



# **Assessing Urban Development on the Reclaimed Land in Sheung Wan**

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## **Abstract**

As a result of the rapid land reclamation development plans in Hong Kong, the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan has been overlooked. The purpose of this project was to assess the current state of urban development of the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan and to evaluate redevelopment needs of the stakeholders of the Western District. In order to achieve this goal we conducted direct observations of the land through site visits, and interviewed knowledgeable people in our area and stakeholders. From this, we were able to: identify problems with the current state of urban development in Sheung Wan, compare and contrast the needs and wants for redevelopment of the area and determine how the land could be redeveloped to appease as many of the interest groups as possible.

## **Executive Summary**

Throughout Hong Kong's history, it has used land reclamation as a method to increase developable land. In the 1970s, Sheung Wan, one of the oldest parts of Hong Kong was expanded through land reclamation. As a result of the rapid land reclamation development plans in Hong Kong, the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan has been overlooked. The initial development of the Sheung Wan area was rapidly constructed without any public input. The purpose of this project was to assess the current state of urban development of the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan and to evaluate redevelopment needs of the stakeholders of the Western District.

In order to achieve this goal, three necessary objectives were designed and fulfilled. Our first objective was to determine what is presently located in our site and identify problem areas. In order to achieve this objective, site visits were conducted in the "active" observation style, where our general thoughts and feelings were noted. We decided to divide the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan into two sections due to the fact that they both were developed differently. We named the first section the "Utilities Section" because it primarily consisted of utility buildings, and named the second section the "Park Section", because it contained a park and recreational facilities. We identified four main issues with each section. These issues were: the difficulty of public access to both sections, the lack of accessibility to the harbor front property, noise pollution and air pollution and poor utilization of the land.

Our second objective was to determine what features are needed in Sheung Wan. This required us to review the history of land reclamation and development along the waterfront in the Western District via archival research. In addition to this, interviews were conducted with knowledgeable people. These interviews were conducted in an informal manner and gave us valuable insight into what Hong Kong needs for waterfront development. The main points from

these interviews were that the Hong Kong waterfront needs: better access, open space, use the waterfront for waterfront-dependent development (e.g., marina), and where appropriate, waterfront enjoyment activities, such as dining, rest areas etc.

Our third objective to reach a consensus in our group of what our stakeholders consider to be the best use of the land that was previously reclaimed in Sheung Wan. To achieve this objective, we conducted interviews with various stakeholders who are active in advocating how the harbor front should be used. We noted conflicts between how the government thinks (e.g., Sheung Wan can be developed without moving the utilities that are currently along the waterfront) and how knowledgeable private sector people think. The Society for Protection of the Harbor wants more open space, parks and a promenade on the land which would require moving the utility buildings off the site to create a pleasant experience. A public survey contained in the Western District Development Study 2001-2002, provided information on what the public perceived as areas that need improvement in the Western District. These areas include: the environment, open spaces and parks. It was unanimously voiced by all stakeholders that open space and improved accessibility were the greatest needs for the Western District.

The results obtained from each of our objectives led us to two conclusions. Our first conclusion was that the reclaimed area in Sheung Wan is in need of redevelopment. Our second conclusion was that the area could be redeveloped for public enjoyment. These conclusions led us to the following: in 2011, the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan will be redeveloped by the government, but the plans have some remaining issues such as providing better accessibility, moving utility buildings off site and taking into account other stakeholder needs.

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## **I. Introduction**

Throughout the world, urban development plans have been the cause of much controversy. The challenge of urban development lies in satisfying everyone's vision for growth. Since there are a myriad of opinions on such matters, it is too idealistic to think fulfilling all of them is an option. However, satisfying the majority of the citizens' opinions is something to strive for. One may ask how such a feat can ultimately be achieved. In such cases, success is contingent upon the coordination of the groups involved. This is easier said than done, considering each group has its own specific motives and outlooks on the situation. Some groups may be motivated by a deep felt responsibility to protect the environment while others may be motivated by a drive for economic advancement. Land reclamation projects in Hong Kong have been at the center of controversy for many years.

For years, Hong Kong's government has been reclaiming the harbor to provide land for economic growth. The government has been criticized for several reasons surrounding the issue. First, poor planning of such projects has resulted in the seemingly wasteful development of reclaimed land. The citizens want previously reclaimed land to be developed in a way that makes the harbor more accessible to the public. Second, the public traditionally has had little say in the planning of such projects. The sponsor of this project, Civic Exchange, is an independent think tank that researches civic issues and provides the public with objective information on them. Civic Exchange is concerned with the protection of the harbor and disagrees with the government's decision to continue reclamation. Civic Exchange believes that reclaimed land must be developed in a way that allows the public to enjoy the harbor; this includes the way in which the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan (next to the Macau Ferry Terminal), is redeveloped.

Currently, research has been conducted on the urban development strategies used by the Hong Kong Government. First, this research has determined that the Hong Kong government does not include the public when they create urban development proposals on reclaimed land. Instead of taking ideas from the public, they have the public choose from a limited number of proposals they create. Second, research has shown that the public in Hong Kong both needs and wants more open space to improve their quality of life. However, the government tends to build their own buildings, transportation infrastructure and utilities on the reclaimed land. Accommodations for the public's needs are minimal. The research has demonstrated that the Hong Kong government needs to implement a more substantial development plan, taking the public's needs into account.

Although research had been conducted on the government's overall land reclamation development plans, our project focused specifically on the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan. Specific information on this site was lacking due to rapid land reclamation development plans in other areas of Hong Kong, which led to the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan (next to the Macao Ferry Terminal) to be overlooked. Because of this lack of information, our project focused on determining the feasibility of the original development plan and the redevelopment plans specifically in Sheung Wan.

The goal of our project was to assess the current state of urban development of the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan and to evaluate redevelopment needs of the stakeholders of the Western District. Our first objective, to accomplish this goal, was to determine what is presently located on our site and identify problems with the area. These visits gave us first hand experience in our area and gave us a starting point for determining the suitability of proposed redevelopment plans. For example, if a redevelopment plan did not address some of the

problems we observed with the area, we were able to question its suitability. Our second objective was to determine what features are needed in Sheung Wan, and our third objective was to reach a consensus from our stakeholders on what they considered to be the best use of the land that was previously reclaimed in Sheung Wan. This objective took into account the perspectives of the government, public views, as well as the knowledgeable people we interviewed.

## **II. Background**

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the Hong Kong government has pursued a policy of land reclamation as a means of increasing developable land. The desire for more developable land is directly related to Hong Kong's unique historic pressures such as: transformations, geographic and socioeconomic conditions. This has continuously fueled the government's legitimization for reclaiming the harbor in Hong Kong. Recent controversy surrounding reclamation has made further plans no longer acceptable in the public's eye. The attention has now shifted to how best develop the land that has previously been reclaimed. The Western District of Hong Kong, in particular the Sheung Wan area, was chosen as a site for land reclamation in the 1970s. Due to a shift of focus to other areas of Hong Kong, this zone was poorly planned in the past and is now primed for redevelopment.

