



SPH + SOS + CTA Joint Press Release

Rezoning - the Only Legal Choice Save our Central District Now

The Society for Protection of the Harbour (SPH), the Save Our Shorelines (SOS) and the Clear the Air (CTA), jointly denounced the Town Planning Board's (TPB) unscrupulous delay to review their submissions regarding the rezoning of the Central District on the current reclamation site at a press conference held today (Wednesday). They demanded an immediate review and urged the TPB stop playing tactics that are not aligned with the interests of the public.

The three organisations have each sent in submissions to the TPB to rezone the Central District (Extension) Outline Zoning Plan more than six months ago. Earlier they were promised that a review of the proposals will be held this Friday (20 May), but recently they found out that the review will be further deferred.

Mr. Winston Chu, Advisor of SPH, Mr. John Bowden, Chairman of SOS and Ms Annelise Connell, Vice-Chairman of CTA, unanimously opposed TPB's plan. They pointed out that the original schedule was unnecessarily long and not justifiable for such an important matter. "Many Hong Kong people will express their concern on the matter. The review could not be delayed further," they said.

The excuse was made when SPH requested the Chairman of TPB, the Permanent Secretary of Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau (Planning and Lands) Mrs Rita Lau, to declare a conflict of interest when reviewing rezoning proposals. TPB thus use the pretext of legal review to postpone the rezoning request.

The postponement of review on the submissions of SOS and CTA was also not justifiable. They had not requested Mrs. Rita Lau to declare a conflict of interest. Mr. John Bowden, Chairman of SOS, maintained that they will protest at the TPB meeting on Friday.

The three organisations severely criticised TPB's deliberate delay on the rezoning review which was viewed as a move of the government to close the review process. As the work on the reclamation at the CRIII site is proceeding rapidly, the concern groups are deprived of options to save the Central District from further chaotic planning.

The groups also criticised TPB's lack of transparency. The coalition demanded, "not only should TPB review our proposals and give us its feedback at the earliest possible date, they also have no grounds to deprive us of the right to attend the hearing."

The three submissions are all well supported by engineering advisers and reflect the public's expression of how this new piece of land should be used. They, however, slightly differed on the direction: SPH concentrates on the demand of reduction in reclamation, reduction in road P2 and the objection of land sale; SOS focuses on zero reclamation and proposes to use an immersed tube tunnel for the Central-WanChai Bypass; and CTA proposes an immediate implementation of ERP to solve the problem of traffic congestion.

Under the current Outline Zoning Plan, a 6-lane road, P2 and a massive "Groundscraper" as big as the IFC will be constructed on the reclamation site. The plan is not acceptable because it will deny public access to the harbour front. It will bring in more traffic and create more pollution problems in the long run. Yet, the excessive reclamation will produce over 10 million square feet of floor area for commercial use, which is believed to be the hidden agenda of the government to generate a large amount of revenue from land sale.

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