



**BPF Response to Phase II Public Engagement  
on the Proposed Establishment of a Harbourfront Authority**

The Business and Professionals Federation of Hong Kong (BPF) believes some of the key concerns are not addressed in the digest and response form of the Government Consultation on the setting up of a Harbourfront Authority. These include a lack of oversight over the harbour as a whole; the lack of advisory powers over Government departments; a lack of legitimacy in land allocation; bias towards commercial operations; and a loss of the public voice on the Board.

Since 2004, Designing Hong Kong has called for an authority to create world class waterfronts and BPF support the idea. Now the shortcomings need to be resolved before the community and legislators support the proposal.

Government wants the authority to be endowed with large waterfront sites. Yet, the vesting of land should be the last, not the first, tool in enhancing the waterfront sites.

To start, we need a strategic plan for Victoria Harbour and its 75km waterfront to justify the location of water-dependent land uses – especially the ones nobody wants: pumping stations; sewage plants; waste transfer stations; concrete batching plants; fish and wholesale markets; container and oil terminals; cargo working areas; passenger piers and landings; water sports centers; fuel and water supply stations; police, customs, marine department and fire stations.

Next, the authority must develop waterfront plans for each district along Victoria Harbour, identifying land- and water-based activities and facilities which the local communities want. Such district planning processes are not new. The District Urban Renewal Forum successfully brought together professionals, the Government, district councilors and community to envisage what was required to improve the livability of Kowloon City.

To intervene, the authority must have advisory powers to guide government to invest in new projects, and to steer works and management at existing sites. This should include road and pavement design, pedestrian connectivity, and cycling and dog walking routes irrespective who manages the land. It should steer the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) so we can eat cooked food outdoors at restaurants and kiosks along the waterfront.

The authority must advise the funding of projects irrespective of which government department has responsibility. Again, this is not a new process. This is already being tested in Kwun Tong by the Energizing Kowloon East Office (EKEO), a works office under the Development Bureau.

Where a local community has decided that neither the government nor developers can deliver what the people want, only then can a site be proposed for vesting to the authority because of its flexibility in structuring solutions. With well-argued reasons and community support for proposed



activities, land uses, urban design and business plans, a project proposal identifying funding gaps can be readily approved by the Legislative Council.

However, the proposed requirement for “financial sustainability” and a “balanced portfolio of projects” would force the authority to not just focus on social objectives, but to pick waterfront sites based on commercial viability rather than community aspirations. We need to drop this requirement of financial sustainability. It appears that government’s finance branch is once again meddling with what was supposed to be a good mechanism for delivering a harbourfront for the people. It appears the bean counters consider the setting up of the authority an opportunity to reduce public open spaces, increase development along the waterfronts and reduce public spending. Currently, government normal procedure is that our public spaces are managed by Leisure and Cultural Services Department supported with ample annual funding of operations and ad-hoc funding of projects.

This proposed focus on financial sustainability would also create conflicts of interest, making it impossible for the authority to act as an advisor on overall harbourfront planning. And it would no longer be able to comment on the planning of private waterfront sites next door.

Finally, the current organisation members of the Harbourfront Commission nominate their own representatives. This has ensured diversity in views, creativity, and transparency. The authority must similarly pursue community appointments.

With such changes, the authority becomes a benign solution provider rather than a commercial developer. It becomes a partner of the community rather than an aloof institution. It can then create waterfronts which become exemplary public spaces with an abundant choice of activities for all people.

We also avoid the pitfalls facing the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority. If not, government departments will soon turn their backs on the new authority adopting attitudes of: “It’s not my site, not my responsibility” or “Why make comments on my work, focus on your own sites”.

Without these changes, why risk the unintended consequences of yet another authority? Why not simply create a well-funded works office under the Chief Secretary to implement projects identified by the existing Harbourfront Commission and district councils? Either way, it is time for government to start spending money on world class design and management of our waterfronts. And not just Victoria Harbour, surely residents of Aberdeen, Ap Lei Chau, Tseung Kwan O and Shatin have the same aspirations for their waterfronts.

(December 2014)

\*\*\*