

From the Desk of

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The Chief Executive, HKSAR,
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Town Planning (Amendment) Bill 2003

The Government of HKSAR has tried hard to improve the Hong Kong business environment. Part of the CEPA(2) negotiation is going to open more job opportunities in China. Whilst Government is trying hard to negotiate for better terms for Hong Kong professionals working in PRC, there is unfortunately a general lack of interest/attention to the recognition of the professionals in the field of town planning in Hong Kong.

PRC has already learnt from Hong Kong the protection of PRC professionals by a registration system for valuers, architects, town planners and is already implementing the system. In this area, we are not as update as PRC in the recognition/ protection of professions in Hong Kong. The Bill does not mention statutory professional submissions. What we are proposing is the introduction of an Authorized person submission system in line with the Buildings Ordinance Cap 123 in the submission of building plans. Under the Buildings Ordinance, an Authorized person is a co-ordinator in the building/structural plan submission, control of building /structural works to ensure building safety and health standards and minimize administrative work load in government departments.

Town planning today is a complicated process, far more complicated than the situation in 1939 when the Town Planning Ordinance was first introduced. Today, it involves many facets, social-economic aspects, traffic implications, density and height controls, environmental issues, preservation and conservation, slope stabilization and drainage implication, urban design, landscaping issues and visual impact, land administration, compensation issues, public spending, long term planning goals etc. Co-ordinated professional work will ensure quality submissions.

The submission by any person in the present system will surely not ensure quality submission which will affect its product and the living conditions of its people and the environment in the long term.

The Amendment Bill has already proposed introduction of prescribed fees in future planning applications. Saving of professional fees in favour of and in encouraging submission by any person should provoke more thought and discussion by the Town Planning Bill Committee. It is unwise to save some money of the applicants so as to encourage submission by any person (non-professional people who may include unscrupulous persons) who may not be able to produce quality planning work and to take up the duties of discharging the conditions of planning permission and thus jeopardize our future environment.

Moreover, a submission with systematic presentation of facts and information by professionals, whose conduct is governed by the professional Institute's Code of Professional Conduct, would not only guarantee the quality of the information and planning proposals, but would also save the time of the Town Planning Board in deliberation.

The Board may make rules on what may be exempted from qualified professional AP submission. For instance under the Buildings Ordinance, village type housing is exempted from building plan submission; similarly, submission of village house development in Section 16 applications may also be exempted from the proposed AP Planning submission system.

Kindly ask the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau and the Town Planning (Amendment) Bill Committee of the Legislative Council to consider the above proposals. I am sure the professional Institutes will comment on other points which I shall not repeat here.

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Member of the Election Committee for the Formation of the First Government of HKSAR in 1996/1997 and Member of the Architectural Surveying Planning Sub-Sector of the Election Committee in 1998 and 2000.

c.c. Town Planning Bill (Amendment) Committee (2003),
Mr. Michael Suen, Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands,
Hon. Mr. P.C. Lau , JP,
Hon Mr. Raymond Ho, JP,
President, HKIP,
President, HKIA,
President, HKIS,
President, HKIE,
President, HKILA,
Director of Planning.