### ***2.1 Transformations in Hong Kong***

Hong Kong's history is filled with events that have transformed the city. These transformations have created a need for more developable land, and have led to pressures on the government to reclaim land. For the purpose of this report, we will focus on Hong Kong's recent transformation, starting with a major rush of refugees coming from mainland China to Hong Kong after 1949 and throughout most of the 1950s and 1960s. In a little over a decade, the population grew by over a million people. This was over a 33% increase in population. With the stress from a dramatically increasing population and paralleling economic growth, more land was reclaimed to satiate the rapidly growing city's need for a place to work and live. The solution provided land for both industrial and housing uses (Hong Kong Government, 1995).

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the expectation was that after the transfer of power from Britain to China, there would continue to be strong interest for legal migration from mainland China to Hong Kong (approximately 55,000 per year). Thus, population projections by the Hong Kong authorities continued to show a rise in population. Furthermore, there were extensive plans to continue to reclaim Victoria Harbor to create land for container terminals, roads, commercial development and housing to cope with projected population growth and economic demands of port functions and also for more office development. A plan released by the Planning Department in 1994 showed the extensiveness of government's reclamation plans. Until then, these transformations all helped legitimize the government's use of land reclamation in order to provide more developable land. However, from 1995, citizens groups began to argue that reclamation in Victoria Harbor had become too extensive and if land was needed, the government should look for alternative sites since not all types of development need to be on reclaimed land at the harbor front. Moreover, though there has been an overall increase in the population, the fertility rate has dropped significantly in Hong Kong to now the lowest in the world. The most recent population data also show mainland migration to Hong Kong has in fact slowed substantially over the last three years and with a much lower projected growth rate. Therefore, the extensive housing and related infrastructure provisions originally envisaged on reclaimed land can no longer be justified (Civic Exchange, 2005).

## ***2.2 Socioeconomics***

To understand why the Hong Kong government turned to land reclamation on Hong Kong Island, we must first consider some of the pressures that led to it taking that course of action. Prior to the 1980s, Hong Kong Island and Kowloon were the parts of the territory that

were ceded in perpetuity from China to Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the waterfront, especially the Western area on Hong Kong Island, was where the British had first focused developments and where the port activities initially took place.



Figure 2.1: Map of Hong Kong (Wikipedia, 2005)

The only flat land that is present on Hong Kong Island is a relatively narrow strip of land along the harbor front and on the southern portion of Hong Kong Island. In order to continue development and allow the city to grow, the Hong Kong government decided to reclaim land along the shores of Victoria Harbor. With the rise of containerization of shipments from the 1970s, the government began to reclaim large parts of Kowloon at Kwai Chung for container terminals. This trend had the effect of moving port activities away from Western to Kwai Chung. Reclamation therefore provided more space for economic activities, businesses and homes. According to an economist in Hong Kong, not only did land reclamation provide more functional

land, it was the most inexpensive alternative to expanding development in the mountainous regions.

The land area of Central and Western District of Hong Kong comprises of just a small portion of the 1,092 total square kilometers of Hong Kong and is only 12.4 square kilometers. Its relation to and size in comparison to the rest of Hong Kong can be seen below in figure 2.2.



**Figure 2.2: Western Districts Location (Wikipedia, 2005)**

To walk through Sheung Wan in the Western Districts only takes approximately five to ten minutes by foot from the Macau Ferry Terminal to the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park. .Central and Western District's population is approximately 270,000 and density is very great.

### ***2.3 Economic Policy***

A key priority of the government is to expand the economy. The government believes Hong Kong has a competitive advantage in tourism, logistics, professional services and banking. Thus, the government wants to look at how it can devise policies to enhance further development

in these areas, such as creating more tourism attractions, creating logistics parks and enhancing the financial services sector. We have already pointed out the government's record in reclaiming land for port expansions and for commercial development including in Central and Western.

## 2.4 Land Reclamation Plans

Thus, land reclamation has been an integral part of the development of Hong Kong since the 1840s. Between the commencement of its use and the 1980s, land reclamation projects continuously diminished the harbor at a steady rate. However, during the early 1980s, land reclamation plans reached a pinnacle and the largest amount of land in Hong Kong history was proposed to be reclaimed (*see Figure 2.3*). These proposals not only doubled all of the previous land reclamation projects combined, but were also conducted at an alarming rate (Yueng, 1997). The government claimed that they were planning accordingly for future growth projections through forming these development strategies.

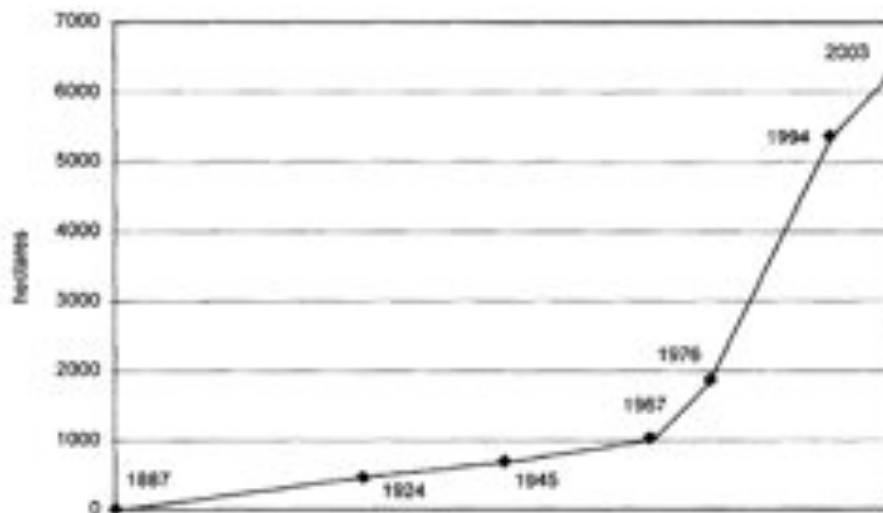


Figure 2.3: Total Reclaimed Land, Hong Kong (Kam & Cook, 1997, p.9).

The large scale of the reclamation projects has been decreasing the size of Victoria Harbor, an important land mark to the people of Hong Kong. Recently, this has led to a great deal of public opposition against continuation of these plans. At this point, the government is the driving force behind the continuation of these plans.

## ***2.5 Political Reasons for Reclaiming Land***

After reclamation, the new land can be sold or leased for development, thereby generating substantial revenue for the government. According to the knowledgeable people we interviewed, there was a financial incentive to land creation in the harbor front because the government did not need to consult the public to reclaim it. To develop land in the New Territories, the government would have needed to negotiate to buy land from villagers, which made harbor reclamation less hassle and more profitable.

In the past, Victoria Harbor was regulated by the Foreshore and Seabed (reclamations) Ordinance. This Ordinance basically allowed the governor to authorize any reclamation proposals as long as it was the Director of Lands who made the proposal (Chu & Loh, 1996). However, a new Ordinance was passed in 1997 that raised a presumption against harbour reclamation to protect the harbor from excessive reclamation (Chu, 2002). Harbor protection activists believe that if it was not for this ordinance, the government would have reclaimed the majority of the harbor as per the 1994 Planning Department reclamation plan.

The piece of land under discussion in this report in Sheung Wan was already reclaimed before this ordinance was enacted. Since this ordinance now prohibits further reclamation of the harbor except under certain strict circumstances, it is important to use the available reclaimed land to its full potential.

## ***2.6 The Trends in Urban Development***

Urban planning is the development of cities, towns and other regions on a social, economical, and physical scale. In Hong Kong, urban planning on reclaimed land has been a unique issue. The community historically played a very limited role in urban development in pro-growth Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government is solely responsible for the way that land has been reclaimed from the harbor and developed. Its planning depends only on market forces of its free market economy and this in turn has led to some unique planning trends (Ng, 2002).

