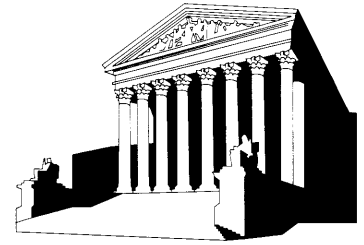




Title	Rethinking planning
Author(s)	McInnis, JA; Donnelly, B
Citation	Asian Architect & Contractor, 1999, v. 28 n. 9, p. 47
Issued Date	1999
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10722/57096
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Rethinking Planning



A major planning review is under way in Hong Kong. This month, in the first of a two-part series, *J A McInnis* and *Bernadette Donnelly* look at the background to these changes. Next month they offer some suggestions for the review.

ONLY IN RELATIVELY recent times has Hong Kong had an overall planning strategy. In fact the system of town planning in the city has been criticised for lacking in sophistication and might be said to have a pragmatic rather than theoretical basis. In holding this view, the 1991 consultative document *Comprehensive Review of the Town Planning Ordinance* concludes that "a more sophisticated approach to planning is required in Hong Kong to meet the rapid pace of development and the growing public concern about the quality of the physical and social environments."

Many debates have taken place as to whether the aims of the *Review* can be met, and what the consequences of those proposed changes might be. In *Town Planning in Hong Kong – A Critical Review*, author Lawrence Wai-Chung Lai holds the view that despite the claim for a balance between public and private interests, the main thrust of the proposals are tilted towards public interest in the form of more planning and less private rights. On the other hand, Samuel Staley in *Planning Rules and Urban Economic Performance – The Case of Hong Kong*, looks at town planning in Hong Kong in the economic context. He holds the view that the proposed changes put forward in the *Review* will have an economically disruptive effect on the town planning and development process in Hong Kong by bringing about further uncertainty in the local property markets. According to Lai, Staley's main argument is that town planners have proposed reforms to the local planning permission system that will delay the development process by forcing developers to undergo lengthy and uncertain development application procedures.

Strategic Industrial Development

The re-structuring of the industrial sector that has taken place in Hong Kong since the launch of the "open door" policy in China has important implications on the demand for land, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. In order to review future requirements of the industrial sector for different types of land and premises, the Government undertook the *Study on the Provision of Industrial Premises and the Development of Planning Guidelines and Design Parameters for New Industrial Areas and Business Parks*. Planning standards and guidelines for this area of development are based on its findings.

Also significant is the relocation of Hong Kong manufacturing operations to southern China and resultant

shift towards non-production activities such as finance, transportation, trade, advertising and technology. The *Territorial Development Strategy* ("TDS") has identified the functional role of Hong Kong in the area of industrial development as being a "Regional Base for Industrial Services and High-tech Industry." This role is set to become a fundamental principle in future planning and land use as Hong Kong goes forward.

The above shift, plus an increased focus on tourism, has brought recreational land use to the fore. The Government has acknowledged that recreation stems from a basic human need for activities essential to mental and physical well-being. It is accepted therefore, that recreation is an essential activity for which land must be allocated. The *Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines* (HKPSG) set targets in this area which may not be achieved all at once or even uniformly throughout Hong Kong.

Furthermore, the Government has begun a review of *Metroplan*. The review is considering the effect of recent changes in local development including the trend toward decentralisation, changes in population forecasts, transport links and new environmental perspectives. Under *Metroplan* a broad framework for open space and recreational facilities has been formulated with the objective of improving the living quality and working environment in the "Metro Area".

In 1992, a *Foundation Study for a Recreation Land Use Strategy* was commissioned as an integral part of the TDS Review to provide a framework for the future provision of land for recreational purposes. In late 1995, in view of the changing circumstances and the proposals in *Metroplan* and the TDS Review, consultants were commissioned to undertake a study entitled *Study of Leisure Habits and Recreation Preferences*. The purpose of the study was to assess the leisure habits and recreational preferences of Hong Kong people and to formulate up-to-date planning standards and guidelines to meet their needs. The findings provide a good basis for up-dating planning standards and guidelines for all future forms of land use, focusing on *quantity, quality, good practice and vision*. ■AAC

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