

Responses to the West Kowloon Cultural District Stage 2 Public Engagement Exercises

I. Introduction

1.1 The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (hereafter the WKCDA) has conducted the second stage of public engagement exercises to solicit public views in relation to the concept plans on the West Kowloon Cultural District (hereafter the WKCD) prepared by three design teams¹, including Foster + Partners (hereafter Foster's), Rocco Design Architects Ltd. (hereafter Rocco's) and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (hereafter OMA's). They are the world's leading planning and design teams, each of their design proposal is not only ingenious to make way for the unique vision and philosophy of the WKCD but also creative to reflect wisdom from planning and design point of view. We herewith would like to pay tribute to the three outstanding design teams.

1.2 The Professional Commons (hereafter The ProCommons) has been closely monitoring the development of the WKCD. In the end of 2007 we issued a research report namely "West Kowloon for the People: Research Report on the West Kowloon Cultural District", which put forward multifaceted proposals on its development philosophy and planning guidelines. It should be appreciated that the three concept plans have in one way or the other resembled some of our recommendations.

1.3 The development of WKCD is a public policy issue of utmost importance. After release of the three concept plans, we intended to conduct an in-depth analysis, but reference materials given to the public engagement exercise were far from comprehensive, in which the official information kit failed to provide detailed design plans, study reports and data information. In the light of this, we approached the WKCDA and the three design teams directly to acquire the additional information. To

¹ We show concerns regarding the shifting of the Chinese name of "West Kowloon Cultural District" from 西九文娛藝術區 to 西九文化區 by the Government in the past few years. In fact, the "new" name had once been used in a report from the Culture and Heritage Commission. Secretary for Home Affairs Mr. Tsang Tak-sing used the "new" name again on 12 September 2007 when speaking in the meeting of the Panel on Home Affairs of the Legislative Council. However, the reason for such change has not been explained. We consider that the "old" Chinese name of 西九文娛藝術區 has a more comprehensive coverage on not only art and culture but also recreational activities. We are of the view that the "old" Chinese name can position the Project better in accommodating the basic recreational and cultural needs of the general public. Hence, we prefer the "old" name of 西九文娛藝術區, as far as the Chinese name of the area concerned.

respond, all three design teams stressed that they were willing to give out more information but it was all withheld under WKCD's review, therefore failing to get its consent. It is obvious that **the WKCD denied the public's right to know so their "response" can only rely on limited information and therefore not an informed one.**

1.4 In order to offer each team a chance to present their proposal, the ProCommons hosted three seminars between October and November in 2010. Upon our invitation, all three teams responded positively and had an open communication with participants therein. Each of them made full use of the three-hour session to present their cases, but as expected only information of limited scope has been given away in comparison with their long-range research. On the other hand, the unique characteristics of their designs have also been regarded as an obstacle for the public to grasp the whole picture of each design, therefore detailed comparisons amongst them. Notwithstanding that the platform we provided could help understand more about the planning strategies of the three design teams, it was not as anticipated in soliciting sufficient information for in-depth analysis.

1.5 In the course of evaluation and assessment, we tried to keep our attitude as professional as we could to deal with evidences we had gathered. To get rid of possible bias arising from inequality of information amongst the three concept plans, comparison we made was largely based on publicity materials delivered by the three design teams under the strict guideline of the WKCD. As far as we are concerned, WKCD's control on information flow had been so anti-intellectual that constructive assessments and responses were seriously hampered. Without any easy access to authoritative information, errors and omissions concerning the information quoted in this paper would be inevitable. We deeply regret the blockade of information and deliberate misinformation that result in information asymmetry and subsequently wastage of massive resources by our civil society to collect even general facts. To this end, the WKCD should be held responsible to all data misinterpretations stemmed from its inadequate supply of information.

1.6 It should also be added that **the three world-class designs are of highly stimulating and valuable significance to local professionals, as far as their well-researched thoughts on local planning and design are concerned. Since the Government had acquired the copyright of these concept designs, they became public property and the Government should have them released for public uses and references.**

1.7 This paper aims to grasp this last chance to provide the WKCD with feasible recommendations in a hope that the WKCD brings as much benefit as it could to individual citizens, and then facilitates the development of local art, culture and creative industries. Despite this, the ProCommons would not pre-empt WKCD from making the choice on its behalf but would assist on exploring the merits of various options instead. As some assessment criteria, four areas are suggested as follows:

- Ways to implement the design guidelines as outlined in the tender notices;
- Whether to conform to the ideal planning conditions as suggested by the ProCommons;
- Uniqueness of concepts concerning each of the concept plans; and also
- Views collected from the Stage 1 Public Engagement Exercises.²

² See Public Policy Research Institute, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, “Report on the Analysis of Views for the Stage 1 Public Engagement Exercise for the West Kowloon Cultural District,” March 2010.

