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## RESPONSE TO HONG KONG 2030: PLANNING VISION AND STRATEGY STAGE 3 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

### Summary

- This planning exercise should have been preceded or paralleled by discussion and consensus on our community's economic and social aspirations. This could not have been conducted by the Planning Department alone.
- The Government should move its focus away from hard infrastructure. Hong Kong should emphasize the “soft” factors such as culture, education, and the environment. These are the factors that will make Hong Kong more livable, attractive, and competitive.
- The assumptions need to be re-examined. The numbers appear unrealistic, e.g., a population growth of 37%, especially given ongoing integration with the Mainland. Specific proposals such as opening up the Frontier Closed Area are also outdated by the CEPA arrangements.
- We agree with the three general directions in (1) providing a quality living environment; (2) enhancing competitiveness; and (3) strengthening links with the Mainland, but do not necessarily agree with the specific projects set out under those directions.
- For example, like others in our community, we still await the Government to provide a convincing case for the necessity of harbour reclamation, explaining also why alternatives such as pedestrianizing parts of Central and stringent controls on private automobile use could not be pursued or are not sufficient.
- We believe it more meaningful and more important to develop, rather than a plan using a bird's eye view of hard infrastructure, a set of propositions and implementation steps that would inform practical decisions.
- Perhaps the greatest value in this 2030 project is not what “plans” might come out of the exercise, but the process of discussion, of ascertaining people's aspirations and preferences, and of building consensus. We urge the Planning Department to draw its conclusions and draft its final papers accordingly.

### Overall Concerns

1. The Stage 3 consultation document, as well as the many other materials in this and earlier consultations, reflect an ambitious attempt at articulating a vision for Hong Kong as a city and for the Hong Kong people. The document refers

to a number of economic as well as social issues, most of which involve cross-border considerations. It also tries to put many aspects of planning at different macro vs. micro levels into a framework. We greatly appreciate the Planning Department's Herculean courage and efforts.

*This Planning Exercise Requires Extraneous Discussion and Consensus*

2. As the document points out at its very beginning, the planning objective is to help achieve the community's vision and aspirations for how we would like our city to develop in the future. The document then takes it as agreed and well understood that we would like Hong Kong to be "Asia's World City". It makes references to "internationally oriented service economy", "workforce with specialized skills and knowledge", and "world-class 'hard' infrastructure (such as transportation and telecommunications) and 'soft' infrastructure (such as education and training)" without discussing what these concepts mean to the Hong Kong community.
3. We acknowledge that these matters are not within the purview of the Planning Department nor, indeed, its policy superior, the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau, alone. The Government should first ascertain, articulate, and build a consensus for the community's aspiration before or simultaneously with this 30-year strategic planning exercise. Such an exercise should involve multiple policy bureaus and, more importantly, the evolution of a governing philosophy.
4. This is not a point on mere abstract logic. It has implications for our looking at specific planning issues. We find it difficult to analyze meaningfully the consultation document's planning options, Development Patterns, and "what-if" scenarios because we could not tell what each option or issue means other than in its apparent engineering and physical terms. For example, we might well prefer higher-density to lower-density development if this would help rejuvenate old districts or that it would help repopulating abandoned industrial areas. Similarly, we do not know how to evaluate the creation of so-called New Employment Nodes in New Development Areas because we do not know what the community's consensus is on our economic aspirations.

*The Government Should Move its Focus Away From Hard Infrastructure*

5. We are also very concerned about the Government's tendency to think of hard infrastructure as necessary – and as its contribution – to the development of education, culture, and (using the consultation document's words) "a sense of belonging and pride conducive to building a socially cohesive society". This is a wrong direction. Culture and social coherence grow out of an atmosphere of tolerance and togetherness.
6. In this regard, we question especially the Government's "culture encouraging" projects – Enhancement of Waterfront Areas, West Kowloon Cultural District, and University Town. The Government has stated repeatedly the benefits, but not the necessity, at what cost, of Harbour Reclamation and the West Kowloon Cultural District. Moreover, the Government's approach in promoting these projects runs counter to building social cohesiveness and divides rather than

unites our community. (We wish, however, to acknowledge also that this is not entirely the doing of the Government alone.)