The development of the reclaimed land follows a few trends. First of all, if you take a look at the current harbor front property you will notice that there is a lack of continuous public access and public access to the harbor front is a hassle. One of the reasons why the harbor front property is not accessible to the public is that a great deal of the reclaimed land is used for highways. Why would the Hong Kong government build highways on some of the most expensive land in the world? One of our interviewees provided the perspective that two decades ago, the government wanted to alleviate severe traffic congestion and gave the Highways Department priority in determining roads plans even prior to the Planning Department. In other words, roads are the first thing that goes into a plan and other considerations flow from there. Giving road planning such priority is unusual in the world, and in the last decade, it has come under attack in Hong Kong. Hong Kong now faces a number of urban planning issues such as a non-accessible, non-ascetically pleasing harbor front and a need for reduction of noise and air pollution.

## ***2.7 Western District History***

The Western District of Hong Kong is one of the most unique areas in the entire city and has a rich and vibrant history. This uniqueness can be seen today, with just a brief stroll through

the Western District. The dried seafood merchants are still there today hawking their goods on De Veoux Street, much the same way they did two hundred years ago. To better understand the circumstances of why the Western District was chosen as a site for land reclamation, it is important to have knowledge of its people, culture and history.

The modern history of the Western District began in the 1870s upon the establishment of Victoria City. Central, as the area was soon to become known by, became the main financial center of the city with the establishment of the Oriental Bank in 1845 and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in 1865 (Western District Development Study, 2002). Due to the Western District's proximity to Central and the trading there, it became a favored shipping port. The port activity in this area soon gave rise to a Chinese merchant class in the Western District. The establishment of the Western Market complex is prime evidence of the intense importance of the port to the Western District, at that time. This is also testament to the amount of trading and shipping that was present there (Western District Development Study, 2002).



**Figure 2.5: Typical Activity in the Western District**

The intense trading atmosphere of the Western District has led to a distinct impact on its culture and a firm establishment of merchant like attitude, as seen in Figure 2.5. The Western District's bustling port attitude, at least in the early days, did not lend itself to a good living environment. Dense, low rise, low income housing was prominent and led to unsanitary conditions and outbreaks of disease. The bustling harbor was also dirty and polluted. The Sheung Wan area was no exception to this and was the most densely populated part of Hong Kong in the early years of the colony; to this day it is still extremely dense (Western District Development Study, 2002).

Life changed for the Western District in the 1970s, when modern port facilities were constructed in Kowloon, in order to accommodate the new larger container ships (Western District Development Study, 2002). These new ports caused the trade to shift to Kowloon. The loss of the port and the trade traffic that it brought greatly reduced the Western District's importance as a commercial center. The area was left with a great amount of unused shore line that the people never considered to be valuable in any other sense than a port. This was due in part to the fact that this area was historically the dirtiest and noisier part of the district. This left the zone ripe for redevelopment and land reclamation. With little public opposition, the government seized the opportunity and reclaimed the land next to the Macau Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan.

Today, the perspectives of the people in Western District have changed with the advent of large scale residential development. An important question that now arises is, whether the land reclamation and redevelopment has met the needs of the citizens of the Western District and if not, how best to meet them? Although the Sheung Wan area has already been reclaimed and

seemingly improperly developed, redevelopment options that involve the people's opinion may revitalize the area.

### **III. Methodology**

The goal of our project was to assess the current state of urban development on the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan and to evaluate redevelopment needs of the stakeholders of the Western District. To achieve this goal, we gathered the relevant information using a variety of means. We came to an understanding of the following stakeholders' perspectives: the general public, the government and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). The methods that we used to achieve this goal were: archival research, open-ended question interviews of selected knowledgeable people in our area and stakeholders and on-site visits.

***Objective 1:*** *to determine what is presently located on the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan and identify problem areas.*

In order to achieve this objective, site visits were conducted in the “active” observation style, where our general thoughts and feelings were noted. Data was collected on the placement of buildings, how accessible it was the level of noise and air pollution, traffic, land use and how things generally felt and looked. This allowed us to note exactly what is present there now, an important step in identifying the fundamental problems in the area. We also observed the Western District itself in order to better understand what type of people live in the area and to get a sense of the culture there. These visits gave us first hand experience in our area and made us more qualified for proposing redevelopment ideas.

***Objective 2:*** *to determine what features are needed in Sheung Wan.*

This required us to review the history of reclamation and development along the waterfront in the Western District via archival research. In addition to this, interviews were conducted with six knowledgeable people in our area in our area, all with various backgrounds and professions relevant to our problem. These were conducted in order to gain their

knowledgeable opinions of why the land was developed in that manner, overall trends of development in Hong Kong and what features the city is lacking as a whole. The interviews were conducted in an informal setting. The interviewee lectured for some time and then questions were posed in order to gain more specific information on our problem.

***Objective 3:*** *to reach a consensus in our group of what our stakeholders consider to be the best use of the land that was previously reclaimed in Sheung Wan.*

To achieve this objective, interviews were conducted with representatives from each of our stakeholders: Government, Public and NGOs. These interviews were conducted in order to ascertain their various opinions on what they felt should be built there. These interviews were conducted in much the same manner as in objective 2, informally. The first interview was conducted with our NGO stakeholder, Society for Protection of the Harbor. Our second interview was conducted with a representative of the public, a Western District Council member. Also, The Western District Development Study 2001-2002, an in-depth survey of the people's thoughts in the Western District, was used to understand what the public wanted most for redevelopment in their area. Our third interview was held with a city planner from the government specifically assigned to our zone. From this interview we were able to gain the government perspective on redevelopment plans for the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan. In addition to this, the government's plans for redevelopment were acquired and reviewed. From the interviews and archival research, we understood the trends of urban development in Sheung Wan and assessed its planning to date.

The results from the previous three objectives were compiled and reviewed. Using the input from knowledgeable people and archival research on our topic and site visits, a number of different redevelopment ideas were proposed. These ideas were designed to best accommodate the needs of as many stakeholders as possible in Hong Kong in order to achieve our initial goal.

## IV. Results

The data we obtained for each of our objectives are as follows. These data were analyzed and used to formulate our conclusions.

### *4.1 Objective 1: to determine what is presently located in our site and identify problem areas.*

The team directly observed what is presently located on the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan and determined the problems with the area.

We first decided to divide the reclaimed land next to the Macau Ferry Terminal into two sections. We labeled the section that immediately follows the Macau Ferry Terminal the “Utilities Section” because this area primarily consists of utilities as well as government buildings. We labeled the next section the “Park Section” because the majority of this area consists of public parks. Our observations of these sections led us to the identification of issues shared by both sections and issues that are unique to each section. Each section was observed in the following ways: land use, noise pollution and public access to the area.