II. Government's hidden agenda

2.1 Probably as a PR strategy to tone down the development of the WKCD as a property project, the planning of commercial and residential properties had been sidelined in community discussion on various WKCD concept plans. As highlighted, the core idea of the WKCD is that world-class art and cultural facilities have to be built to host top international arts and cultural activities so as to boost economic development and image of Hong Kong as an Asia World City. It is also important that self-financing has been one of the major guidelines in the WKCD's development. As revealed by government's mindset, economic contribution and financial sustainability of the WKCD appear to be more important than development of local art and cultural, in which the former has become the most important criterion of selection. In order not to be misled, members of the public should monitor the issue more closely. Having said all these, two hidden but overriding agendas have been established by the Government in the evaluation process. Details are shown as follows.

A. Linkage between the WKCD and the Central Business District

2.2.1 The idea to develop another Central Business District (hereafter the CBD) in West Kowloon became very clear by the end of last year, as far as its specific landscape is concerned. On 9 November 2009, it was indicated by Secretary for Development Carrie Lam in the Legislative Council Subcommittee on Harbourfront Planning that "the West Kowloon development possess the potential for another high-quality commercial area, the relevant authorities are redrawing the land use pattern in order to provide more office space in West Kowloon, so that the total supply of the floor area for business purposes will increase to 500 000 square meters (about five million square feet) "³.

2.2.2 In accordance with the established financial arrangements, the land premium generated from commercial land is expected to account for about one-eighth of WKCD's overall revenue, which is not high in particular.⁴ Despite this, the evaluation does not rule out the fact that property value will be on the continued rise in the future. As inferred by current property prices, the estimated value of

³ Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the Subcommittee on Harbourfront Planning of the Legislative Council, 9 November 2009, Appendix, page 1.

⁴ Estimated land Revenue Based on Recommended Financing Option and Measures in Chapters 5 and 6, The Report to the Consultative Committee submitted by the Financial Matters Advisory Group, May 2007, Annex 9.

commercial land in the WKCD had already been doubled⁵. It was also reported in local newspapers that the International Commerce Centre (ICC) and the WKCD would provide Grade A office spaces of about 2.49 million and 1.16 million square feet respectively;⁶ the West Kowloon Terminus of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (hereafter XRL Terminus) would also provide an additional 2.85 million square feet of office space⁷, while another site on top of the MTR Austin Station were sold to developers for their construction of residential properties. Thus, it can be seen that the WKCD would account for one-fifth of all office spaces of this future CBD, therefore of crucial importance to its development. **Therefore, as far as the commercial land in the WKCD is concerned, its capacity in revenue generation is less important in comparison with its provision of adequate office space for the development of the future CBD in West Kowloon. As reiterated, this must be in violation of government’s policy objective if any of the three concept plans tries to jeopardize the future supply of Grade A office spaces. Nevertheless, we are of the view that the decision to be made by the WKCD should instead hinge on the wellbeing of the District.**

2.2.3 Foster’s idea adopted a vertical mixed-mode within a building that consists of spaces for commercial, residential and cultural purposes. The design does not meet those standards as a Grade A office building, particularly complex estate management that would result in difficulties in ownership title and trading accordingly. In addition, the incorporation of office spaces into art and culture purposes might affect the market positioning of these flats, then reduction of Grade A office supply eventually. Financial capability of the art groups in term of rental payment has been another issue of concern.

2.2.4 Under Rocco’s interpretation, office spaces are “workspace”, 70% of which will be for cultural and art workers, art groups and creative industries. Such strategy tries to allocate more land for “other arts and cultural facilities” purpose but will

⁵ Based upon the valuation projections of the West Kowloon Terminus of the neighboring Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, the valuation price per square foot of office space in the West Kowloon Cultural District would be on the range of HK\$4,000 to 10,000, it is estimated to be worth a total of HK\$4.6 billion to HK\$11.6 billion. Managing Director of Savills Valuation and Professional Services (Greater China) Charles CK Chan, the Executive Director Knight Frank Mr Tony Chan, and surveyor Chan Tong Ngok estimated that the prices per square foot of the commercial properties on the rooftop of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong West Kowloon Terminus to be of HK\$4,000, HK\$6,000 and between HK\$8,000 to HK\$10,000 respectively. See〈高鐵總站上蓋擬建三幢商廈〉, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 10 February 2010, p.9; and 〈高鐵總站上蓋擬建「方包」地標〉, *Sing Tao Daily*, 10 February 2010, p. A2.

⁶ 〈西九擬打造新中環 600 萬呎甲級寫字樓建核心商業區〉, *Ming Pao*, 10 November 2009, p. A10.

