



10 December 2005

Members
Panel on Planning, Lands and Works, and
Panel on Environmental Affairs
Legislative Council of Hong Kong
Jackson Road
Hong Kong

By Fax & By Hand

Dear Members,

Re: Tamar and Central Harbour-front

Act when ready, Not in haste

We are grateful to Members for holding a special session on 17 December 2005. We refer to our letter to Members of 18 November. The issues have not been adequately addressed by the Administration at the 22 November panel meeting. We look to Members to continue to press for detailed answers.

For the meeting on 17 December we wish to share a number of observations with Members:

1. Rising pressure for change

There is a clear demand today for development projects to put human needs first. This involves creating more and larger open spaces in the urban areas, ensuring the open spaces provide a quality experience, greening public spaces, preserving heritage, providing much lower density developments that at the same time can reduce air and noise pollution, revamping the city for a pleasant pedestrian experience, as well as creating a sense of aesthetics that has cultural charm.

The growing interest of many civil society groups and individuals from all walks of life to involve in development issues is an indicator that the Hong Kong public is increasingly concerned about planning and development results. Reclamation-related projects, the proposal to build a large prison on Lantau, the still unresolved matter of the future of the historic Central Police Station, West Kowloon, Oil Street, and developments in Wanchai (just to name a few) have all galvanized many groups to voice their concerns.

2. Realise "Harbour Vision"

We agree with the HKSAR Government that there should be no more reclamation. We note that the Central reclamation is in fact the final piece of reclamation in the harbour-front. We also agree with the HKSAR Government's "Harbour Vision". The difference, and therefore contention, between the public and the Administration lies in the translation of that vision in specific developments.

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We remain extremely concerned that the Administration's priority is to maximize land revenues along the harbour-front rather than to create a total waterfront experience that meets the public's demands. Members may be interested to see the attached news report from 25 years ago when the then Urban Council argued for more open space in Central against the Administration's proposal to develop the Queensway government offices and sell the rest of the land for commercial development. Subsequent to that period, more of the harbour was reclaimed, a part of which is the Tamar site.

Today, Members are engaging in a similar debate against the background that there could be no more reclamation and the Administration's promise to implement its "Harbour Vision". In our view, it is impossible to fulfill the "Harbour Vision" without major town planning and transport planning changes to the current Central OZP. Indeed, Hong Kong's problem is that while it has a most beautiful harbour the actual waterfront experience on foot is regrettably extremely poor.

3. Take opportunity to transform

Tamar and the Central OZP need to be viewed against the abovementioned context. If Tamar and Central are developed along the lines envisaged, they will create a sub-optimal environment along the waterfront that will be almost impossible to alter in the future.

There are opportunities to meet the people's aspirations. Various groups have in fact put forward concept ideas in the past. There are also numerous examples from overseas, including examples in Asia, Hong Kong can draw inspiration from.

Hong Kong can, and must, transform the currently poor harbour-front experience into one that befits the city's natural endowment. Together between the government and the people, we must do our best to create a harbour-front experience that we will all be proud of for many generations to come.

4. Support for substantial development investments

In order to make this transformation, it will require not only sound planning and re-prioritization with the long-term view in mind, but also substantial financial investments to ensure there will be a proper mix of open space, low density recreational developments, the right community facilities, and appropriate commercial developments. Our view is therefore not "anti-development". We advocate substantial investments in harbour-front design and development of a kind that will create long-term economic and employment opportunities, not just short-term construction-related jobs.

The Administration's argument that Tamar should now be developed quickly is unsound. Just because the site has been available for development for some years does not mean it should be when the Administration cannot justify the proposed development.

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5. Need time to reassess options

To move forward constructively, it requires a fundamental review of the Central OZP. While the Town Planning Board is not yet demanding the Administration to restart the statutory review process, it has demanded on 5 August 2005 a partial revisit of the OZP. This has yet to be done.

