

Timothy A. Steinert

Subcommittee to Review the Planning for the Central Waterfront (including the Tamar Site)
Legislative Council
Hong Kong SAR

Attn: Ms. Christina Shiu

1 February 2006

Re: Planning for the Central Waterfront (Your ref: CB1/PS/1/05)

To the Legislative Council:

I am submitting these views in my individual capacity as a resident of the Central Mid-levels and a partner in an international law firm with its office in Exchange Square, Central. My wife and I are permanent residents in Hong Kong and both our children were born and have lived their entire lives in Hong Kong. We live in a rental flat, own a single car and have paid income taxes every year we have lived in Hong Kong. Our eldest goes to school by bus in North Point.

I strongly oppose any development of the Central waterfront, including the Tamar site, that would increase the density of buildings there, particularly further government buildings. The additional extension of the waterfront into the harbour is in my view a mistaken decision, but the redevelopment of Tamar together with the appropriate use of the Central waterfront can still be turned into an opportunity to significantly improve the quality of Hong Kong for current and future generations. I believe the entire area should be used for park and recreation (including restaurant and similar infrastructure in support of recreation) for the following principal reasons:

- **Hong Kong vs. Shanghai.** Hong Kong's future is as a financial and other services base for greater China. In order to preserve this future, Hong Kong must create and preserve a significantly better living environment than its competitors on the mainland. This means quality of environment in general, of housing, of schooling and of work environment. If Hong Kong can't offer a better overall environment, why will service professionals decide to live here and why will their employers decide to put their China headquarters or management centres here? A central park area by the waterfront would help Hong Kong remain ahead of the alternatives on the Mainland.
- **World City?** Hong Kong models itself as a "World City" etc. It needs to increase greenery in its urban areas and build a world-class urban park network that can help our city breathe. Compare Singapore, Sydney, New York, London, Boston, Paris, etc. The Central waterfront is an opportunity in this regard that must not be lost. Our waterfront is one of our most valuable

assets. And please note that what I mean is park space and not concrete and roads. Some of the government's plans look to be dominated by sterile concrete areas and criss-crossed by roads. The current roads through the Central waterfront in front of Tamar should be moved back inland.

- **Park = Increased Property Value.** The value of Central property and Hong Kong in general will increase, I believe, if the waterfront is developed as a park and recreational area. This improvement will have a long-term positive effect on government revenues and the future of Hong Kong in general. More commercial space can be developed from existing old sites in Central (Hutchison House, Central Post Office, ICAC garage, Wanchai, the area between Connaught Road and Queen's road from Central to Sheung Wan, etc.).
- **Reduce Traffic!** The traffic situation in Central is already critical, how could more office space in the very centre help this? If the government wants to improve the quality of air, etc. in Central, it should be considering projects like Boston's "big dig" and not more building or a road tax system such as Singapore. The government says its plans would increase congestion by only 3%. Any increase is too much. Most notably, the plans call for more parking spaces. Where? If more parking is provided in Central it must be below ground! Above ground parking (such as already exists at Star Ferry, City Hall and ICAC) is an eyesore and a tremendous waste of space.
- **Don't Repeat Past Mistakes.** IFC is a handsome and impressive modern building, I think, but in its location it is an abomination to our waterfront. In addition, the so-called "green space" that was part of the justification for the extension into the harbor is a wasted empty space that is virtually inaccessible between roads. Is this the type of "civic space" planned for Tamar? Let's not make the same mistakes over and over again or use unsupported rationales to justify unnecessary new building, especially of government facilities.
- **No New Government Offices Needed.** The government does not need to expand its offices in Central. At the very least, the government has not demonstrated this need in a convincing manner. If new space is needed, it should be built on available but less critical land or through the redevelopment of existing office space. Some government offices should be convenient to citizens, but many need not be. I see no justification for expanding yet more in Central. If space is really needed for the government functions that are currently located in Central (see next bullet), the government should consider redeveloping existing government building sites, the garage/ICAC site, in Wanchai or towards Sheung Wan in Central. The military buildings on the Tamar site should also be torn down—there is absolutely no justification for military in any concentration to be stationed in the middle of Hong Kong.

- **Don't Develop Without a Well-supported Argument.** The government makes all sorts of other statements about its need for new government offices, the lack of alternatives, the public benefit of its proposals and the need for speed in decision-making. But the government provides very little support that I have seen for any of these statements. No further development should occur – especially of government buildings – until the government provides full and rationale justification for the use of our tax money. The government talks about buildings of 130-160 metres as acceptable and speaks of “corridors” through the buildings as if this is some sort of benefit. If I made such a poorly supported argument to my colleagues in business, I would be (politely) shown the door.

Thank you very much for this opportunity for expressing my views. I sincerely hope the voices of the Hong Kong public will be listened to on this and other issues of public concern.

Sincerely,



Timothy A. Steinert