⁷ 〈高鐵西九總部上蓋擬建 3 商廈〉, *Hong Kong Daily News*, 10 February 2010, p. B8.

deviate government's guideline plan from ensuring adequate supply of office spaces. Despite this, from another point of view, Rocco's design is not without a smattering of merit. Its City Link would be in the north of the WKCD that is adjacent to the Elements shopping centre and is separated from the Cultural Core and the Art Venue that would run from east to west. The design would not undermine the vision of developing a CBD in West Kowloon, as long as land in the north is for the construction of Grade A offices. If such an overhaul actualizes, the strategy of using commercial land to support local art and cultural development plan will never get accomplished.

2.2.5 In analogy with OMA's, Rocco's design comprised a street market in the Middle Village area that would be adjacent to the Elements shopping centre as well as terraces of buildings in the north. In the middle, there would be a green patch that connects east and west, while Recreation, Dining and Entertainment (RDE) facilities would be situated in the south. Therefore, even if these terraces of buildings have to be developed into Grade A offices, development of cultural elements in the WKCD will not be necessarily undermined. It is because land for local art organizations and creative industries would be released through reduction of Core Arts and Cultural Facilities (CACFs) in Rocco's design.

2.2.6 As reiterated, the three designs appear to ignore the interrelationships between the WKCD and the prospective CBD in its vicinity, in which both sides of the central square are to be crammed with CACFs. Only OMA's plan suggested putting some RDE facilities into the east of the Middle Village. However, this is by no means a mistake that cannot be rectified. Instead, it can be solved through a more moderate change in planning arrangements.

B. Revenue generated from sale of residential land

2.3.1 Amongst all concept plans is no detailed explanation concerning residential area planning. Such a low-toned arrangement has largely been attributed to the widespread negative sentiment against hegemony in relation to real estate development in the territory. However, **the land premium arising from residential buildings is of critical importance to the overall finance of the WKCD, in which the budgeting arrangements are closely related to land value. It is estimated that the sale of residential land will account for 80% of total revenue in the District. In the light of this, the WKCDA should not abide by the government's financial**

principle and should try very hard to eliminate the overriding and deterring effect of land sales over the development needs of the District.

2.3.2 Amongst the three designs, Foster's adopted a vertical mixed-mode to make composite of commercial, residential, art and culture activities within the same architecture. But such a move will definitely incur great complexities in ownership, sales arrangement and property management. It will eventually reduce the possibility of luxury flats that would cause adverse effect on property prices and land premium accordingly.

2.3.3 Rocco's proposal clearly indicated where standalone residential buildings and buildings in residential areas should have been situated. In this regard, OMA's proposal is rather vague, in which 11 square-shaped buildings situated in the waterfront area in the north of the Theatre Village can easily be converted into residential uses. Point in common concerning the two concept plans is that the layout of the residential area can clearly be separated from other functional zones, therefore facilitating the management and sales in a more effective manner. It is believed that the idea will be more acceptable to the WKCDA.

2.3.4 It was suggested in OMA's plan that 2% of residential GFA would be reduced, which had been within the permitted range. In fact, it is only stipulated in the relevant regulations that residential GFA must be within the upper boundary of 20% of the total GFA.

2.3.5 It had been unanimous amongst the three design teams that at least a quarter of GFA were allocated to the construction of affordable housing that entertains the needs of the general public, as well as the needs of local art groups and creative workers.⁸ The latter has been in line with ProCommons's view to have a curtailment of one third of residential GFA for local cultural and creative workers.⁹ However, the proposal is considered unrealistic as it will inevitably reduce government's revenue from land sales, therefore suggesting its attitude of reluctance.

⁸ 〈破豪宅框框 公共專業聯盟撐 OMA〉, *Ming Pao*, 21 November 2010, p. A4.

⁹ The Professional Commons, "West Kowloon for the People: Research Report on the West Kowloon Cultural District Development," December 2007, para. 3.3 and 3.4.

III. Our views

3.1 Embodied as its outward vision, government's initial idea concerning the development of the District is to build clusters of world-class cultural venues for the sake of attracting visitors from the Mainland and abroad. In view of this, it was stressed in our research report in 2007 that people from all walks of life and those in local arts community were so eager that any future design should have given a higher priority to local interests, public enjoyment and interactive development between local culture and creative industries. As indicated by the three design plans, each of them seemed to be aware of the importance of these public concerns and aspirations. They were all vividly interpreted in their separate design.

