

**Central and Western District Council  
Culture, Leisure & Social Affairs Committee**

**Proposed Establishment of a Harbourfront Authority  
Phase I Public Engagement Exercise**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on Phase I Public Engagement (“PE”) Exercise for the proposed establishment of a Harbourfront Authority and gauge Members’ views on the proposal.

**Background**

*Vision for the harbourfront*

2. Victoria Harbour is the icon of the city and the most precious public asset of Hong Kong. It is our vision to enhance the Victoria Harbour and its harbourfront areas to become an attractive, vibrant, accessible and sustainable world-class asset: a harbour for the people and a harbour of vitality.

*From harbour reclamation for development to harbourfront enhancement for public enjoyment*

3. The Victoria Harbour as we see today is the result of more than a century of development-came-first approach. Successive cycles of reclamation have provided valuable land for economic activities and development. Most parts of our existing harbourfront have been formed and developed over the years, and occupied by commercial, industrial and residential buildings, roads and infrastructure, as well as public facilities. Some parts of the harbour and its adjoining harbourfront sites are also required for port operation of Hong Kong. Harbourfront planning and beautification was difficult in the early days as there was no idea when and how the final shoreline would emerge.

4. In the course of Hong Kong’s rise as an international financial, logistics, commercial and trading centre, about half of the Victoria Harbour has been

reclaimed towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extent of reclamation that had already taken place rendered what was remained to be the Harbour even more precious. The Protection of the Harbour Ordinance (Cap. 531) was then enacted in 1997 to protect and preserve the Victoria Harbour by establishing a presumption against reclamation.

5. After a spate of harbour reclamation litigations regarding the Central Reclamation Phase III project for the construction of Central-Wan Chai Bypass (CWB) in 2004, the Government made a high-profile statement that there would be no further reclamation in the Victoria Harbour upon completion of the reclamation required for the CWB. Since then, the Government has started taking quantum steps to enhance the Victoria Harbourfront.

### ***Harbour-front Enhancement Committee***

6. A Harbourfront Enhancement Committee (“HEC”) was set up in May 2004 to advise on planning, land uses and developments along the existing and new harbourfront of Victoria Harbour. HEC made important contributions towards shaping the future harbourfront in its almost six years of service. Harbour Planning Principles and Harbour Planning Guidelines were devised and promulgated in 2005 and 2007 respectively to provide guidance for the planning and development of harbourfront areas. 22 Action Areas were meticulously drawn up to set the agenda for action by relevant Government departments to enhance the harbourfront. With the series of public engagement exercises it launched, HEC provided valuable planning, land use and design inputs for mega harbourfront projects like the Kai Tak Development and the New Central Harbourfront. It was also instrumental in bringing to fruition a number of quick-win harbourfront projects for early public enjoyment, such as the West Kowloon Waterfront Promenade (2005), the temporary pet garden in Wan Chai Promenade (2006), and a promenade cum pet garden developed with Sheung Wan Stormwater Pumping Station (2009).

7. During its tenure, HEC also established a Task Group on Management Model for the Harbourfront (“Task Group”) to explore a framework for the sustainable management of the harbourfront. The Task Group reviewed a wide range of local and overseas examples, and recommended in its Report on Management Model for the Harbourfront in 2009 that an overarching, non-statutory Harbourfront Commission (“HC”) should be established to replace HEC to advise the Government on harbourfront planning, design, management and other related matters. The Task Group also considered that the ability to combine advocacy with execution as well as flexibility to operate without the constraints of bureaucracy would be conducive to bringing about

holistic, integrated and responsive changes to the management of the Victoria Harbour, and recommended that the possibility of establishing an independent statutory authority with its own executives and dedicated funding should be revisited in the longer term so as to enhance community participation, improve harbourfront activity and dynamism, and ensure timely response to public needs and aspirations.

### ***Harbourfront Commission***

8. Following the recommendations of HEC, a Harbourfront Commission (“HC”) was established in July 2010 to succeed the HEC to play an advocacy, oversight and advisory role in harbourfront planning, development and management with broad-based representation from professional institutes, civic and environmental groups and the business sector. Since its establishment, HC has generated constructive discussion among stakeholders through an open and transparent process, and has offered advice to over 80 public and private harbourfront projects. Supported by a dedicated Harbour Unit set up under the Development Bureau, a number of quick-win harbourfront enhancement projects were also taken forward in recent years, namely the Kwun Tong Promenade Stage 1 (2010), Hung Hom Waterfront Promenade (2011), as well as the advance promenades at the new Central harbourfront and Quarry Bay harbourfront (2012).

