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Submission Number:

TPB/R/S/H5/32 -S029

DRAFT WAN CHAI OZP - S/H5/32 - OBJECTION

Dear TOWN PLANNING BOARD Chairman and Members

Re: DRAFT AMENDMENTS WAN CHAI OUTLINE ZONING PLAN S/H5/32

Item A– Rezoning of a site at 1, 1A, 2 and 3 Hillside Terrace, 55 Ship Street (Nam Koo Terrace), 1-5 Schooner Street, 53 Ship Street, 18 Sau Wa Fong, Inland Lot 9048 and adjoining government land from “Comprehensive Development Area” (“CDA”), “R(C)” and an area shown as ‘Road’ to “Other Specified Uses” (“OU”) annotated “Residential Development with Historic Building Preserved” (“OU(RDHBP)”) with stipulation of building height restrictions

Item B1 - Rezoning of a site at 31-36 Sau Wa Fong and 8-12 St. Francis Street from “Residential (Group A)” (“R(A)”), “Residential (Group C)” (“R(C)”), and an area shown as ‘Road’ to “Residential (Group A)9” (“R(A)9”) with designation of 31-36 Sau Wa Fong as sub-area (a) and 8-12 St. Francis Street as sub-area (b)

I am a resident of Kennedy Road, living in Wan Chai opposite St.Francis' Canossian College and I have family with a property in St.Francis Yard facing Sau Wa Fong .

I strongly **OBJECT** to this Draft Plan because it basically intends to **DOUBLE DEVELOPMENT DENSITY** and **DOUBLE BUILDING HEIGHTS** thus it raises many serious planning questions and practical problems acknowledged and specified in the Wan Chai OZP down the years. The Board needs to earnestly address, on behalf of the community, the failures of the Planning Department to consider and enforce the requirements of the OZP rather than passively kowtowing to the interests of influential developers.

1. Location - Wan Chai OZP's have stated that Schooner Street is part and parcel of Sau Wa Fong. It seems that proponents want to treat Item A Nam Koo Terrace & Hillside Terrace (NKT/HST) as a special entity apart from Sau Wa Fong and thus evade the strict specific planning restrictions that have been placed on Sau Wa Fong. Item A and Item B1 are "in the same boat".

2. Development Intensity

Wan Chai OZP's have explicitly stated that the Sau Wa Fong area is for low to medium rise residential development which is subject to specific plot ratio and building height restraints:

a maximum **PR of 5** and a maximum **BH of 12 storeys**.

3. Character of the Area

In many discussions down the years the Board has determined that this area of Wan Chai to the south of Queen's Road East encompassing Schooner Street, Sa Wah Fong, Sun and

Moon Street, St. Francis' Street and Yard has a special local character and that this should be preserved. This **special local character** is reflected in the Wan Chai OZP statements

restricting max building heights to 12 storeys as well restricting the development PR to 5. The low rise properties of the vicinity currently give a unique character to this area and are much appreciated by the local community and the wider Hong Kong public who actively visit this area as an attraction. This "Sau Wa Fong-St Francis-Star, Sun, Moon" precinct has become very popular for young people to meet and socialize, including young Chinese tourists - (the "selfie generation") - **see photo 3** attached below

4. Accessibility

There are severe accessibility problems for these sites: indeed Sau Wa Fong, and NKT, has **NON-EXISTANT vehicular access**. The closest vehicular access is at St. Francis Street .

This is a busy single lane steeply sloped road (1-in-6 gradient) without standard footpaths so that people must walk in the road. This is **DANGEROUS**, especially when St. Francis'

Junior school pupils are arriving or departing. There are **NO designated parking/loading/unloading bays** so that cars and delivery trucks stop in lane in St. Francis Street or drive into the St. Francis Yard cul-de-sac. (**see Photo 3** attached below)

No consideration has been made of the impact of the lack of vehicular access on the already traffic laden locale. Large delivery trucks would block the traffic as a development of 400 + units plus the proposed retail would require frequent offloading of heavy items. Nor is there any consideration of arrangements for the removal of the large amounts of daily garbage that would be generated. These large developments would certainly have a strong negative impact on the QRE environment and traffic flow and could create dangerous chaos on St. Francis' Street and Star Street.

Heavy goods vehicles are banned from St. Francis' Street on safety grounds (**see photo 2** attached below)

No consideration for pedestrians. Pedestrian access is difficult , hazardous and long via steep steps up from Queen's Road East, or long and indirect via the narrow lanes in Sau Wa Fong or via Hopewell Hotel and Mall. For the elderly and infirm this is a severe challenge, and for the disabled it is untenable. (**see photo 4** attached below)

5. NO EVA

NO consideration has been made for the lack of access to **Fires Services, Ambulance Services and Policing Vehicles**. In previous Wan Chai OZP this lack of **EMERGENCY ACCESS** was an explicit and specific reason for limiting **maximum building height 12 storeys**. The proponent's basic viewpoint is that these sites have unique constraints which prohibit normal statutory standards,

therefore we can ignore them! This ludicrously "flexible" approach to a CDA has not been challenged. This apparent change in official and Board attitude to public safety and risk is alarming to ordinary citizens.