A. Facilitating the development of local art and culture industries

a. Adjustments in spatial layout

3.2.1 In addition to CACFs as required, the three design teams also attempted to boost WKCD's vitality through injection of more local element, including a suggested increase in GFA to promote cultural and art education, to facilitate the exchange between arts and creative industries, and to provide them with facilities-in-residence. Simply put, these ideas **are in analogy with our "Creative Jam" idea. Generally speaking, all three concept plans share with our view to provide more spaces for art and creative workers, despite differing in approaches.**¹⁰

3.2.2 In terms of design criteria relative to the official design, OMA's plan is quite subversive in the sense that the original number of CACFs was considered too much according to their research result. Instead, it suggested a delete of one large, two medium, and one small sized performing venues, then the vacated GFA would be used as spaces for creative productions and education facilities. Another creative idea was to put M+ museum and the Visual Arts Village under the same building structure, upon which M+ museum was considered the backbone together with performing art of various scales and forms. Further, visual art workshops and facilities would also be housed in the same building including offices, schools, studios, hotels, homes and galleries to facilitate exchange and interactions.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

3.2.3 More importantly, OMA's in many ways has affirmed the status of local culture and, through special planning and design tools, enabled overall art and culture development at local level. OMA attached great importance to both cultural characteristics and vitality of urban Kowloon, emphasizing the need to retain its local style rather than blindly adhering to the dogma of redevelopment and beautification. In addition to putting the M+ visual arts village into a location where old Kowloon is nearby, OMA's proposal had an initiative to blend galleries, art workshops, rehearse spaces for theatrical performances into the existing neighboring streetscape in a hope to devise a multiple of "satellite art stations" in the periphery of the District. The setting up of the Premiere Theatre was not only an affirmation of Hong Kong film industry but also an encouragement to the development of local creative industries. Also, audience education and its facilitation was what OMA had attached great importance to, in which open backstage as a concept was adopted in the Theatre Village in the West. Through the concept, members of the public might be enchanted or enlightened through their direct observation on art productions and creations.

3.2.4 Foster's plan made a major adjustment of GFA allocation through reducing scale involved in CACFs, hotels and utility facilities equivalent to a total of 17,000 square meters, 3% of GFA. These vacated GFA, coupled with another 2% from OACFs, would be allocated for educational purposes. More importantly, it stressed a further strengthening of interaction between art and creative industries, in which both residential and commercial functions would be arranged in the same building structure. By combining both working and living spaces for art and creative workers, the design would help break spatial partition to facilitate interaction, which is indeed avant-garde. Also, to facilitate development of local art and creative industries, office spaces within the White Cubes/Black Boxes would be rented to local performing art and creative workers at affordable prices.

3.2.5 It was suggested in Rocco's plan that 70% of office spaces situated in the City Link, approximately 7000 square meters, would be zoned as "workspace" for the use of cultural and creative productions, so as to provide local artists and creative industries with substantial work spaces. Meanwhile, substantial amount of space will be allocated for educational and training purposes so that a cultural ecology that facilitates industrialization could be established. In addition, a quarter of residential GFA would be designated as "affordable housing" for local cultural and art workers. Regarding hotels, there would be similar arrangements including construction of two hotels of relatively small scale, in which the three or four star one was suggested for

exchange purpose between local and overseas artists. It was believed in Rocco's design that artists and creative workers in-residence could play the role as "seed residents" that might bring effect of synergy into play, therefore providing a favourable condition for developing WKCD into a regional art and cultural hub.

b. More space for outdoor performances

3.2.6 It is suggested that the WKCD should have a wide appeal by establishing an atmosphere drizzling with vitality and joy. Besides local elements of considerable proportion, it would be of utmost importance to provide a diverse array of performances as well as to create a pleasant environment where people can be immersed as their profound experience. To this end, it is also crucial to have a flexible arrangement of outdoor performance venues in the WKCD. Foster's and OMA's are similar in terms of arrangement of performing spaces that would provide patches of various sizes for outdoor performance, including forecourt of clutters teeming with cultural facilities and open spaces between architectures. It was further suggested that land carrying no designated function should be used as free temporary performance venues. As emphasized by OMA's design, with endeavors to provide diversity of activities within the District and to achieve public sharing, it would help change visitors' role from a mere passive consumer into an active participant. Despite so, reference materials are so general that further comparisons are so difficult to be made.

3.2.7 Comparatively, Rocco's design is rather stick-to-the-rule, only a number of outdoor performing venues including the Xiqu Square, the Music Forecourt and the Banyan Forum were marked in the plan, giving general public an impression that it is a mere relocation of indoor grand performances from CACFs to outdoors. It is expected that the effect of the arrangement on drawing public close to culture will be very limited. It was also suggested in Rocco's plan that, in formulating development plans, there was no need in designating the usage of every single piece of land in a bid to create room for temporary performing and exhibition purposes. Despite so, without adequate data support, it is difficult for us to have a tenable justification concerning the above proposition, not to mention rooms for further imagination.

