

Town Planning Board Metro Planning Committee
Meeting on 2 February, 2007
Regarding the Planning Brief for the Hollywood Road Police
Quarters

Background

On 22nd Jan, 2007, three local residents (from the Central and Western Concern Group) applied under Section 12A of the Town Planning Ordinance to rezone the Hollywood Road Police Quarters site from Residential (A) to GIC/Open Space use. At the time of the application, the applicants requested the TPB to defer the discussion of the Planning Brief for the captioned site until the statutory procedures for 12A application have been completed (ie public consultation and hearing). However, the Metro Planning Committee of the TPB discussed and endorsed the Planning Brief at an open meeting today (2nd February, 2007). Below are the observations obtained during today's meeting.

Procedure versus Logic

We (the applicants) believed that it is a commonsense logic for a land-use review to come before a discussion of development parameters. By discussing the development parameters based on a residential land-usage, its endorsement will possibly preempt our rezoning application.

It is noted that a Section 12A application is a statutory procedure while a PB (Planning Brief) is an executive guideline.

The chairlady argued that the discussion of the PB is a matter of procedural need, and it is entirely independent of our Section 12A application. She said that if there are Section 12A applications putting in every month, leading to hold-ups, this will result in delays in the necessary procedures. One board member asked whether there is any urgency of a PB, and if the PB is endorsed and sent to the Lands Department for use in lease revision, will that affect the said 12A application? The chairlady said the two things are independent and if in the future our application is considered and approved, the PB will automatically be void.

Our question is: will the PB endorsement affect the decision-making process for our application or has it already influenced the minds of the Board members? It seems that the board members have many questions and reservations regarding the planning brief, but none raises an objection. Why? It is apparent that the chairlady (Head of

Planning Department) is steering the whole procedure.

On Public Consultation

The PB has only consulted the Food, Environment, Hygiene and Works Committee of the Central and Western District Council and the full council or the public is not consulted. Even with the Committee, it is a plain rejection of the PB. Minutes of the DC plus our comments and letters are on file. If the TPB comes out and says that the PB has gone through necessary public consultation, it is a plain lie and we are in for a case of complain.

This is an abuse of the consultation procedure.

On Land Sales and Archaeological Finds

A representative of the Lands Department (Mr Merritt) raised many important questions. He asked with the prospect of further archaeological finds underground, is it possible that the government demolishes the Police Quarters first and have the AMO come in and do the digging before deciding on the land use or land sales. It is apparent that the HAB or AMO has no idea about the history of the Shing Wong Temple and they have not done any archaeological investigation on the site. What they have done are preliminary investigations of the walls, and the PB was drafted based on these preliminary investigations. There are so many unknowns and question marks and we challenge why an endorsement should build on such loose sands. Why can't a serious archaeological investigation be done first before deciding on the land use or land sales? Why has the HAB not doing anything?

Another question raised by Mr Merritt is that in case the land is sold and during the demolition and construction, some historical relics are found, there will certainly be a hold-up for months or years (for archaeological investigation by AMO), in that case, since the developer will be pressed for completion by the lease requirement, they can make a claim on the government.

If the land is sold and highly important archaeological finds are discovered, there will be no chance of reversing the land ownership, and preserving these finds in-situ. Can we argue then that the land should not be sold unless detailed archaeological investigations have been undertaken?

For us, there is also the issue of historical and cultural meanings. Even if there is no significant archaeological find after the excavation, do the existing foundation, walls, staircases plus the deep-rooted historical lineage, dating from 1843-1876 Shing Wong Temple (housing the city's guardian god), to the highly important Central School 1889-1940s(Sun Yat-sen's alma mater) and the Police Quarters as Donald's previous resident, merit some kind of serious preservation? And does the Central and Western community, with a confirmed shortage of 7 hectares of open space, deserve some kind of genuine open space provision?

On Heritage Conservation

The only amendment to the PB after the DC consultation is a single clause: the developer will be required to preserve the four heritage walls as much as possible (pls check the exact wording), but an underlying clause is that the granite pillars on Staunton Street and Aberdeen Street should be preserved but not necessarily in-situ. Such play on words will easily be exploited by a developer and is definitely not a proper way of heritage conservation.



All in all, the District Council and the Central and Western Concern Group objected to this planning brief and our objection is towards its residential high-rise nature. The revised PB has not addressed this point and its amendment regarding heritage conservation still offers a lot of loop-holes for future developer. It is a plain case of false consultation and false heritage conservation. Genuine archaeological investigation has never been done and the TPB is determined to push the PB through irrespective of all the unknowns and question marks.

Our application will be an important test case to analyze the openness of the TPB and the government's 'new' emphasis on heritage conservation.

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