9. While the Government has made strenuous effort in opening up more harbourfront areas for public enjoyment, experience over the last nine years has shown that the conventional approach under which the relevant government departments develop and manage the harbourfront sites within the service-wide fiscal and human resources constraints might not be able to fully meet the community’s aspiration for a truly attractive and vibrant harbourfront for all to enjoy and for Hong Kong to become a world-class waterfront city.

10. To better fulfil the vision for the Victoria Harbourfront and overcome the institutional constraints, the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) Subcommittee on Harbourfront Planning of the Panel on Development had recommended, and a non-binding motion was passed by LegCo in July 2011 for, among others, the establishment of a statutory body to co-ordinate and implement strategic harbourfront development.

### ***Proposed establishment of a Harbourfront Authority***

11. Against the above background, HC has revisited the HEC’s

recommendations and vigorously deliberated the subject. In October 2012, HC submitted a report to the Government recommending the establishment of a Harbourfront Authority and its broad framework. In his Policy Address announced in January 2013, the Chief Executive welcomed HC's proposal of setting up a dedicated statutory Harbourfront Authority to press ahead with harbourfront development in a holistic manner with an innovative mindset and a more flexible management approach, and undertook that Development Bureau ("DEVB") would collaborate with HC in conducting public consultation on the proposal. Should the proposal is supported by the public, the Government would take forward the legislative work and provide the financial support.

## **The Proposal**

### ***A Dedicated Harbourfront Authority***

12. The former HEC, HC and DEVB have earlier studied a number of waterfront cities overseas, such as Sydney, Auckland, San Francisco and Singapore, etc. These successful examples have one common feature – they all have a dedicated agency (be it statutory, independent or being part of a government department) with dedicated resources and sole priority, to pursue integrated planning, design, construction, operation and management of harbourfront projects in a holistic manner. HC believes that the establishment of a dedicated Harbourfront Authority will be the key to achieving the shared vision of an attractive, vibrant, accessible and sustainable harbourfront for public enjoyment. To address the limitations of the existing harbourfront development and management model, HC considers that the Harbourfront Authority should be an independent and dedicated body with broad-based representation, which is able to -

- plan, design, develop, operate and manage harbourfront sites holistically;
- accommodate innovative ideas and designs;
- adopt a place-making approach and manage the sites with flexibility;
- reduce bureaucratic red-tape;
- combine advocacy and execution;
- facilitate inter-departmental and cross-sectoral coordination;
- promote community involvement;
- strike a good balance between social objectives and commercial principles; and
- subject to public scrutiny.

## *Development priorities*

13. Upon completion of the last reclamation works in the Victoria Harbour, new land will be available in the prominent waterfront areas in Central from 2016 onwards and Wan Chai in 2018-2020. There are also other harbourfront sites with the potential to become vibrant places, such as Kwun Tong Promenade, Hung Hom harbourfront area, Quarry Bay harbourfront area and the proposed boardwalk underneath the Island Eastern Corridor, etc. Taking into account the availability and conditions of these harbourfront sites, it may be more prudent and realistic for a new Harbourfront Authority to start with the most readily available opportunities in the new Central harbourfront and expand incrementally when its experience accumulates.

## **Public Engagement Exercise**

14. As the proposal involves substantial financial commitment and vesting of valuable public resources in a new statutory body, wide community support would be essential for its success, and the public should be engaged and duly consulted before firming up the way forward. Further to the announcement in the Policy Address, HC has sounded out some stakeholders to gauge their initial feedback for preparation of the public engagement exercise. As the general public may not be fully aware of the background, process and challenges in harbourfront development, before discussing the detailed framework of the Harbourfront Authority, it would be important to enhance public awareness of the subject, build consensus on a common vision for the Harbourfront and establish the need for a change to the current development and management approach. HC has hence decided to conduct a **two-phase PE exercise**.

15. During the three-month Phase I PE exercise which was recently launched on 4 October 2013, public views would be gauged on the design and operation of the existing promenades and the facilities therein, their vision and aspirations for the future Victoria Harbourfront, whether they would prefer having a dedicated body to take up the development and management of the harbourfront over the existing model, and the possible roles and mode of operation of the Harbourfront Authority if established. To facilitate a more focused discussion, we have also put forth some non-exhaustive options of the possible institutional setup as distilled from HC's nine years of experience. For details, please refer to the PE Consultation Digest in **Annex**. Members of the public are invited to express their views through various channels. We will interact with the community and stakeholders through various forums in the coming months.

## **Way Forward**

16. After completing Phase I PE, DEVB and HC would consolidate the public views received and put forth a concrete proposal in Phase II PE, which is tentatively scheduled for Q2 of 2014, for more focused deliberation of the detailed framework of the proposed Harbourfront Authority. The relevant District Councils would be consulted again in due course.

17. Members are invited to note the arrangement and way forward of the PE exercise, and provide views on the proposed establishment of a Harbourfront Authority.

**Development Bureau  
October 2013**