6. Rushing will lead to regrets

The Administration's responses to Members' questions on 22 November showed not only does it not know how much space it needs and which officers should relocate to Tamar, it has also not looked at the development within the context of the Central OZP.

There are worrying planning, traffic and environmental implications:

Firstly, the many roads will compromise the environmental quality of the open spaces that the Administration says it intends to provide for public use. In particular, air pollution, which is already a serious problem in Central, will get much worse. We urge Members to question the quality of experience of the open spaces.

Secondly, pedestrians will no longer be walking at grade. Instead, they will have to walk on bridges and raised structures to reach the waterfront. We urge Members to question whether this is the kind of experience Hong Kong should provide.

Thirdly, we urge Members to question the wisdom of putting so much new density in Central, including the additional density that will arise from selling the CGO and Murray Building sites for commercial developments. There are more sustainable solutions.

Overall, we urge Members to ask the Administration not to rush into schemes it has plainly not thought through and instead take the time to exploit the much large potential gains from reviewing the Central OZP to transform the harbour-front into a pleasant and vibrant human experience.

Yours sincerely,



Christine Loh
Chief Executive Officer

Encl.

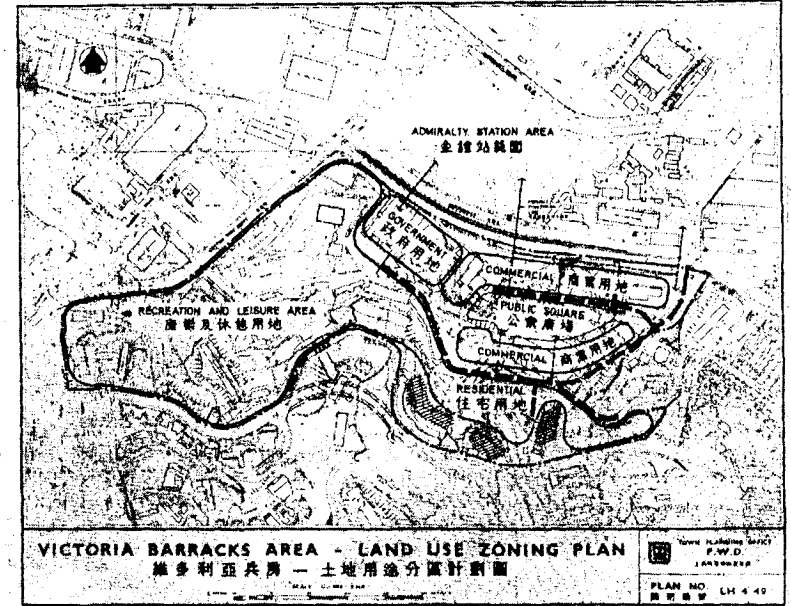
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Henry Henry Standard

11 July, 1978.

More than half of land to be
turned into a park

GOVT RELENTS ON BARRACKS



AERIAL view of the Queensway side of Victoria Barracks, one of Hongkong's oldest landmarks.

by
Michael Chugani
Assistant News Editor

THE Government has decided to turn more than half of Victoria Barracks into a park in what is seen as a compromise move in the face of strong public pressure.

But the move still falls far short of what was proposed by the government-appointed planning committee, headed by Mr Szeto Wai, which suggested that 79 per cent of the total area be used as public space.

And yesterday Urban Council Chairman A. de O. Sales accused the Government of "selling the people of Hongkong down the river."

Mr Sales has repeatedly demanded that the whole of Victoria Barracks be turned into a park.

And Heritage Society chief David Russell said he was "saddened" by the decision.

A government spokesman said the Government had taken into account "strongly held views" from certain quarters that a reasonable chunk of the site be sold for new development.

"I'll bet there were strongly held views," Mr Russell retorted yesterday.

The government decision for the future use of the site published yesterday will reap in a whopping \$1.1 billion through the sale of land for commercial and residential development.

Some \$700 million of this will come from selling off chunks of the barracks site mainly on the Wanchai end, while the remaining \$400 million will come from selling off the Murray Barracks land on Queensway by re-siting government offices within Victoria Barracks.