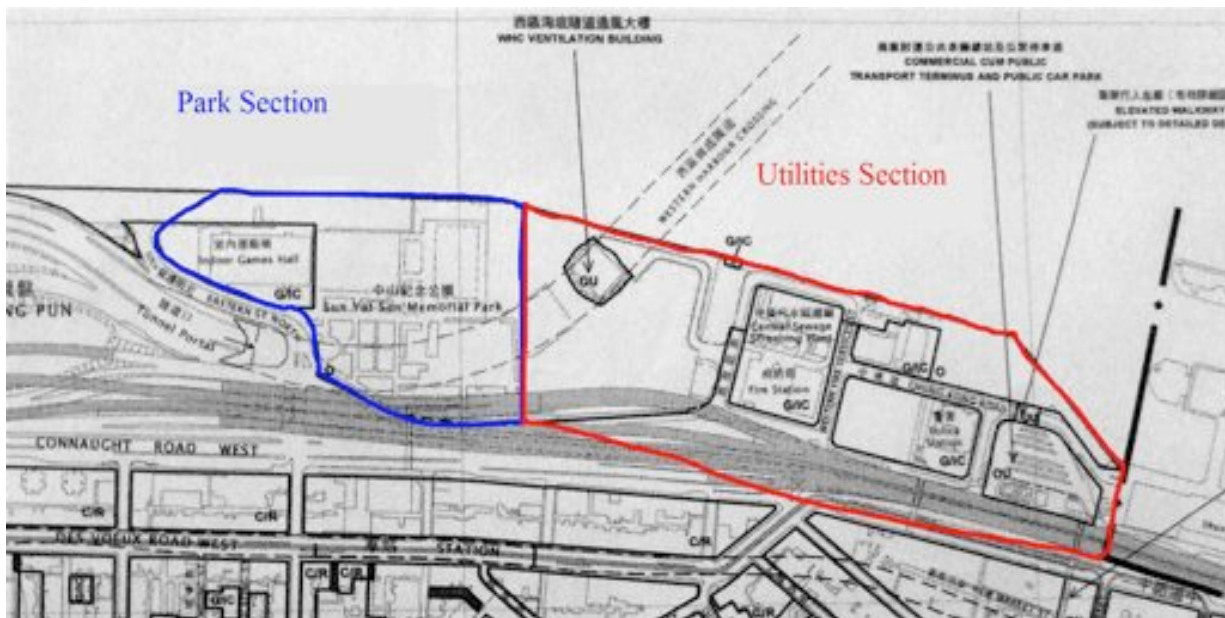


Figure 4.1: Reclaimed Land in Sheung Wan Breakdown

### 4.1.1 The Utilities Section

Table 4.1 lists the problems associated with the utilities and facilities that are located in the “Utilities Section.” We determined these problems through direct observation.

**Table 4.1: Identified Problems in the Utilities Section**

Utilities and Facilities	Problem(s)
<b>Utilities</b>	
Bus terminal	Air pollution Noise pollution Not aesthetically pleasing
Bus parking lot	Not aesthetically pleasing
Car parking lot	Blocks continuity of public access Not aesthetically pleasing
Ventilation tower	Blocks continuity of public access Not aesthetically pleasing
Drainage Service Department	Blocks continuity of public access Not aesthetically pleasing
Salt water pumping station	Blocks continuity of public access Not aesthetically pleasing
Waterfront police station	Not aesthetically pleasing
Sheung Wan fire station	Not aesthetically pleasing
Open field	Land is not used
Hong Kong Electric	Blocks continuity of public access Not aesthetically pleasing
Overhead highway	Air pollution Noise pollution Not aesthetically pleasing
<b>Public Facilities</b>	
Public park (next to the harbor)	Aesthetics
Public park #2	No view of harbor
Public restrooms	No problem

## *Land Use*

This section consists of utilities, government buildings, parks and open fields. Observing this site helped us come to some of our own feelings on how this land was utilized. It appeared to us that this land had been improperly developed in several respects. The first improper use from our perspective was the government's choice of buildings there. For instance, was it necessary for a parking lot to be located right on harbor front property? Keep in mind that this land is some of the most expensive land in Hong Kong. A parking lot can be placed in areas other than harbor front property while public enjoyment of the harbor can only be done on harbor front property (see figure 4.1). Government buildings, such as the pumping station, can also be placed elsewhere. In addition to this, these buildings are not aesthetically pleasing and ruin the appeal of sitting down and enjoying the harbor.



**Figure 4.2: Is it Necessary to Place a Parking Lot on Harbor Front Property?**

The second improper use of this reclaimed land from our perspective was the amount of open space that was not used. For example, there is a large unused field that is located next to the ventilation tower. This gave us the impression that this area is low on the government's priority list. The third improper use of this area that we recognized was the "makeshift" park

located on the waterfront. The park (next to the harbor) was preceded by a vacant cement lot. There was only one entrance into the area. The park was vacant which could be due to the fact that it was primarily cement and little was done to make it pleasant for the public. The way in which this reclaimed land was utilized raises an important question: why did the government choose to develop the land in a seemingly wasteful manner when it is highly valuable property? Also, was it necessary to have government buildings located on the waterfront?

### *Noise pollution*

The most glaring issue that our group noticed upon visiting this site was the noise pollution; there were several sources contributing to this noise. The most overbearing source of noise pollution was caused by the helicopters which frequently landed on the helipad on top of the Macau Ferry Terminal. There were also many high speed jet ferries which passed next to the section and generated a lot of noise pollution. Noise pollution was also observed coming from sources located on the site. These sources were the large number of buses, taxis and cars which visit the area due to the utilities located on it (see figure 4.2). The noise pollution from all of these sources contributes to the overall feeling that this area is not a place to sit and relax. This raises the question that even if the area was redeveloped with a substantial park, would many people want to visit it?

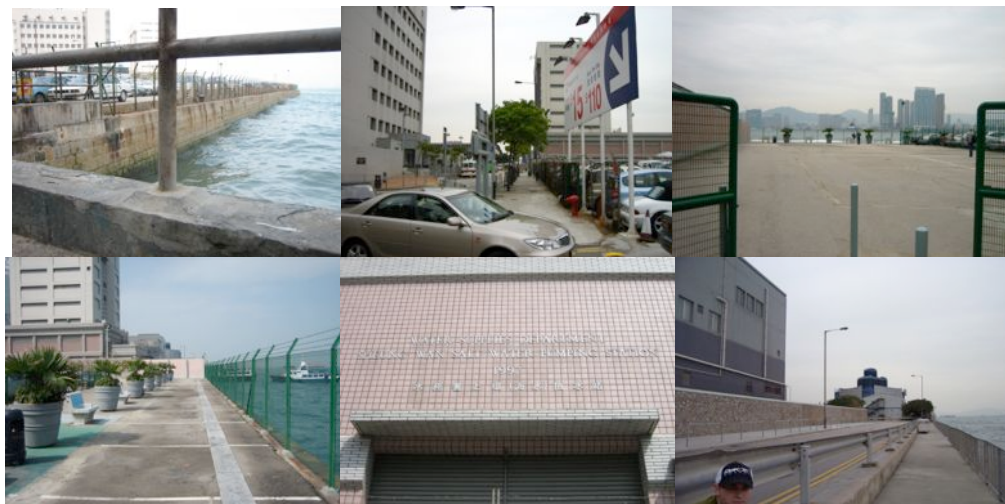


**Figure 4.3: Taxis are a Source of Noise Pollution**

### *Public Access*

From our observations we noticed that there are two issues in terms of access in this section. First, there is an issue of difficult public access to the section. Second, there is an issue of minimal public access to the harbor front property. In terms of public access, there are two entrances from foot bridges, one entrance from the Macau Ferry Terminal, an entrance from the “Park Section”, an entrance from the sidewalk adjacent to the Macau Ferry Terminal, and a ground level cross walk. Although there are several entrances and exits, many of these are difficult means of accessing the area. For example, the entrance from the Macau Ferry Terminal does not contain a sidewalk so we had to be careful of traffic running through the area. The foot bridges required climbing stairs that does not accommodate the handicap and elderly. The ground level cross walk is only at one intersection due to the fact that the length of the road is divided by a median. This makes it an inconvenience for the public, when entering the area via ground level. Regardless of these inconveniences, we noticed that there were quite a few people moving in and out of this area; however, there were very few people who actually sat down to enjoy the harbor. These people were in the area either to catch a bus or to go to the Macau Ferry Terminal. There are several probable reasons why very few people actually go to this area to