7. Hong Kong should emphasize the “soft” factors such as in supporting culture, education, and the environment. These are the factors that will make Hong Kong more livable, attractive to domestic as well as international talent, hence competitive. This is a key reason why New York and London succeed so well.

*The Broad Assumptions Need to be Re-examined*

8. The 2030 project commenced several years ago. Much has changed since then. We wonder whether even the broad assumptions are still valid.
9. We find Annex 1 of the Stage 3 consultation document, which sets out the key planning assumptions, helpful, but seriously question whether the numbers are realistic. It assumes a population growth of 37% over the 30 years from 2001 (6.7 million) to 2030 (9.2 million). Premier office space would increase by 76% from 4.1 to 7.2 million meters square GFA. Accommodation for “special industrial uses” (such as the Science Park and Cyberport) would also increase by 62% from 3.9 to 6.3 million meters square GFA. While the consultation document does not discuss this specifically, these assumptions imply massive infrastructure and construction needs.
10. The logistics-related numbers, such as cargo growth, air services demand, and visitor arrivals, are equally impressive. (For instance, the paper assumes that visitor arrivals would increase from the current level of 14 million every year to 70 million in 2030.)
11. These assumptions should be re-examined and placed in a larger context as we urged in paragraphs 2 to 4 above. Hong Kong is already a developed, perhaps even mature, city. If we expect a population growth of 37%, we should be focusing on the consequent social rather than infrastructure needs! We should ask whether the current birth/immigration patterns support such an assumption and, moreover, whether they are consistent with whatever economic and social aspirations that we might have.
12. Similarly, if we are confident about the expectation of a five-fold increase in visitor arrivals, we ought to be planning for much more than airport capacity, but also internal transportation, width of sidewalks in popular districts, space for tour bus drop-off points and, very practically, availability of public toilets!
13. Furthermore, as the consultation document itself points out, Hong Kong is fast integrating with the Pearl River Delta. We must consider whether there would emerge a commuting workforce and “satellite communities” north of the Hong Kong border. These extraneous issues of population policy and cross-border integration should be discussed before or simultaneously with this strategic planning exercise.
14. We strongly emphasize the need to base any planning exercise on the proper assumptions. For example, planning for 9.2 million people is very different from planning for 7 million, a number forecast by some statisticians and which

means only a small increase from the current level. Indeed, one might well expect our population to shrink if Hong Kong integrates successfully with the Pearl River Delta. For example, more retirees might decide to spend most of the time just across border. Too many planning mistakes are caused by wrong assumptions to begin with.

15. Similarly, the assumptions on office and industrial space requirements appear unrealistic. Many property experts expect the current pipeline of supply to be sufficient to meet the demand for office space. As for the assumed 62% jump in space for “special industrial uses”, it remains to be seen whether the Science Park and Cyberport indeed encourage the growth of new industries or merely take tenants away from other districts. Most importantly, these assumptions involve issues of industrial policy, which, again should be discussed before or simultaneously with this strategic planning exercise.
16. The consultation document discusses in some detail and in positive terms the “opening up” of three specific locations in the so-called Frontier Closed Area. But the very idea seems outdated by the CEPA and Free Travel arrangements. Unless this project is placed within an industrial policy with public consensus, we could not see its benefits.

#### Specific Comments

17. As this response noted earlier, we find it difficult to analyze meaningfully the options that the document sets out. We would, however, like to comment on the more detailed points that the document explains as under the three broad directions.

#### *Direction I: Providing a Quality Living Environment*

18. We support the preservation of the Victoria Harbour and, like many others in our community, still await the Government to provide a convincing case for the necessity of reclamation. It appears that the Government’s main argument is for better transportation and car access into Central. If so, the Government should also prove that alternatives, such as pedestrianizing parts of Central and more stringent controls on private automobile use, cannot be pursued or are not sufficient.
19. Indeed, we believe these measures should be considered seriously with a view to improving the overall quality of our city life. Successful examples abound, including London, Atlanta, Shanghai, and Singapore.
20. We support the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Hong Kong has a very interesting history and one of the best country parks for any cities. We thank the Government for its good policies and work over the years. We also urge for an increasing emphasis on the “software” side, such as encouraging villages to preserve their histories and relics, and carrying out urban renewal in ways that breathes new life into the traditional, rather than replacing the old with something entirely different. (We acknowledge that this is difficult and wish to commend the Government’s efforts to date.)