3.2.8 It has been agreed by many local artists and members of the public that not only should the WKCD attract audiences all over the world, it should also be in a mission to enhance local arts and culture, making them more suitable for mass consumption. In the light of this, **more favourable conditions should be created to**

let local arts and culture nourish on WKCD's soil, apart from construction of architectures of a mere grandeur. The future WKCD should also play a role of utmost importance to facilitate the interaction of art and culture between West Kowloon and other regions, therefore enhancing the cultural literacy of the general public.

c. **Relocation of the Fire Services Complex to spare more space**

3.2.9 It should be highlighted that spaces reserved for the use of local culture and art groups are severely inadequate, in which only 15,000 square meters of land will be for the use of other art and culture facilities, totaling only 2% of GFA of the entire District. Even worse, these scarce GFA will be reserved for the use of major local art organizations, suggesting small-scale art groups and creative industries will not be able to share. In the light of this, **we proposed in our research report in 2007 that the originally proposed fire services complex situated at Canton Road should be moved elsewhere to free GFA of more than 10,000 square meters for the creation of a “Creative Jam” designed for the use of local arts groups of small and medium scale.**¹¹ As an instant effect, a multiple expansion of land supply for the use of other art and culture facilities is expected by the implementation of the proposed measure, despite government and WKCDA's ignorance.

3.2.10 The ProCommons is still of the view that the above proposal has provided an excellent option, particularly under the circumstance that the Government is unwilling to reduce the commercial and residential GFA. After further studies, we **propose to reduce the size of the King George V Memorial Park nearby to free up land for possible relocation of the Fire Services Complex.** The option has been suggested for two reasons: first, there would be within a walking distance of a few hundreds of meters between the Park and the old fire services complex as well as a convenient access to Canton Road. Second, it is expected that green areas and public spaces of at least 23 hectares will be provided by the WKCD for the uses of residents in neighboring regions like Tsim Sha Tsui and Jordan. Thus, frequent visitors of the King George V Memorial Park will significantly reduce in number. Against this background, the proposal has tried to strike a proper balance in overall interests of the community at large, while not detrimental to the interests of local residents.

¹¹ The Professional Commons, “West Kowloon for the People: Research Report on the West Kowloon Cultural District Development,” December 2007, para. 3.3 and 3.5.

B. Park design

3.3.1 Parks under OMA's design would be luxuriant in content where people would be allowed to carry out wide range of activities. This is indeed a direct challenge against the current stringent management policies from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (hereafter the LCSD). Under the regulation of the "Pleasure Grounds Regulation", all on-grass ball game playing, kite flying, even a mere lie-down are not allowed in public parks. Given that LCSD is not responsible for the management of parks within the premises of WKCD, WKCDA is advised to adopt a more liberal policy so that members of the public can enjoy the park in a more relaxing and casual if not offhand way.

3.3.2 In addition, the criss-cross pattern of the park under OMA's design would be partitioned for different types of landscapes, including themed gardens, ponds, grasslands, wetlands and even community farmland with various kinds of vegetations. Such diversity of natural and rural landscape might satiate visitors with enchantment.

3.3.3 One of the most stunning features of Foster's concept plan is a city park of 19 hectares in area. A large patch of green space along the waterfront is especially compelling. As a highly developed economic entity, it should be beyond any doubt that substantial urban public space is far from adequate in Hong Kong, especially a big park in the heart of the city that, as an open space, facilitates a direct contact with the nature. Also, the Foster's plan reminds instrumentally-minded Hong Kong people of the relationship between the mankind and the nature and suggests the former ways to get along with the latter. The proposed park that plays the function of "urban lung", would be covered with over 5,000 trees. As far as we are concerned, not only does Foster's concept highlight the importance to provide urban areas with better air quality, it also suggests that parks should not be made too artificial to be concrete-covered. As Foster's deliberate arrangement, no specific activities would be arranged in the park to create ample rooms for imagination.

3.3.4 One of the most prominent features in Rocco's plan is its introduction of roof-top gardens. Over 40% of all construction sites would be built into green terraces or roof-top gardens in the future.

3.3.5 It must be noted that there has been a high degree of uncertainty concerning the size of the future West Kowloon Park. **According to the design standard, at least 15 hectares of but not all on-ground public space is required to be allocated**

for park building. Further, the provision of a waterfront promenade no less than 20 meters of width would take up as many as four hectares of land, not to mention the extra for cycle-paths running through the whole District. Hence, the West Kowloon Park is not as big as one might imagine. Notwithstanding 19 hectares in size, the West Kowloon Park would at most be of the same scale as the Victoria Park. Therefore, when **formulating detailed design of the park, it is advisable to strike a balance between Foster’s and OMA’s plan. As a rule of thumb, neither would it be monotonous, nor would it be crammed with facilities and features of excessive amount.**