enjoy the harbor, but the main reason appears to be the lack of accommodations for public access to the harbor. This claim is supported by the fact that there is a lack of continuity of public walkways along the harbor front property. Upon entering from the Macau Ferry Terminal entrance, there is a short stretch of cement sidewalk with guardrails that is right along the harbor. This sidewalk soon diverges away from the harbor front area due to the parking lot which is located there. This disrupts the continuity of the public’s view of the harbor. After walking the length of the parking lot, we reached a park on the right. The park is fenced-in and located on the harbor front; however, following the park are pumping stations, which like the parking lot, disrupts the continuity of public access to the harbor. Following the pumping station, there is another stretch of sidewalk that is located next to the harbor. This is followed by a ventilation tower which is located on a grass field which is located next to the harbor and is fenced-in. As one can see, there is a pattern of utilities disrupting the continuity of public access to the harbor front (see figure 4.3).



**Figure 4.4: Lack of Continuity of Harbor View**

### 4.1.2 The Park Section

Below is a list of the objects that are located in the “Park Section,” as well as a table that lists the problems associated with each of the objects. We determined these problems through direct observation.

**Table 4.2: Problems with Facilities in Park Section**

Facilities	Problem(s)
Western Park Sports Centre	
Public Park	
Public Parks next to the harbor	Small View blocked by fence
Basketball courts	
Public cement lot	Land is not used frequently
Fenced in cement lot next to the Harbor	Land is not used
Public garden	

#### *Land Use*

This area consists of: public parks, The Western Park Sports Centre, basketball courts, a public garden and open cement lots. Although this area made several accommodations for the public, there were a few issues we noticed with the section in terms of land use. The first issue we observed was the lack of effective use of the land. For example, as you enter the area from the direction of the “Utilities Section,” there is a large cement lot. This lot could possibly be used during festival events so it may not be as big of a waste of space as it first appears to be. However, it seems as though there may be better options for this valuable property especially since festivals are not an everyday occurrence. We noticed another large cement lot right on the

harbor front behind the sports centre. Unlike the other cement lot, this one was completely fenced-in. From our standpoint, it looks as though this area could be better utilized and future redevelopment plans might address this issue. The second issue we observed with this section is the way in which the parks on the harbor front are arranged. There are two separate fenced in parks next to the harbor however, these parks were not connected (see figure 4.4). The unused cement lot divides the two parks. We noticed that in addition to relaxing, people used these parks for running. From our perspective, the parks would be more enjoyable if they were connected and thus larger. Connecting the two parks would reduce the claustrophobic effect that they currently give. This is an opportunity for citizens of the Western District to have open space.



**Figure 4.5: Parks Divided by Large Unused Open Cement Lot**

### *Noise pollution*

This section has many of the same sources of noise pollution as the “Utilities Section.” For example, there are frequent helicopters and jet ferries that travel by (see figure 4.5). However, there are no buses and few cars travel through the area. This is due to the fact that there is no bus terminal on this section and there is one road which cuts through a small portion of the area. Relative to the “Utilities Section,” this section has less noise pollution.



**Figure 4.6: Jet Ferries are Sources of Noise Pollution**

### *Public Access*

Like the “Utilities Section,” this section has two different issues involving its public access. First, it is difficult to access this section in general. Second, access to the harbor front property could be improved. In terms of access to this area there are only two entrances. There is a ground level entrance which leads from the “Utilities Section” and a foot-bridge which leads from the older section of Sheung Wan. Due to the minimal number of entrances, this section is difficult to access. The ground level entrance takes approximately ten minutes to reach from the ground level entrances in the “Utilities Section.” This means that if people are unable to use the footbridge to reach this section, they are forced to enter the “Utilities Section” which is extra walking. If there was a ground level entrance crossing the intersection near this section, this would alleviate some of the public access problems. Although the foot bridge in this section contains a ramp in addition to stairs, the ramp has a fairly steep slope and would be difficult for wheel chair access unless assisted (see figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.7: Difficult Access for the Handicapped**

In addition to public access to this section being difficult, there are issues with public access to the property next to the harbor. In this section, there are only two public areas where property is located directly next to the harbor; these are both parks. One of the parks has thick fencing which interferes with the view of the harbor; however, the other park does not. As mentioned, these parks are not connected. In terms of public access, this disrupts the continuity of public enjoyment of the harbor. It is clear that this area is specifically meant for public enjoyment of the harbor, and from our perspective this area can use enhancement.

All of the problems we perceived with both sections led us to an important question: from the knowledgeable peoples' standpoint in our area, how could these sections be enhanced? The next portion of this chapter addresses this important question.

#### ***4.2 Objective 2: to determine what features are desired in Sheung Wan.***

In order to determine what features are desired in Sheung Wan, the team interviewed various knowledgeable people in our area. These interviews identified the following needs for Hong Kong:

- Open space (e.g., park/promenade)
- Ground level access.
- Development that depends on the waterfront.
- Restaurants and public venues on the harbor.
- Playground for children.
- More office space.
- Tourism.
- More trees.
- People-friendly planning/wider boardwalks.
- Improved access to harbor.
- Improved quality of life.
- Ground level development.
- Accessibility along waterfront.

#### **4.2.1 Public Space**

Open space is important in a city like Hong Kong because it increases the overall value of the area and improves the quality of life. The increase in value is due to peoples' desire to live in close proximity to areas that are considered pleasant such as parks and natural features (e.g., the harbor). This makes the surrounding area a more desirable place to be. People are willing to pay more to live in desirable places and as a result this increases revenue. Open space is also important because living in a concrete jungle like Hong Kong can lead people to many tensions. Green space could help alleviate these tensions and provide a place to relax and escape. Trees, which add more green space, beautify and purify the air in Hong Kong. Improving the quality of life can be achieved through increasing the number of green and open spaces and reduce pollution. Also, building a park on the waterfront could beautify the harbor for the rest of Hong Kong's enjoyment. This would relieve tensions of the Hong Kong people.

#### **4.2.2 Public Activities on the Waterfront**

The harbor is one of the greatest natural assets to the people of Hong Kong and the people are "entitled" to its use, as voiced by the interviewees. Hong Kong lacks places where

people can enjoy the harbor. Since there are few restaurants along the waterfront for people to sit down, have a meal and enjoy the harbor, more restaurants could be placed on the water for the people. Also, “ground level” development should be implemented to avoid blocking the view of the harbor and causing the canyon effect (canyon effect is pollution trapped at ground level due to tall buildings on both sides). Accommodations for children, such as a playground, could be made for them to enjoy the harbor. These types of developments could bring more people to the waterfront as well as beautify the area for all of Hong Kong.