6. Public Open Space

There was a community centered plan in 1994 to create a "green ribbon" interlinked public open space network, at grade (i.e. natural ground level) in the Queen's Road East locale of Southorn.

These open space areas were intended to be managed by Government with minimum restrictions on public access. Sam Pan Street-Garden East, Lee Tung Avenue-QRE Plaza, Ship Street-HCII Kennedy Park-HCII are in reality controlled by private developers and have been designed with sparse facilities and operated to discourage public participation. They are hidden on high podiums that obscure access and hamper proper tree growth. Nam Koo Terrace and Hill Side Terrace were intended to be the final link in the "O" zone network; thus the Board zoned NKT and HST as Open Space "O" with zero Plot Ratio potential. Now a large part the statutorily required "Open Space" provision will be placed underneath the tower block on HST or inside NKT where it is generally inaccessible to the public. It will be a miserable dark area, especially as many people think that NKT is haunted. (**see photo 1** attached below) And now development plot ratio is being extracted from this Open Space "O" land.

7. Heritage

There are serious concerns with regard to the damage already done and planned alterations the future with regard to Grade I Nam Koo Terrace. Over the many years of Hopewell's ownership of NKT this Grade I property became dilapidated. However, now it appears they are being rewarded by compliant planners. The impressive high granite plinth would be built over under the plan. This is an integral part of the heritage building and represents its location overlooking the original harbour before extensive reclamation moved the shoreline. In addition the public would be denied the pleasure of viewing the Grade I building from the main thoroughfare of Queen's Road East and the south side of Ship Street. The development plans are stripping Grade I Nam Koo Terrace of any visibility, and community and cultural context. (**See photo 1** attached below)

8. Representations

I have read the received submissions TPB/R/S/H5/32- S-001 to S-005 on the TPB website

I agree with S-003,S-004,S-005 as they give a valid perspective of people living in the close vicinity: whereas I doubt that members of the Board will have any awareness of this unique area.

In S-002 I read the ebullient support given by the Principal of St.Francis' Canossian College, though perhaps not surprising given the school's long relationship with Hopewell. The former Principal,

Sister Susanna Yu, requested Hopewell in 2014 *"to allow sufficient space for ventilation and provide ample greenery between the school's boundary and Hopewell's boundary"*. I expect that Sister Yu would not have been "happy" to know of such a dominant 28 storey block set so close behind her classrooms, stealing natural light. Undoubtedly, when Sister Yu expressed that *"the safety*

and security of our students is our gravest concern" she could have had in mind the ability of the tower's residents to peer into the classrooms of her girl students, and about the traffic impact and risk to her junior students at steep and narrow St. Francis Street (see photo 3 attached below)

9. Wan Chai OZP statements

I quote the following ten statements directly from the Wan Chai OZP which are directly **PERTINENT** both Item A and Item B1.

It is both stunning and alarming to ordinary citizens how such **DEFINITE** and **CLEAR** statements are simply **IGNORED** and **BYPASSED** by proponents, and that our Development Bureau and the Director of Planning have turned a blind eye. Obviously influential developers are involved.

- a) This zone is intended for low to medium-rise residential development subject to specific plot ratio and building height restrictions to preserve the local character and to avoid adverse visual, air ventilation and traffic impacts from more intensive development. (8.4.1.)*
- b) given the special local character of the area, development intensity is restricted to a maximum building height of 12 storeys. (8.4.3.)*
- c) Subject to specific building height restrictions (12 storeys) to address problems of loading/unloading, limited emergency access and fire safety concerns.
More intensive development in the area is not recommended because of safety concerns particularly for the disabled and elderly (7.5.1.)*
- d) The area is inaccessible by vehicular traffic (8.4.2.)*
- e) Loading/unloading facilities have to be carried out manually at a distance, posing inconvenience to residents. (7.5.1)*
- f) In case of emergency, safety might be at stake because of access problems for ambulance services and fire-fighting. (7.5.1.)*
- g) The inaccessibility of fire engines to the site would pose a safety risk and inconvenience to residents (8.4.4)*
- h) the cumulative effect of more intensive developments would aggravate the existing traffic conditions" (8.4.2).*
- i) the generally low-rise character of the area facilitates southerly downhill wind penetrating into Wan Chai". (8.4.1)*
- j) a well preserved, enclosed and tranquil residential area" and that "the streetscape and low to medium-rise residential developments in the area possess a human scale and create a different urban form in contrast with the high-rise mixed development to the north along Queen's Road East. The building height restrictions are to preserve the local character and to avoid adverse visual impact (8.4.1.)*

One can only QUESTION why these statements-requirements were NOT properly addressed by the Independent Board during the discussion on Y/H5/5 and Y/H5/7

Summarizing up Y/H5/5 the chairman said that while the Members were in support of the site to "CDA" more effort should be made by the applicant to improve the design of public open space

in terms of both quality and quantity, the accessibility of the site, the provision of community/social welfare facilities, and the air ventilation of the surrounding area". This was a **meek , weak and essentially an accommodating statement in the context of the ten OZP points a) to j) listed above.**

However, Instead of responding to the Board, the developer continues to push the boundaries and increase the density of the development.