C. Linkage with the Harbour

3.4.1 The Victoria Harbour has been of special significance to local citizens as well as overseas visitors. Hence, for the sake of returning the Harbour to the people, it is recommended that the WKCD should take reference to the “Harbour Planning Guidelines” in the formulation of the concept plan.¹² Having considered harbour as one of the design parameters in tender specification, the three concept plans tried to show the beauty of the harbour in their own ways but shared the view of establishing a waterfront promenade.

a. Enjoying the Harbour

3.4.2 Comparatively, Rocco’s design is good in the sense that it tried to combine performing art with the Victoria Harbour by proposing a number of art pontoons to bring cultural art performances to the sea. Also, as suggested by their design consultants, these floating arts pontoons could be dragged to different part of the harbour, therefore facilitating the promotion of the WKCD as a brand as well as cultural exchanges between the District and regions in its vicinity. As a covered outdoor theatre, the Banyan Forum would be situated next to the park, where visual art programmes are provided through a giant water curtain as a projection screen after nightfall, with the Harbour as the backdrop. The coastal Green Terrain is so spacious that people would be able to enjoy the harbor view on the green slope thereupon. It is proposed as another feature that the Harbour Pool could make people feel as if they were swimming in the Harbour. North of the City-Belt is to be teeming with

¹² The Professional Commons, “West Kowloon for the People: Research Report on the West Kowloon Cultural District Development,” December 2007, para. 2.3 and 2.4.

commercial, residential and hotel buildings that are amongst all the tallest, whereas most of them facing the harbour.

3.4.3 OMA's suggested that, as situated in the western side of the waterfront, the Theatre Village was expected to bring more activities to the waterfront. The Middle Village concept is a suggested extension of Kowloon streetscape, where commercial facilities including retails, dining and entertainment facilities of relatively small scale, open markets and art galleries would be available. People would be able to reach the harbour-side park on foot after the Middle Village via Elements shopping centre and the future CBD nearby. Leveled patterned design of all architectures in the Middle Village, as well as large performance venues with Hong Kong Island and the Victoria Harbour as the backdrop would provide additional opportunities to appreciate the harbour-scene. Besides, the proposal of floating black box theaters and harbourside swimming are innovative and intriguing, as far as we are concerned.

3.4.4 The coastal green-belt in Foster's plan is composed of dense groves and a waterfront promenade that are expected to play the role of beautification, then improvement of harbour environment. However, the hotel with the shape of "liveable wall" situated near the entrance of the Western Harbour Tunnel appears to be the only building that can enjoy the unparallel harbour view in the District. Those buildings on eastern side would be high in density and might block views of each others, therefore reducing each other's chance to face the Victoria Harbour.

b. Back-and-from the Harbour

3.4.5 **The scenery of the Victoria Harbour is static and even monotonous if there is no vibrant activity therein. It could not revitalize the harbour by merely providing more venues that face it. As far as its historical role is concerned, one of the basic functions of the Victoria Harbour is to connect Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula.** Unfortunately, increasingly well-developed mass transit system in recent years has resulted in the decline of ferry services. In fact, whether to put in place ferry services has always been an area of study in the development plan of the WKCD. It is suggested that not only could ferry services bring about extra visitors to the District, they could also serve as an additional channel for traffic flow. As far as the future development of West Kowloon is concerned, the scope where ferries could serve should not be confined to the premises of the WKCD but also the new CBD nearby. In so doing, the connectivity could be enhanced by improving its networks with other areas in Kowloon and even New Territories. However, the three

design teams have had their own interpretation of differing degree over this important factor.

3.4.6 Amongst three is Rocco's plan that suggested to put ferry pier at an important location in the middle part of the south-facing coastline where faces straight the Central Square. Visitors after landing would be able to head off to the ICC, commercial buildings on top of the XRL Terminus and even Tsim Sha Tsui or Jordan Road within a walking distance of 10 minutes. In addition to the future XRL Terminus, it is obvious that West Kowloon, as one of the most important transportation hubs, is expected to bring about considerable synergistic effect over the territory.

3.4.7 On the other hand, the suggested ferry pier, according to OMA's and Foster's plan, is to be located at a relative west position of the coastline that would face the ICC at its north, suggesting service targets would be those who take core art and culture performing venues as their destination. Foster's proposal also adopted ferry service, whilst OMA's preferred Water Taxis. Since irregular frequency and limited capacity of the latter, water taxis would not be very helpful in flow channeling of any kind.

3.4.8 Ferry services between Central, Wan Chai and West Kowloon offer convenient means of transportation that help improve the connectivity of these three commercial centres, while bringing the Harbour with vitality. People hustling and bustling through the District will not only increase customer flow for the RDE facilities but also help enhance the public understanding on local arts and cultural facilities and programmes thereupon, therefore attracting more people to enjoy the District. It should also be highlighted that, despite strategic significance of the proposed ferry piers, they are auxiliary in the sense that, such element could be easily embedded in their respective plan with no significant difficulty.