Sheung Wan is one of the few areas in Hong Kong where it is actually difficult to reach the harbor. Placing things like restaurants and playgrounds on the waterfront will allow the public to finally enjoy the unused resource of the harbor.

#### **4.2.3 Waterfront Dependant Development**

It is appropriate for development that is waterfront dependent such as marinas, to be built along the harbor. Office buildings and public utilities, which are not waterfront dependent, could be placed elsewhere and leave the harbor for public enjoyment.

#### **4.2.4 Access**

Ground level access is an important consideration when planning an area. People, especially the handicapped and elderly, need easy accessibility as anyone. Currently, overpasses and subways create resistance of movement. Having ground level access could make accessibility much easier. More elderly and handicapped oriented planning could be implemented for easier access of all people. As of now, Hong Kong is a difficult city to travel by foot. Improving this difficulty will make it easier for people with different needs to get to the waterfront and use whatever structure is placed there.

#### **4.2.5 Impacts from Other Development Projects in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong has an expanding economy that is shifting towards the service sector. This shifting has created a large demand for office space in the city. This could be a factor that is considered when the government decides which plans to implement in Central. If more green space is created in Central (land reclamation project currently pending in Central), emphasis on the creation of more office space will be placed on Sheung Wan or visa versa. Since developable land is scarce in Hong Kong, placing office buildings on the reclaimed land could be an option. The government also sells land to developers for a significant profit. These developers could create office space in Sheung Wan.

It is felt by some of our interviewees that a cruise ship terminal at the Kai Tak site in Kowloon (Hong Kong's former airport) could be built. They feel that all the manufacturing and shipping is shifting to mainland China; therefore, the only way to save Hong Kong's economy is to expand the tourism industry. If Kai Tak was made into a home port terminal, tourist attractions may need to be expanded. This would mean a greater number of tourists in Hong Kong and the Western District could economically benefit from attracting them to the area.

**4.3 Objective 3:** *to reach a consensus in our group of what our stakeholders consider to be the best use of the land that was previously reclaimed in Sheung Wan.*

In order to achieve this objective, archival research and interviews were conducted.

##### **4.3.1 The Public's Desires for Redevelopment**

The following table and charts were generated from data provided by the Western District Development Study 2001-2002. The study specifically noted:

“The purpose of this study is to challenge existing planning orthodoxies that have produced highly discouraging results elsewhere in Hong Kong in the recent past”

(Western District Development Study, 2002).

The study focused on providing new methods of developing reclaimed land and redevelopment of the Western District. Although the reclamation proposals this study addressed were terminated, this study still provides valuable information on what the stakeholders would like to see in the Western District. From this information, we are better qualified in making recommendations on how the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan could be redeveloped. The following table and charts were generated from a street-survey. The majorities of the respondents were either resident’s of the Western District, or lived outside the Western District but still on Hong Kong Island. Since the study was conducted in 2001-2002, it must be noted that this may not be a completely accurate representation of the current stakeholders’ opinion.

**Table 4.3: Respondent's View of Function of Western District**

	Residential	Industrial	Commercial	Tourist Centre	Dry Seafood Market	Dining District	Transport Interchange	Retail/ Wholesale
%	50.90%	1.40%	8.40%	1%	24.10%	3.60%	3.50%	5.70%

(Western District Development Study, 2002)

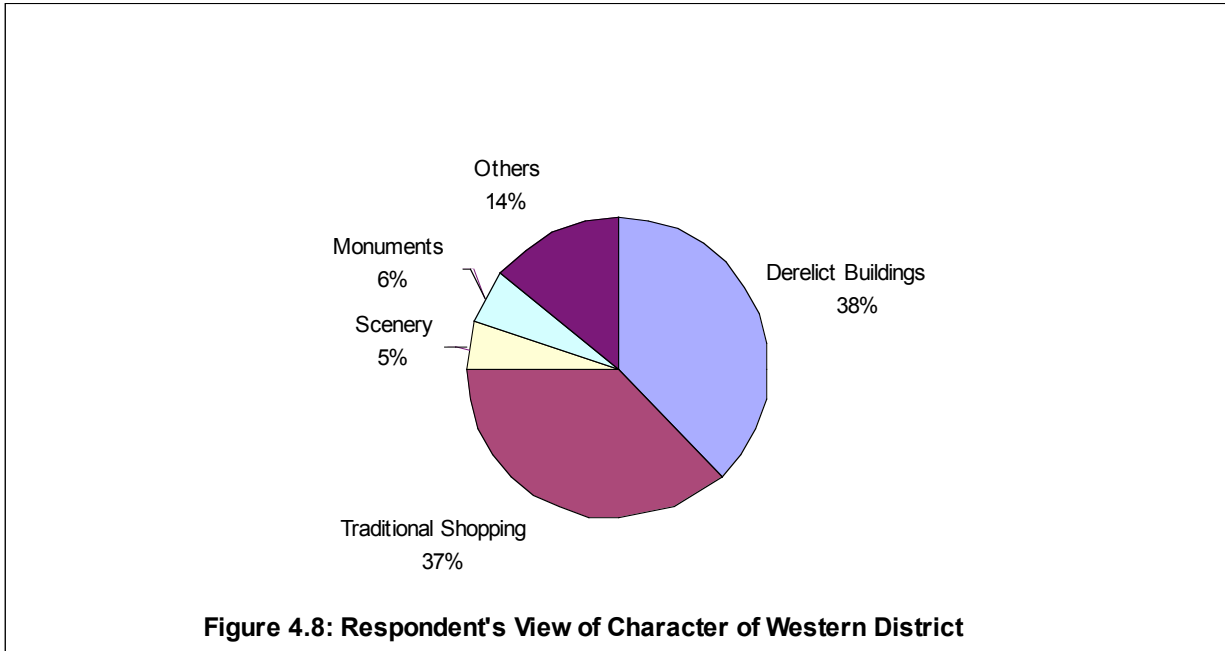
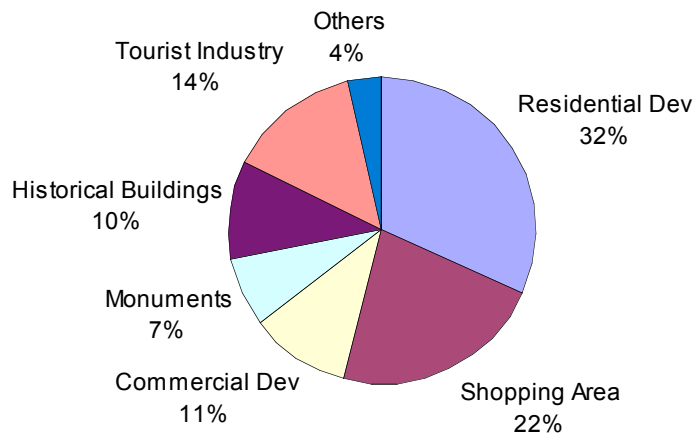
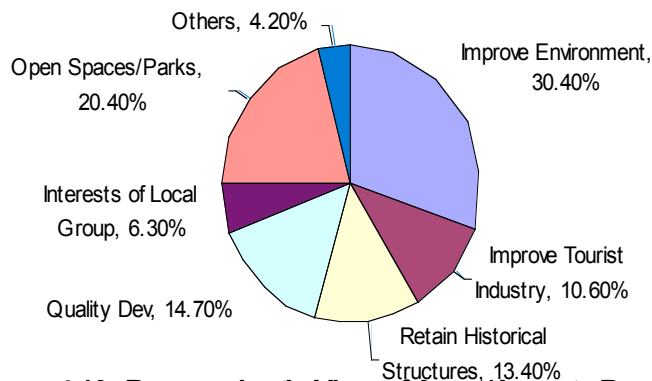