While I have not seen the chairman's summary for Y/H5/7 I expect a statement in a similar vein, and a similar accommodating outcome.

10. Comments

a) Item A - Hopewell are time-honed masters of the multi-TPB application method to confuse planners and Board Members in order to gain incremental advantage.

Now through astute and manipulative use of the planning system to switch zonings -"O" to "CDA" to "OU(RDHBP)" - instead of zero PR the planners have given PR5 and

now ludicrously wanting to grant PR9. Whereas "O" offers no building possibility , our planners have granted a 21 storey block, and now intend to further increase this to 28 storeys.

I surmise the next step will be to apply a s.16 application for "a minor relaxation to the Building Height Restriction" to add "a couple more floors" - this used to require a specific justification to the Board, but now it appears to be a formality. It is obvious that the proposed "OU(REHBP)" zoning paints over the common sense that needs to be applied to this unique location and attempts to evade the requirements of the ten Wan Chai OZP as quoted in section 9 above. The requirements for "Open Space" ("O") have been completely fudged.

b) Item B1 - How can one **DOUBLE** the development intensity and building volume and then claim you are improving the townscape in the context of the Wan Chai OZP statements a given in section 9. above. Likewise the key planning and design merits listed by the developer CANNOT stand up to examination at the Sau Wa Fong and St.Francis' Street location,

particularly in the context of the OZP statements-requirements. It is obvious that the proposed "Residential (Group A) -9" zoning is completely inappropriate and incompatible with the location and the vicinity.

c) Density - Both Item A and Item B1 are large sites (300+ & 200+ residential units)- indeed Item A will have the largest number of residential units of any residential building in the QRE and

Kennedy Road neighbourhood. It is pure fiction for the developers to pretend that the traffic and environmental impacts of their projects will be negligible.

d) "Housing Shortage" Justification - Development Bureau and Government are rightly focusing on the "pressing housing shortage" but this primarily applies to the provision of public housing

and low cost housing to address the depressing situation of citizens having no alternative but to live in the poor circumstances of sub-divided flats and "coffin" and "caged" homes.

It is not the case in the private market, where a combination of economic downturn, emigration, and increase in interest rates has had an impact on the appetite for acquiring residential units

for investment. The locations of Item A and Item B1 will NOT be low purchase price projects. However, developers are always ready to ride under the banner of helping government and society

to alleviate this "housing shortage" to further their own interests at the TPB. In the case of Item A I surmise that this project will not be for sale, but will become hotel apartments connected to the adjacent *Hopewell Hotel* - and thus will not at all address the housing shortage.

11. Conclusion

Has any Board Member actually visited the unique Sau Wa Fong and Schooner Street area so that they are personally informed on this Wan Chai OZP matter S/H5/32?

Down the years Section 3(1) of the Town Planning Ordinance Cap. 131 requires the promotion of the **HEALTH, SAFETY, CONVENIENCE and GENERAL WELFARE of the COMMUNITY**.

Does this still ring TRUE ? Donald Tsang's administration restructured the Town Planning Board under the new Development Bureau in 2007. Following the restructuring, the Secretary for Development, became the chairman of the Town Planning Board. This change marked a significant shift from the previous arrangement, where the chairmanship was typically held by a non-official member. When the TPB was placed under the Development Bureau, which reported to the Financial Secretary, there was a noted shift in focus. This restructuring emphasized economic development over livelihood issues. The new alignment aimed to prioritize economic growth, infrastructure development, and real estate interests, reflecting a more market-driven approach to urban planning. The shift often led to increased scrutiny of developments in terms of their economic viability rather than their impact on community welfare or environmental sustainability. This change sparked community discussions regarding the balance between economic development and the needs of the community, including affordable housing and public space, and induced a perception that the Board is no longer independent. .

Having been involved in town planning matters since 2003 with the *Kennedy Road Protection Group* I have been aware of this shift in focus away from the livelihood issues of health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the community, towards private developer economic interests. The Board's planning decisions inevitably align with the Director of Planning's recommendations, implying that Board's principal purpose is to use their "rubber stamp" to shield Development Bureau and Planning Department officials from any resultant media or public criticism.

Frankly, the Town Planning Board's approval of rezoning applications Y/H5/5 and Y/H5/7 and the subsequent approval of s.16 A/H5/ 418 (to my mind) conclusively indicated that the balance has moved overwhelmingly towards economic development (and private real estate interests) and far away from the needs of the community.

In this circumstance I deem it will be futile for me to request the Board to **REJECT S/H5/32** on behalf of the community's intentions so clearly expressed in the Wan Chai OZP. as section 9 above.

Yours sincerely

Roger Emmerton

Photo 1 - NKT HST OPEN SPACE - confined on an inaccessible podium and underneath tower block.



Photo 2. Only Vehicular access up steep narrow and dangerous St. Francis Street.



Photo 3. St. Francis' Junior School Students leaving down St.Francis Street.



Photo 4. Pedestrian acces between Schooner Street and Sau Wa Fong.