D. Transportation Facilities

3.5.1 As a newly-developed area situated at one side of the Peninsula, the WKCD will be isolated from the outside if accessibility, as an issue, is not properly dealt with. Despite the fact that all the three concepts attached great importance to transport planning, they were short of macroscopic considerations over this issue, then a failure to have formulated a transport master plan. Their design also ignored two important

parameters, including the interrelationship between the WKCD and the future CBD nearby, as well as the potential of West Kowloon to become a regional transportation hub.

a. Transportation hub in West Kowloon

3.5.2 To effectively manage the road conditions in the vicinity of the future XRL Terminus, the Government is committed to improving transport facilities in and out of the district, while the WKCD is merely focusing on the traffic problems within. Both parties have neglected the potential of the WKCD in regional transport development.

3.5.3 At present, there are nine bus routes, five short-haul minibus routes toward different areas in Kowloon and New Territories together with a cross-border Express coach route connecting the Public Transport Interchange that is situated at the MTR Kowloon Station. When XRL Terminus comes into service, the transport feeder system in connection with both Kowloon and New Territories is expected to be further improved. In the future, West Kowloon will become one of the most important regional transportation hubs that comprises cross-border XRL, coach services, West Rail Line and Airport Express Line of the MTR, as well as numerous bus and public light bus routes that run between West Kowloon and other areas all over the territory. Given its heavy reliance on road transport as the key to future transport problem, the WKCD is prescribed to restrictively handle the inward and outward flow of people and traffic. Despite this, as an objective fact, the proposed ferry pier is to be built near the future transportation hub, which will bring advantage of sea transport into play. Such a move might reverse the fate of ferry service which has been shrinking under the fierce competition from mass transit system. As a convenient point to commute, passengers would be able to take ferries there to Central or Wan Chai, therefore alleviating the burden of on-road traffic.

3.5.4 As a measure to alleviate traffic congestion between the District and its vicinity, OMA's suggested the construction of a loop-shaped suspension bridge that connects Austin Road, Jordan Road and the Western Harbour Tunnel to reduce road bottlenecks on the one hand, and to provide extra road capacity for vehicles on the other. This proposal further indicates the inadequacy of traffic improvement works near the future XRL Terminus in coping with the anticipated traffic flow. Only a significant increase in road capacity might have the chance to accommodate the additional traffic.

3.5.5 Foster's plan suggested transferring part of the road traffic underground, where a multi-lane trunk under the avenue would be constructed not only for inward and outward traffic but also for diversion of traffic flow. Rocco's also suggested an idea of underground traffic but of smaller scale, therefore not effective in providing extra road capacity. In fact, Rocco's plan attached greater importance to walking as a major mode of transportation within the District.

3.5.6 All the three concept plans suggested the underground arrangement of all parking spaces. More than 4,000 parking spaces would be provided according to Foster's and OMA's plans. Besides those for users of art and culture facilities, parking spaces of considerable proportion would be reserved for users of residential and office buildings. By contrast, it was suggested in Rocco's design that parking spaces could only be provided for those who work in the art and culture facilities concerned. No parking spaces would be reserved for audiences and visitors. As highlighted, the ProCommons is of the view that **there is no need to provide that many parking spaces, as far as the availability of excellent inbound and outbound transport are concerned. Instead, visitors and people who live and work in the district should be encouraged to use public transport. To this end, there should be a significant reduction in the number of parking spaces in the final planning. Such a measure should be taken in a bid to address the traffic congestion problems in West Kowloon in a more effective manner.**

3.5.7 All three concept plans shared the view that mass transit system is the most important means of transport in and out of the District. Hence, a number of footbridges connecting the MTR Kowloon and Austin Stations, as well as pedestrian passages straight to the waterfront of the district from the future XRL Terminus were under their design. As far as the high demand on accessibility to the future CBD is concerned, it would be possible to install Automated People Mover for further improvement of pedestrian flow.

b. Transport arrangements within the WKCD

3.5.8 Regarding transport arrangements within the District, OMA's emphasized the importance of pedestrian walking. It proposed to construct outdoor, indoor, and underground pedestrian passages. By doing so, less than 7-minute walk would be possible between any place in the District and transportation points nearby; at most nine minutes would be required to travel through east to west by using the proposed Automated People Mover. Alternatively, Rocco's proposed the introduction of trams,

while Foster's introduced Skyrail, an elevated rail system. But these vehicles would only be allowed to run throughout the District. In this connection, we cast doubt on their ability to attract sufficient passenger numbers, therefore not necessarily cost effective. If they are extended outside the District towards spots like Hong Kong Cultural Centre and the Star Ferry Pier in Tsim Sha Tsui, extra burdens on major trunks as Canton Road and Nathan Road are expected.