Table 4.3 and Figure 4.8 show the public's perception of the Western District in terms of function and character. The majority of the respondents felt that the Western District was best characterized as either a functioning residential area or an area of dry seafood markets. Only 1% of the respondents believed that the area served as a place for tourism. This suggests that tourism is weak in the area. However, tourism could possibly be enhanced in the Western District when the reclaimed area in Sheung Wan (next to the Macau Ferry Terminal) is redeveloped. Ultimately, the way in which the area is redeveloped will determine whether it will attract tourists. If the area is redeveloped into a park it will be more apt to attract tourists to the Western District than if the area is redeveloped into office space. An increase in tourism could positively affect the commercial industry in the Western District because there would be a larger flow of people through the area. Chart 4.3.1 shows that the majority of the respondents believe the Western District is best characterized by derelict buildings and traditional shopping. The fact that the citizens of the Western District characterize it as having derelict buildings suggests that they need an escape from the area. If the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan was redeveloped into

open space, it would offer an area where the citizens could escape. In addition to creating a need for an escape, the “derelict buildings” may play a role in the apparently weak tourist industry in the Western District. On the contrary, it seems as though the traditional shopping aspect of the Western District may attract tourists to the area. This suggests that the redevelopment plans for the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan may want to capture the historical value of the Western District. Figure 4.8 also shows that only 4.9% of respondents believed that the Western District was characterized by scenery. This supports the idea of redeveloping the Western District into a park area so that the scenery of Victoria Harbor can be enjoyed. It would be hard to enjoy the scenery of the harbor if office buildings were built on the land that would block the view.



**Figure 4.9: Respondent's View of Development Priorities in Western District**



**Figure 4.10: Respondent's View of Areas/Aspects Requiring Improvement**

Figure 4.9 show's that the majority of the respondents feel that the top priorities for development are residential and shopping areas. The government's current redevelopment plans mentioned in the following section do not address this need. The areas that the largest percentage of respondents felt needed improvement were the environment, open spaces and parks (Figure 4.10). The government's redevelopment plans do address this need. The areas the respondents felt need improvement conflict with their views on the top priorities for development in the Western District. This is due to the fact that if more shopping malls and residential areas are developed there will be less space to improve open spaces and parks. This demonstrates why urban planning is difficult and how all of the stakeholders cannot get exactly what they want. In the Western District, there are land constraints so redevelopment must be based on what is essential for the needs of the public and the stakeholders. The government could take the information provided from this survey into consideration when forming redevelopment plans because it represents what the citizens of the Western District want for development and improvement. Since the public are not the only stakeholders in the Western

District, the other stakeholders' opinions could be integrated with redevelopment plans as well. Although all of the stakeholders' desires may not be appeased, a consensus must be reached which includes as many of the stakeholders desires as possible.

#### **4.3.2 The Government's Redevelopment Plans**

In an interview with the Planning Department, it wants to redevelop the land into a park for the public to enjoy. The first phase of redevelopment has already been completed. This phase provided the Sun Yat Sen Memorial park. The department claimed that the second phase will utilize the unused land behind the Western Sports Center as well as the land surrounding the Ventilation tower. This phase will provide for an extension of the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park and its construction is proposed to commence in 2009 and finish around 2011. A swimming pool is being planned for location on the land surrounding the ventilation tower. However, this still needs to be approved by the Town Planning Board. In addition to this, the government plans on creating a promenade that will extend from the park section to the Macau Ferry Terminal. This will provide continuous public access along the harbor which is, at this point in time, uncommon in Hong Kong. Although this project seems like a good idea, the government plans still leave the utility buildings on the site. When questioned, about why these buildings were left there, the planner replied that it is very difficult to move some of these buildings because there is minimal land for them to be relocated on. It was also claimed that it would be costly to relocate buildings and there may be a budget issue. So it appears as though the construction of the promenade is still in the early processes of being proposed. We asked about the seemingly poor public access to the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park and the Noise pollution caused by the Macau Ferry Terminal. In terms of public access, the response was that it would be enhanced through the use of foot-

bridges. In terms of noise pollution, it was claimed that the department was currently looking into solutions, but the Macau Ferry Terminal cannot be removed.

**Table 4.4 Interviews with NGO and District Council**

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Needed in Western District</b>
Society for Protection of the Harbor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Facilities could not be along waterfront.</li> <li>-Park along harbor front for people.</li> <li>-Green space.</li> <li>-Waterfront could be given back to people.</li> <li>-Continuous waterfront with some restaurants and Chinese tea. Tourist shops are needed as well.</li> <li>-Subways needed with better traffic light system.</li> <li>-Have to work around flyover highway.</li> </ul>
Central and Western District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Swimming pool, park, exercise area.</li> <li>-Promenade along harbor front.</li> <li>-Footbridge.</li> <li>-Put facilities underground.</li> <li>-Create more space for activities and children.</li> <li>-Fishing area.</li> <li>-Reclaimed land could be used for people.</li> </ul>

#### **4.3.4 Society for Protection of the Harbor**

The opinion of the director of the Society for Protection of the Harbor was that the most important feature that Sheung Wan needs is more park space for the residents with easy accessibility. The Society thought there is not enough open space for the residents of the Western District and the utility buildings could be moved off the reclaimed land for a green park that would stretch across a majority of it. This park might provide a place for people to enjoy the harbor. There might be a continuous promenade along the entire harbor for the people with little tourist shops and restaurants maintaining local character. However, this might be a problem due to the government's thinking and urge to make more revenue.

Accessibility is also a large problem. Unfortunately you cannot take apart the flyover highway so a walkway of some sort has to be built around it. The Society felt that a subway system would be more effective than overpass crossings. Another option would be a ground level crossing with an improved traffic light system, that would improve access to the waterfront. With a combination of better accessibility as well as giving the harbor front back to the people, this will improve the lives of the residents of Western District.

#### **4.3.5 Central and Western District Council**

An elected member of the Central and Western District Council was asked what is important and needed for the Western District of Hong Kong. The councilor responded that the reclaimed land could be used for the people. It might be developed in a manner that reflects this and contain: a park and promenade. It was important to the councilor that the harbor be as beautiful as possible, so some way to camouflage the utility buildings located on the harbor front might be explored.

According to the councilor, Western District is very crowded and needs more open space. A park with possibly a swimming pool, exercise equipment and a promenade overlooking the harbor would benefit the people greatly. A park would create more activities for the people of Hong Kong and provide an area for children to play. A fishing area along the waterfront could also be provided for residents.

As for accessibility, the Transport Department was urged to build a footbridge that would enable the residents to cross safely to the waterfront. The pumping station cannot be moved due to Hong Kong's drainage system and it might be built underground to provide more space along the harbor front and more an attractive feel. By implementing her suggestions it could improve the living standards of the residents of the Western District by providing more open space.

