclamation. How then can a site selection criteria be introduced at this stage?

Having attended a focus group and a public forum it is quite clear that this is not a consultation on what the public wants but rather an exercise to convince the public that reclamation is inevitable and the only solution to increasing land supply. Both the government representatives and the professional institution and academic bodies involved have talked enthusiastically about the benefits of reclamation.

However this enthusiasm has not been shared by the public attending the forums, except for those attendees with vested interests, usually in the engineering and architectural fields. It is evident that the public has major concerns about reclamation and time and again questioned the population growth quoted and why the other options are not being explored.

Population growth: The government has failed time and again to produce realistic and credible population growth figures. The attached article by Jake van der Kamp explains this much better than I can.

Developers Landbanks: For example according to Henderson Land's website its 'total land bank in Hong Kong amounts to approximately **21.2 million sq.ft.** in total attributable gross floor area as of 30 June 2011.

We also hold around **41.4 million sq.ft. of agricultural land** spread widely over various districts in the New Territories. This is the largest agricultural land bank among all property developers in Hong Kong and it provides an important and integral source of developable sites for the Group's ongoing project development portfolio'.

As of June 2011 Sun Hung Kai 'owns over **26 million sq.ft.** of agricultural land (site area) in the New Territories, primarily along rail lines, the majority of which is in the process of land use conversion'.

The other major developers all have considerable land holdings. If land is in such short supply then the administration should be adopting both administrative and fiscal measures to encourage the developers to put these land banks to use.

Rezoning: The government continues to insist that rezoning is difficult and expensive. With abundant reserves, annual budget surpluses and the Capital Works Fund, we have the funds to handle any financial issues and to pay for the expertise required in resolving related issues with regard to rezoning both industrial and agricultural land. Any additional expenditure would be more than recouped by the fact that many of the sites that should be rezoned are already served by transport and other infrastructure. Reclamation on the other hand is virgin land that requires the addition of all essential services. The argument that reclamation is the cheaper option does not include the huge costs of providing these services.

Unsold/Empty units: If there is indeed urgent need for additional housing the administration should introduce administrative measures to encourage developers and speculators to release these units onto the market. Recent data shows there are around **250,000** apartments uninhabited. Empty flats create zero employment opportunities for the district level economy.

Global Warming: The 'consultation' emphasises a number of benefits to be gained from reclamation but ignores the negative aspects. The world is now entering a phase of unprecedented natural and man made environmental disasters. Dumping contaminated sediment and unstable landfill on our shore line could lead to disaster if, as many experts warn, global warming causes sea levels to rise dramatically.

For example in 2007 it was reported that Yingchun Liu of the Graduate University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing developed a computer model with David Yuen, Department of Geology at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. They identified the sites where major quakes were most likely, then modelled how the tsunamis they produced would spread and their heights as they reached major cities. Finally, they factored in the tsunami risks of all possible large quakes for each location.

They found that all coastal regions, stretching north from Macau and Hong Kong to beyond Shantou have about a **1-in-10 chance of being struck by a tsunami within 100 years** (Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors, vol 163, p 233).

It is therefore hardly prudent to plan on building new towns on reclaimed land on the coast line without extensive investigation into the possibilities of inundation.

It is very obvious that the government is taking the easy option that is, coincidentally, also in line with the interests of the large property developers and construction companies.

We want solutions not excuses.



23/02/12 SCMP

Shaky base for law of concrete jungle

Hong Kong's construction blight is justified by routinely inflated official population forecasts

Based on the population benchmark from the results of the 2011 Population Census, the population figures for end-2006 to mid-2011 have been revised (Table 2).

Government news release,
February 21

That brief statement was buried 10 paragraphs down in the news release and it did not say which way the population figures had been revised.

This should be no surprise. It happens every five years at census time. The findings always show a smaller population than our statisticians had projected. But they just ignore it and keep pushing up their forecasts.

The chart shows you how it works. The red line on top represents the semi-annual population growth rate as estimated by Census and Statistics up to June last year, the latest date that an estimate was published before the census data was made available.

The blue line represents the adjusted growth rate that the statisticians have compiled now that they have the hard figures. Notice how their adjustment pushes down the growth rate of earlier years and then pretends that over the last year the growth rate has risen again and is higher than earlier projections.

It is routinely done this way – “Yeah, we got it wrong but that was a few years ago and now we have it right and, oh dear, look how our population is growing once more.”

It leaves you with one obvious question. Why? What good reason could there be for trying to pull the wool over our eyes this way?

Let me suggest one. Look at the evidence of the second chart of how public sector construction spending has more than doubled over the last three years. Donald is a firm believer in the Law of Concrete: thou shalt pour at least 10 million tonnes a

year. He has hugely boosted infrastructure spending.

There are all kinds of reasons why he might wish to do this. He might believe, for instance, that it boosts overall employment (it does not) or that it secures political support from those rotten boroughs, the functional constituencies, in the Legislative Council (it does).

But whatever the bad reasons for doing it, there can only be one good reason and this is that we need all these roads, railways and bridges and the dense residential packing of the New Territories. Donald's problem is that even he cannot entirely evade having to provide this good reason.

We would only need to pour all

this concrete, however, if we had not poured enough in the past or if our population were growing so fast that we must pour a great deal more for the future. The first proposition is manifestly not true and therefore we must rely on the second.

And, guess what – it's the second we get, every time that someone in government talks population. Our transport planning, for instance, is still heavily based on wildly inaccurate population forecasts in a 1996 study, “CTS3”. Overly high population projections continue to curse the new towns with higher construction densities than they need.

But, our planners continue to clap their hands over their eyes and call out the cement mixers, pointing all the while to suspect studies with inflated population numbers.

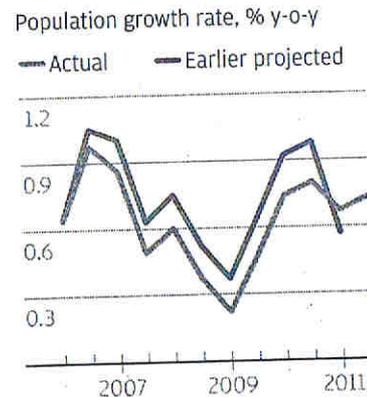
The only immediate difference I see is that our politicians have fixated themselves this time on how the census shows that our population is ageing (people do) and something must be done about it.

I don't see how it is the business of our politicians in any way. Whether to have children, whether to move elsewhere, or whether to adopt a healthy lifestyle to live longer are highly individual and personal choices.

But, whatever the something that must be done turns out to be, I'm sure it will not break the Law of Concrete.

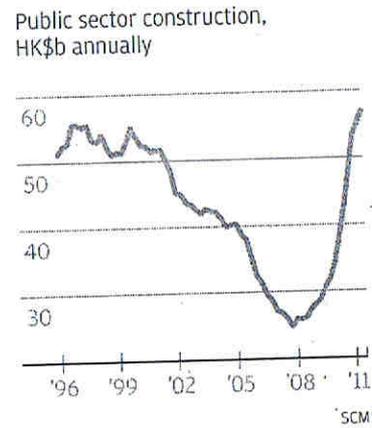
jake.vanderkamp@scmp.com

Too high again ...



Source: CEIC Data

... and here's why



SCMP

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TST RESIDENTS CONCERN GROUP