

8 February 2006

Chairman and Members
Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life
Commission on Strategic Development
Central Government Offices
Hong Kong

Dear fellow members,

Re: Pursuing Sustainable Communities through Tripartite Partnership

Further to the First meeting of the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life, we have carefully considered the collective views expressed in the meeting. In order to formulate a coherent framework and achievable action plan, we have put together a priority agenda which is set out in detail in the attached paper entitled “Building Sustainable Communities for All”.

Following the informal discussion on tripartite partnership last week, we believe that the two concepts can be usefully integrated to complement each other. The practice of tripartite partnership can be adopted as one of the important means to achieve sustainable communities at the district level.

May we offer the attached paper for further discussion by Members at the Second Meeting next week. Meanwhile, we would like to take this opportunity to wish all Members a healthy and prosperous year of the Dog.

Yours sincerely,

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| Albert Lai Kwong-tak | Lilian Law Suk-kwan | Ng Cho-nam |
| Chris Law Kin-chung | Iris Tam Siu-ying | Chan Yu |

Encl.: Paper on “Building Sustainable Communities for All”

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR ALL

Priority Agenda for the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life of the Commission on Strategic Development

1. In order to develop a coherent framework for action, we, as members of the Commission on Strategic Development, would like to propose the following strategic issues as priority items to be dealt with by the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life.
2. Hong Kong is facing serious challenges: economic restructuring resulting from globalization; growing number of poor people; outbreaks of communicable diseases; dysfunctional land-use and town planning; and lack of reverses in air, water and marine pollution which threatens the quality of life of our citizens. An effective governance structure with full legitimacy is critical. A dysfunctional structure leads to poor governance and is a short cut to misfortune and poverty. It undermines social justice and disturbs social harmony. Transparency, accountability, and equity in public policy making are the keys to improving governance.
3. We recognize that reversing impoverization and marginalization of the poor, revitalizing deprived neighbourhoods, changing consumption and production patterns, preserving natural resource base and protecting cultural heritage are overarching objectives and essential requirements of Hong Kong's sustainable development. Only by tackling these issues head on can we raise the quality of life for all sectors of the community, including in particular disadvantaged communities.

4. Hong Kong is ready to shift from “growth at all costs” to “quality growth only” – growth that improves the quality of life of all its community members. The pursuit for better quality of life can only succeed with the integration of social, environmental and economic dimensions in sustainable development. Economic prosperity must not be confused with sheer emphasis on GDP growth, trade surplus, budget deficit reduction or efficiency drives in numbers. The obsolete, narrow-minded ‘business-above-all-else’ logic in our public policy making process must be rejected.

5. Inclusive, broad-based and informed public participatory processes are fundamental to sustainable development. Hong Kong people have said loud and clear that the traditional mode of consultation must give way to innovative mechanisms of participation, which allow all stakeholders’ access to not only information, but also decision-making in public policies. This is of particular relevance to land-use and town planning, formulation of pro-poor policies as well as resource allocation for major infrastructure initiatives. Integrated sustainability impact assessments should be conducted to facilitate thorough understanding of the socio-economic and environmental costs and benefits of various options, and thus facilitate the selection of courses of actions.

6. The Chief Executive, when he was still heading up the Council for Sustainable Development last year, re-affirmed the government’s commitment to pursue the path of sustainable development in line with international best practice. With this in mind it is useful to refer to the eight principles commonly adopted in building sustainable communities in the U.K.:

- 1) ***ACTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND SAFE – Fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities;***
- 2) ***WELL RUN – with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership;***
- 3) ***ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE – providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment;***
- 4) ***WELL DESIGNED AND BUILT – featuring quality built and natural***

environment;

- 5) *WELL CONNECTED – with good and affordable transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services;*
- 6) *THRIVING – with a flourishing and diverse local economy;*
- 7) *WELL SERVED – with public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all;*
- 8) *FAIR FOR EVERYONE – including those in other communities, now and in the future.*

7. Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. To achieve this, Hong Kong has to rework our policies at a local, district level with reference to the criteria embedded in the above eight principles. Differential policy tools, tailor-made to suit each district's characteristics and priorities, have yet to be developed. An empowerment process which allows key stakeholders in each district to have a greater say in decision-making, and to have a bigger share of resources at their disposal will be essential.

8. To facilitate further discussion by the Commission, we have identified three types of neighbourhoods which warrant special attention in the pursuit for sustainable communities:

A Old Metro Areas

Some common issues faced by these communities include high-density living, deteriorating building conditions, heavy traffic congestion, under-provision of public space, increasing poverty among ageing population, loss of cultural heritage and diversity under pressure of redevelopment. Given the deteriorating urban environment and increasing physical constraints (such as zero harbour reclamation), how can the physical and ecological 'limits to growth' be recognized, and cultural heritage be preserved, through changes in development

pattern and planning controls, which are essential to tackling air pollution, noise pollution, transport, accessibility and public health concerns in old metro areas?

B Remote New Towns with significant under-privileged communities
Some remotely located new towns are impoverished and marginalized as the planning intentions for their existence are never fulfilled despite years of development. They are confronted with common issues such as high youth unemployment, dwindling investment, mismatch of job opportunities, prohibitively high cost of transport, increasing incidence of family violence, lack of neighbourhood pride and identity, cultural isolation, and deficient social support system. Given the growing income disparity and the imbalance between population settlement and employment opportunities, how can deprived neighbourhoods be re-vitalised and the quality of life of disadvantaged communities be improved through public and private investment, civil society initiatives as well as differentiated, district-oriented policy instruments?

C Rural Areas with under-managed sites
Some rural areas in the New Territories are suffering from illegal and incompatible land use. These land use problems not only cause environmental nuisances, but also lead to under-utilisation of land in terms of either economic value or conservation value. In these areas, they are dotted with isolated settlements housing some of the poorest in the community, often members of the minority or newly arrived groups, who are not being served with adequate community facilities or social support systems. Given the priority of conservation and the pressure of development in the countryside, how can derelict sites and under-managed areas in the New Territories be restored and put into good use either for

conservation or other economic functions in line with sustainable development principles? How can the under-privileged settlements be served and supported with decent facilities?

9. We recommend that a sustainability review be carried out for the above three types of priority districts on the basis of the principles of sustainable communities. Local district councils and key stakeholders should be given a dominant role in the review and be endowed with decision-making power for follow-up action. District development strategies should be drawn up as a result of such reviews. Thereafter, in the pursuit for sustainable communities, priority action plans should be implemented with the help of sustainability indicators and continuous assessment systems.

10. We also recommend that a broad-based, open and inclusive stakeholder engagement process be adopted by the Commission with a view to gauge the community's concerns and priorities in issues related to social development and quality of life. The outcome of such public engagement will provide guidance to the Commission's work and the priority of resource allocation.

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Members of Commission on Strategic Development:

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17 January 2006