Under the plan, the western half of the barracks will be used for recreational and leisure activities covering 24 acres of a total site of 41 acres.

The park area will not be disturbed by government or commercial development and it will be entirely free of traffic.

The area is about one and a half times the size of the Botanical Gardens.

But the eastern half of the barracks on the Wanchai end will be turned over for commercial and residential development.

A huge commercial complex will be built there with a public square in the centre.

A third section facing Queensway will be used for a new Supreme Court and a government high-rise office building.

Special consultants will be called in to make best use of the open space because of the hilly terrain. The consultants will also look into the future use of Lagstaff House which will be retained.

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Barracks land decision

From Page 1

The government announcement yesterday climaxes months of speculation and public furore over an official wall of silence surrounding the Government's intentions for the valuable Central District site.

The official decision, although going halfway towards meeting public demands, still differs in many instances with proposals put forward by the government-appointed planning committee's final report.

The committee had proposed that 79 per cent of the site be used for public space and only 8.3 per cent for commercial development with no area at all for residential use.

These revised proposals were made following strong public pressure against the committee's initial proposals which only set aside 38 per cent for public use but almost 40 per cent for government, commercial and residential use.

But the Government's final decision virtually splits the barracks site into two parts...one for leisure and the other for development and government use.

Other main points in the government plan are:

● Commercial development will be handled by a single developer to ensure harmonious architecture and the complex will have pedestrian linkways with the Admiralty Station.

● The Government's rejection of the planning committee's proposal not to include residential development.

● The scrapping of earlier proposals to build a huge Government Secretariat complex within the barracks site.

Chairman of the planning committee Szeto Wah said yesterday the Government's plan "was acceptable to the committee" and he pointed out that the plan had been developed largely from the committee's final proposals.

Hong Kong Standard

11 July, 1978.

Need to sell parts of site questioned

URBAN Council Chairman A. de O. Sales yesterday hit out at the government plan for the barracks site and questioned the need to raise \$1.1 billion by selling off chunks for commercial development.

"Last year alone the government surplus was \$1.2 billion. So why do we need the money?"

"The only sensible thing in the plan is turning over the western half for recreational use," he said.

Mr Sales challenged the need to turn the eastern half over for commercial use.

The Wanchai population does not have play space as it is now. What are these 'strongly held views' expressed in certain quarters that land be sold?" Mr Sales asked.

"Who applies these pressures? Why should the Government be so weak-kneed to bow to this pressure?"

The Urbco chairman also said that it was unnecessary to have a Supreme Court building on the barracks site fronting Queensway.

He said the court buildings could be built in the huge Wanchai reclamation site along with other government buildings.

He also attacked the move to sell off a section on the south eastern side of the barracks for residential use. He said the area was wooded and would be useful as a green area.

Heritage Society chief David Russell also attacked the Government plan and said he had expected at least 80 per cent of the site to be used as public space.

"It appears that the plan was not properly considered nor was it prepared by professionals.

"The plan does not even begin to look like a compromise," he said.

The Heritage chief also charged that public views were not taken into account.

"Why go through the motions of appointing a planning committee and then not accepting its recommendations in full? Was the planning committee just a move to please Whitehall or a claim that Government rules by consensus?" Mr Russell asked.

President of the Hongkong Conservancy Association, Dr L.K. Ding, said yesterday he was very disappointed over the Government's decision not to preserve the entire Victoria Barracks for public interest.

"I feel the place should be completely converted into a public park for recreational purposes, although the Government said they may expect \$700 million by the sale of part of the land," he said.

"The Government does not need this sum of money as they had an unexpected sum of over \$1 billion in last year's surplus, which can be used to offset the \$700 million lost for not selling the land."

"We must have a long range view for the place, which if converted into a public park, can benefit Hongkong's population for many years to come, and this kind of benefit can not be equated in terms of dollars and cents."