## *Direction II: Enhancing Economic Competitiveness*

21. As this response explained earlier, we question the assumptions underlying the consultation document's concern about meeting the demand for office space. There are already secondary business districts well connected to Central, e.g., Causeway Bay, Kowloon and Olympic Stations. Of course, these possibilities are at least partly the result of good planning. But given the excess space at present, and the trend for businesses to move their low-end service operations north of the border, we doubt if Hong Kong should be planning for substantial construction and related infrastructure investments.
22. We would support the plans for Port Development, Airport Development, and a Logistics Park if the separate studies demonstrate their value.
23. As this response noted earlier, we question the logic of building a University Town. Universities are creatures of traditions and knowledge founded on an atmosphere of openness and exploration. To the extent our universities need physical expansion, the Chinese University and the University of Science and Technology both have space. The University of Hong Kong takes part of its character from being in the city and its expansion would necessarily be more haphazard, perhaps with annexes. The same is true for leading universities in other cities, e.g., Columbia University of New York, the various colleges of the University of London.

## *Direction III: Strengthening Links with the Mainland*

24. We support the strategic realization that Hong Kong must plan with due regard to Guangdong's regional networks (such as the Pearl River Delta Inter-City Rapid Transit) as well as the national networks. We also support in principle the proposed Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, a new express rail linking Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, and strengthening the eastern linkage.
25. As this response explained earlier, we question the logic of "opening up" the Frontier Closed Area for industrial or commercial use.

## Developing Meaningful Propositions

26. On balance, we agree with the broad directions as well as most of the specific points stated under those directions. But as this response explained earlier, we find it difficult to understand how the stated planning options relate to these directions or specific points. Furthermore, as we stated at the very beginning of this response, we believe it inappropriate to embark on a strategic plan with a bird's eye view of our city without a sufficiently deep articulation of and consensus on our economic and social aspirations.
27. Hong Kong is already a well-developed city. We wonder whether we should be consciously planning at the scale that the consultation document seems to suggest. To the extent that we are likely to witness major developments, they would be driven by factors north of the border. Unfortunately, at present, we understand little about the Mainland's development patterns and plans. Indeed,

given the speed of their development, our adaptation might well have to be primarily responsive in nature.

28. Considering the above, we believe it more meaningful and more important to develop, rather than a plan using a bird's eye view of hard infrastructure, a set of planning propositions that would inform our practical steps.

#### Acknowledgement

29. We wish to acknowledge and thank the Hong Kong Institute of Architects for sharing with us their response to this consultation exercise. We have benefited from their assistance. While we do not have the necessary information or the expert knowledge to analyze HKIA's detail propositions and suggested steps, we find their emphasis on urging for more attention on "soft" factors such as culture, education, the environment etc. to accord with our own preferences for a quality living environment and sense of community.

#### Concluding Thoughts

30. We wish to thank again the Planning Department for its courage and efforts at tackling this extremely important and complex subject. The materials in this 2030 project provide the most wide-ranging discussion we could find on what vision we can have for Hong Kong. We trust that many in our community like ourselves would not have given the subject as much thought without this and earlier consultations.
31. Perhaps the greatest value in this 2030 project is not what "plans" might come out of the exercise, but the process of discussion, of ascertaining people's aspirations and preferences, and of building consensus. We urge the Planning Department to draw its conclusions and draft its final papers accordingly.
32. We also urge the Government to let the Planning Department hand over the torch to a coordinating authority that would encourage informed discussion on our community's economic and social aspirations and preferences, within the larger context of integration with the Mainland. The Planning Department should carry on the part of this exercise that lies within its core functions – developing and analyzing the details of specific projects, propositions, and implementation steps, such as those the Hong Kong Institute of Architects has suggested. A lot can be achieved at the micro level.
33. The 30SGroup is a self-funded young professionals forum not affiliated with any other organization. We submit this response to the 2030 consultations as a group of Hong Kong people who care deeply about how our community grows and develops. More information about us could be found on our website at <[www.30SGroup.org](http://www.30SGroup.org)>.