3.5.9 For the sake of cultural incubation through civic participation rather than a district for passive consumption, a transportation system of excessive convenience would probably stimulate "impulsive spending" that is rather not preferable. Thus, the multi-layered design involving heavy use of motors, as Foster's and ROCCO's do, would not only increase investment and operating cost but also adversely affect the cultural ambience of the District.

3.5.10 Despite the fact that cycle paths have been incorporated as one of the design components in all three concept plans, it was only restricted within the District without further extending them to its periphery. It is far from satisfactory when compared with our Cycling City concept that proposed a network of connections between old and newly developed areas.

E. **Eco-friendly facilities**

3.6.1 As a new area still under planning, the overall design should incorporate the most advanced development mode of low carbon emissions through the introduction of the most stringent emission standards in building design, transport as well as overall urban planning. **Despite the fact that all three concept plans have had their selling points on emission reduction design, their effectiveness can only be assessed with extensive data analysis. Given limited information disclosure so far, only a few factors of consideration can be summarized as references.**

3.6.2 **The WKCD has a great potential to be developed into a "low-carbon demonstration zone". The crux of the issue is whether there is a comprehensive reduction plan via holistic planning and mitigation measures on the one hand, and a proper emission reduction planning plus installation of facilities accordingly to change people's bad habits of resource wastage on the other.** As a goal, OMA's proposed a 20-year plan to reduce carbon emissions in the District to the half of Hong Kong overall level. According to OMA's plan, sea breeze would be used as a major source of ventilation to lower the temperature of the region under which

elaborate road width, building height and shape were expected to facilitate wind circulation. Similarly, blockage of sunlight would be possible via tree shades of extensive scale. All these constitute a unique cityscape, within which the temperature would be around 5 to 10 degrees below that in Yau Tsim Mong District, its neighborhood. Furthermore, given no public transport within the District, it would be helpful in shifting behaviors of the general public by encouraging them to walk in the long run.

3.6.3 One of the selling points of Foster's design is its goal towards a zero carbon city via waste recycling and the use of renewable energy. Specific measures include the construction of a state-of-the-art Energy Centre for organic waste treatment and power generation by using the gas released, whilst District Cooling System would be installed to further enhance energy efficiency, then reduction of carbon emission.

3.6.4 Nonetheless, **underground facilities of extensive scale are not in line with eco-friendly principles, as far as huge demand on ventilation is concerned.** The underground trunk proposed by Foster's is expected to create a lot of emissions, therefore requiring a sizable air-conditioning system that might involve considerable energy consumption. Bio-fuel buses also create emissions of carbon dioxide and other toxic substances. In addition, the proposed three-storey underground car park provides far more parking spaces than the single-storey one suggested by Rocco's and OMA's.

3.6.5 Also, it should be highlighted that the effectiveness of eco-friendly design is also a major parameter other than the design itself. Regarding eco-friendly means of transport, Rocco's suggested tram; Foster's suggested Skyrail and bio-fuel buses, while Automated People Mover was introduced in OMA's plan. The anticipated source of passengers as a factor should be taken into serious consideration. It will also be a great wastage if there exists substantial amount of spare capacity.

F. IT infrastructure

3.7.1 Despite the fact that great emphasis is attached to hardware architecture in the design criteria, minimal concern has been received in the development of information and communications technology (hereafter ICT). Subsequently, ICT development as an issue has not been addressed by all three concept plans. Since CACFs of world-class standard are to be in place in all designs, sophisticated ICT system *in par* should be in place. More importantly, as a government's objective to develop Hong Kong into a "wireless city", **it is suggested that the WKCD should**

become another "demonstration zone" in the development of ICT applications. Through incorporation of the most state-of-the-art ICT elements into the overall design, the WKCD could bring in new elements to facilitate interactions between art and creative industry development, as well as to provide users and visitors therein with exuberant digital life experiences.

III. Conclusions

4.1 As a matter of fact, Hong Kong people have been nauseated by hegemony of real estate development. Since the Government reiterated that the WKCD is not a real estate project, **the WKCDA should try to disentangle itself from constraints of real estate development, select a concept plan that genuinely serves the wellbeing of Hong Kong people, return the Harbour to the people for public enjoyment, and help promote the development of local culture and creative industries.**

4.2 Furthermore, **the ultimate goal of cultural development is to foster civic participation as well as to nurture the individuality and creativity of Hong Kong people. Hence, the design proposal that fulfills these objectives to the maximum degree would be the one that receives the most extensive support.**

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Responses to the West Kowloon Cultural District
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