## **V. Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to assess the current state of urban development on the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan and to evaluate redevelopment needs of the stakeholders of the Western District. This chapter concludes our perspectives from our research on this subject as well as future ideas for redevelopment options that better suit to Hong Kong's needs.

The first conclusion that we made is that the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan is in need of redevelopment. We came to this conclusion based on the results obtained from each of our objectives. From our site visits, we identified problems with our area. These problems included noise pollution, air pollution, unused land, poor accessibility and the few accommodations for public enjoyment of the harbor. The knowledgeable people in our area verified the same problems we identified with the land. In addition to this, development presently located on the land does not satisfy the stakeholders' needs. For example, the public would like better accessibility to the harbor and more public facilities on the waterfront. These issues provide justification for redeveloping the area.

The second conclusion that we came to, is the area could be redeveloped for public use. We came to this conclusion based on the results obtained from objectives two and three. It was almost unanimously voiced by our stakeholders and knowledgeable people in our area that the biggest need in the Western District is open space. It appears as though the government is addressing this issue through its redevelopment plans for the area. In 2011, the government will be expanding the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park in our area to provide more open space for the public. In addition to this, they will begin the construction of a promenade along the water for public enjoyment. This project group feels that these redevelopment plans are incomplete at this time because they neglect to address the other needs of the stakeholders. These needs include:

the Western citizens' desire for more shopping, and the Society for the Protection of the Harbor's desire for seaside dining and better public access. The plan also does not address the pollution in the area caused by the Macau Ferry Terminal. As of now, the pollution in this area is oppressive and makes standing on it unpleasant. The government's plan also fails to address the need to relocate the utility buildings outside the site.

Based on the government's current redevelopment plans, we devised a set of our own recommendations to address the shortcomings of the plan. This was done so that the options would coincide with the most likely future redevelopment of this area. It must be noted that these recommendations will not take into account cost or feasibility and are more ideal in nature.

The first issue is the poor utilization of space on the reclaimed land in Sheung Wan. Utility buildings not required to be on harbor front property could be moved to further inland and placed on less valuable land. These buildings would include the fire station, police station, electrical station and drainage department. The pumping station cannot be moved due to the water system in Hong Kong and might be placed underground. As a result of putting the pumping station underground more space would be available for development. This available land could be dedicated for open space, similar to the government plan.

The second issue that we addressed was poor public access to our area. To improve public access, more ground level road crossings could be put in place. Ground level crossings would make it easier for all people to get to the area. The foot bridges that are present there now make travel to our area uncomfortable and especially difficult for the elderly and handicapped. These crossings could easily be placed there because there is little congestion on Connaught Road.

We see many opportunities for the government to work with professionals and residents to design a harbor front in Western that could cater to needs of residents as well as take into account the overall plan on how to develop the harbor front not only in Western but in Central, Wanchai and also on Kowloon side. We hope that with the creation of the Harbour-front Enhancement Committee two years ago that Hong Kong will begin to develop an open and participatory process where citizens, professionals and government can work together to improve urban planning.

## Appendix A Background on the Civic Exchange

### 1. Mission Statement

- a. Promote civic education amongst members of the community and for such purposes to conduct research and publicize the results so as to provide objective and balanced information to the public concerning economic, social and environmental issues. (Civic Exchange, 2005)
- b. Also to undertake research on development of economic, social and political policies and practices to help shape the breath and depth of public policy debate and so provide well funded and reasoned argument on the issues identified above. (Civic Exchange, 2005)

The Civic Exchange is a public non-profit cooperative social enterprise where its main goal isn't to make a profit but to meet the social needs of the Hong Kong citizens. It is also an independent public policy think tank and is registered as a charity in Hong Kong. The Civic Exchange is funded by donations from both public and private sources. (Civic Exchange, 2005)

The problem that our project addresses is what is the best use for the reclaimed land in the Western Districts of Hong Kong and this problem is important to the Civic Exchange. This is so because the Civic Exchange takes it upon them selves to take care of such social issues in the community and make sure they create solutions for such issues. They have designed and facilitated multiple stakeholder dialogue processes on transport, urban design, conservation as well as sustainable development issues, and have worked with the transport, telecommunications, energy and corporate governance sectors

of Hong Kong focusing on specific matters of concern to the people. It is their main goal to meet the social needs of the people. Our specific problem falls into this realm because land reclamation, diminishing harbor area as well as diminishing open space, are all growing concerns and big social, environmental and political issues for all of the Hong Kong community.

The Civic Exchange operates very differently from many other traditional institutions around the world and it works “virtually”. (Civic Exchange, 2005) Its thinkers, researchers and facilitators all work independently and communicate via the use of modern telecommunication means. The Civic Exchange office is more of a hang out place for people to meet and exchange ideas, then an actual office. It works to create a place where intellectual thinking can grow and create intellectual capital using a corporate structure. (Civic Exchange, 2005) The different sections that the Civic Exchange works on are: dialogue facilitation, education, strategic influence and research. The two most important sections to our project are dialogue facilitation and research. These are important because first off the Civic Exchange has contacts with all the major people we will need to interview and meet with to gain a better understanding what is to be done as well as well as to help us communicate our goals to them. We will also need to take advantage of any past research that had been completed on our subject by the Civic Exchange, which would greatly enhance our understanding of the exact problem they face.

To achieve their goals and aims the Civic Exchange has a multitude of resources at its disposal. The Civic Exchange has a great number of potentially influential people to

contact so we can acquire information that is needed for our project faster. We will also most likely have some access to the skilled individuals of the Civic Exchange and use their expertise for help on our problem. Most of all Christine Loh will be available to discuss our problem and her knowledge will be invaluable as well as her influence will be extremely useful to use in Hong Kong if need be.

The Civic Exchange is not alone in dealing with the problem of land use in Hong Kong. In fact there are many other organizations that also have an interest in it, some competing or working with the Civic Exchange to find a solution to the problem. The Hong Kong government is the main organization competing with the Civic Exchange on land reclamation, often saying one thing while doing another and pushing for more land reclamation. This can be especially seen in the Western districts where a high-Tec office park was intended to be built but instead high rise apartments were erected. Students and intellectuals from around the world, such as Wellesley College and W.P.I, are working with the Civic Exchange on this problem (Civic Exchange, 2005). NGOS and other business groups are also working on the problem but work independently from the Civic Exchange.

Finally two other important things to mention that first the Civic Exchanges offices, work spaces are reserved for activities rather than people, and are very loosely organized. This helps to promote free thinking and innovation which is essential for the Civic Exchange to meet its main goal, to address the social needs of the people. Secondly Land reclamation is a very hot debate in Hong Kong today. Most citizens of Hong Kong are fiercely opposed to it, while the government is strongly pushing for it to continue.

Victoria Harbor is disappearing and people are concerned about losing this landmark of Hong Kong. Another important issue is what reclaimed land is being used for because of the lack already of open space in Hong Kong.

## **Appendix B**

### **Society for Protection of the Harbor**

Society for Protection of the Harbor is a non-profit charitable environmental organization founded in 1995. The organization focuses primarily on protecting Victoria Harbor from land reclamation.

Society for Protection of the Harbor's view of Victoria Harbor is that it is a natural asset to Hong Kong. As a result it is their goal to improve urban planning along the waterfront and protect what is left of the harbor from further damaging development.

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