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**CHAI WAN OZP NO. S/H20/25**  
18/08/2023 03:11

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File Ref:

Dear TPB Members,

**LAND FOR HOUSING**

It is time for all sectors of the community to unite and stop the ‘Land for Housing’ juggernaut in its tracks before it devours and eliminates everything and anything that is treasured and enjoyed by the community be it of historical, cultural, ecological, recreational or community value.

Unfortunately the subtle message is that anyone who opposes development plans that include the word ‘housing’ are daubed as being unpatriotic and enemies of the state. However it is time to make a stand. Unfortunately those campaigning for more public housing units are put in a difficult position as they are expected to endorse all plans regardless of their merit and long term implications.

**The Propaganda : “The Government adopts a multi-pronged approach to build up land reserve with a view to meeting housing and other development needs”**

**The Reality: The only approach evident so far is the easy solution REZONE REZONE REZONE.**

No matter what the existing use and its place in the formation of a livable city:

- The land grab is decimating Green Belt, chopping down thousands of trees and eliminating flora and fauna. This reduces our tools in the battle against climate change.
- Our parks and open spaces are being converted under the one site multi-use formula into nothing more than landscaped podium tops where only ornamental trees can take root.
- Recreational venues are no longer pop in at grade options open to all. One has to go through security and layers of petty regulations that deter the more free spirited from enjoying public facilities.
- Village communities are being evicted and dispersed. Heritage and culture have not been spared.
- Unique heritage and cultural structures have been reduced to a shell and then filled with shiny glass and lots of lights under the ‘adaptive reuse’ policy that strips them of their integrity and original form.

There has not been a single initiative put forward other than rezone.

Regrettably **there is no incentive to explore other solutions now that the administration can ram through whatever plans it wants** as TPB will not dare to overturn the applications and Legco will rubber stamp the expenditure without question. Secretary for Development made that clear in her statement that by the time plans are put to Finance Committee *“the concerns of the LegCo members will be on technical details, like whether we have sufficient facilities to support the new population, whether the timing of the whole construction schedule is reasonable, and whether we have done our best to respond to the concerns of the local residents affected.”*

**It is appalling that no member of the Finance Panel attends Town Planning Board meetings on developments that will cost billions of dollars and radically transform our neighbourhoods.**

## **QUESTION THE JUSTIFICATION FOR DEVELOPING SO MANY PH UNITS**

### **1. Abuse of PH units has not been addressed.**

While there are hundreds of officers investigating NS no dedicated team has been set up to look into this issue that would free up probably thousands of units. Most HK people know folk living in PH who own properties and have cash stashed away or invested elsewhere. Many units are used for storage or as accommodation for domestic helpers. A number of media reports have revealed the lax attitude on the part of HA when it comes to dealing with allocation of its resources. The most recent is the Ombudsman’s revelation that hundreds of units with shared facilities have been left vacant. It is ridiculous that HA uses the excuse that it cannot remodel these units until all tenants have moved out. In the private market tenants are often forced to vacate units to accommodate redevelopment and under the Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) Ordinance. Surely HA tenants agreement has a clause that covers redevelopment needs. PH is not a birth right.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3227578/vacancies-hong-kong-unpopular-shared-facility-public-sector-flats-should-be-reduced-ease-housing>

### **2. No incentive for PH residents to downsize when family member move out.**

I was talking to a lady recently who lives in a large PH unit. At one time there were 7 members of the family spanning 3 generations living there. The parents have passed away and her husband and the children have moved out. One daughter stays with her from time to time. She moans about the rent but likes the space. One solution would be to offer new custom built elderly units to such tenants as many have health issues. Data indicates that each new PH unit houses an average of 1.16 persons.

### **3. The population is SHRINKING both here and on the mainland. Failure of administration to take advantage of current market conditions:**

There are thousands of empty units on the mainland – even in GBA developers

have unfinished projects. Many of the developers are in financial difficulties so this would be a good opportunity to acquire properties at a low cost that could be fitted out as HK style public housing nodes. This is in line with government policy. The Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau has been airing a TV ad encouraging the elderly to move to GBA. Mrs Lam when CE stated that many of Hong Kong's elderly people were receiving old-age living allowances and based in Guangdong. "If our welfare policies make it more convenient for them to spend their retirement years there"

Some people in the queue for PH, including retirees, would prefer to live on the mainland. With an abundant supply of distressed stock available, the administration should be actively seeking to purchase vacant estates that could be adapted to the format of a regular Hong Kong PH complete with community and health services.

One way permit holders who prefer to live on the mainland could be granted residency here but allocated a unit on these estates. It is estimated that 60% of those living in subdivided units are recent arrivals.

This would be compatible with the mandate of the Central Government for better integration with the mainland.

#### **4. Failure to drive forward the Tenants Purchase Scheme.**

140,000+ such units were sold and each tranche was oversubscribed, indication that affordability was not an issue but the programme had been allowed to lapse. This would unlock the value of currently dormant government owned sites.

#### **5. Emigration is growing and interest rates are rising as the economy is slowing down and this is driving down the price of homes.**

**The Quota and Points System** introduced in 2005 has had the negative outcome of encouraging young folk to join the PH queue. This has consequences as it extinguishes the drive to look for better employment and opportunities as this would result in a wage increase that would exceed the limits.

**The Home Ownership Scheme** has attracted investment by families under the name of their younger members who can tick the financial status boxes and have become investment vehicles rather than the solution to the provision of affordable homes.

In view of the soon to be abundant supply of vacant units on the private market at more affordable prices, the administration should introduce more programmes to assist these young people in purchasing their own homes.

Only 60% of the units put on the market recently have sold and there is a record number of units being held back. In addition the administration has not provided an update on the number of empty units, over 200,000 when the Vacancy Tax was touted so certainly grown since then.

The administration is pursuing an outdated development model that is not in sync with the emerging conditions of both China and Hong Kong, shrinking population, significant increase in issues related to global warming and pollution and the need

for prudent fiscal policies that reflect the reality that there is economic stagnation that is likely to persist for many years. Housing targets must reflect genuine need but not overestimate it, as is currently the situation.

**In addition eligibility does not equate with need. Provision of PH to young people is encouraging a culture of Lying Flat.**

Two media reports last week are indicative of the negative impact of allowing young people to apply for PH.

One featured a 23 year old showing the PH unit she had been assigned after only two years on the waiting list. She did not appear to be disabled so many questioned how come when there are many older folk who have waited for years for a unit.

Another was a 40-year old man who said he had been waiting for 18 years for a unit and had restricted his working hours to ensure that he did not exceed the financial limits:

Allowing young people to apply for PH is stifling initiative and encouraging a number of them to rely on the state instead of finding ways to improve their financial position..

The government has refused over the years to find alternative sources of revenue and persists with its high land prices policy. The result is a society with a shockingly high degree of wealth inequality that prohibits a large portion of the population from enjoying affordable housing. This translates into an inordinate demand for public housing and the miserable reality that all many can look forward to is to living in small, poorly constructed boxes on estates with ever dwindling open spaces and amenities.

Mary Mulvihill

