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The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

Ref.HKIA/Council/CE-elect/DC/WC/CC/20220511

11 May, 2022

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Dear John

**Policy Proposals for the Sixth Term HKSAR Administration**

Congratulations to you for being elected as the next Chief Executive! We at the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) are all very much looking forward to your leadership to expedite the recovery of the local economy, maintain our competitiveness in the global arena, and safeguard both national security and human rights within the territory.

The vision of HKIA is to build a better Hong Kong through promoting a sustainable and resilient city design and pursuing of architectural excellence. And we cannot agree with you more on your result-oriented and solution-driven approach to undertake genuine reforms, unite all stakeholders and start a new chapter for Hong Kong.

In this regard, we would like to suggest for the new Administration to consider some policy priorities based on our members' professional expertise, which we believe will help shape the future of a more liveable and vibrant Hong Kong. As to detailed strategies of how to achieve this goal and maintain the city's continued prosperity and stability, we are ready to have a further discussion with you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Donald CHOI Wun Hing, FHKIA, R.A.  
President  
The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

*Encl. Policy Proposals for the Sixth Term HKSAR Administration*



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## Policy Proposals for the Sixth Term HKSAR Administration

### Governance and Regulatory Reform on Planning and Development

We welcome your suggestion to improve the Government's governance capability and enhance coordination and execution, as well as **implementing the proposed re-organization of the government structure by the current Administration**, in particular, the splitting of the Transport and Housing Bureau into two separate bureaus each of which in fact covers a wide range of policy areas. The expansion and retitling of the Environment Bureau into the Environment and Ecology Bureau are also welcome in that climate change, net zero, ecosystem diversity, green technology and the like are all crucial factors affecting the future city vision of Hong Kong.

2 The many major infrastructure projects on the horizon do require close collaboration among relevant bureaus to ensure smooth and efficient implementation of the projects. The setup of a few high-level inter-bureau committees, such as the Steering Committee on Innovation and Technology and the Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee, is effective in breaking down the inter-departmental silos and pushing forward targeted measures and policies. Accordingly, in addition to the two high-level task groups on public housing projects and land/housing supply suggested in your manifesto, **the setup of a Steering Committee on Future City Development (SCFCD) is also very much needed**. SCFCD is recommended to be chaired by the Chief Secretary and involve the Development Bureau, Transport and Logistics Bureau, Environment and Ecology Bureau, Housing Bureau and Financial and Treasury Services Bureau. Decisions made at SCFCD are to be implemented by the respective bureaus and departments based upon an agreed timetable.

3 To avoid discrepancies and ensure consistencies in making regulatory changes across different government agencies, **the proposed SCFCD should initiate executive orders/guidelines for departments to follow**, such as reinforcing the result-oriented approach, identifying hold points, introducing pledges of response time for essential steps in certain regulatory processes, developing an inclusive culture, speedy overall approval (one for all) amongst relevant departments, etc.

4 The Development Projects Facilitation Office set up in December 2020 has been useful in speeding up the processing of planning, lease modification and other developmental approval applications for larger-scale Comprehensive Development Area sites. As such, we propose to extend its coverage to all developments being bolted down by administrative barriers.



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### Urban Design and Redevelopment

5 In most advanced economies, city development places more emphasis on quality design to enable a harmonious integration of long-term social, economic and sustainable development goals and liveability of the city. The conventional engineering-led model on land supply studies is inadequate to drive any vision or strategy to achieve this goal. Accordingly, instead of relying on the conventional engineering-led two-dimensional development model with the Civil Engineering and Development Department as project manager, **the urban design planning approach should be adopted as a guiding principle in future developments.**

6 In essence, Hong Kong needs to expedite the urban renewal process via modernizing existing OZPs in order to release potentials in old built-up areas. Instead of waiting for individual landowners to submit town planning applications for change in land use, it will be more efficient for **the Government to take the initiative to re-zone land use in the Outline Zoning Plans (OZPs).** This will compel government departments concerned to work collaboratively to ensure infrastructures, such as road capacity, water and drainage supply, traffic noise, air quality, and air ventilation, be planned and resolved in a holistic manner instead of the present piecemeal approach where each site is developed individually.

7 We are particularly concerned about the future of those older urban settlements such as Cha Kwo Ling, Ngau Chi Wan and Chuk Yuen United Village. Originally being ancient folk villages, they have evolved into the current state due to migrations after the Second World War. It would be very undesirable to eradicate completely the historical testimonies and social memories embodied in the squatters. A comprehensive heritage study is recommended. Impact assessment should also be carried out to explore the methodology of preserving the historical building textures, humanistic appearances, and the cultural heritage of such old communities prior to any planned redevelopment.

8 A balance between development and conservation is important in our future city vision. We hope that for revitalization projects in older districts such as “Conserving Central”, “Energizing Kowloon East” and “Invigorating Island South”, the new Administration will abolish the previous top-down planning model from individual building perspective, and go for **an overall urban design model with proper study on conservation and revitalization from a district level angle.** Specific measures including the promotion of innovative and flexible development and density control (such as the transfer of development right) to preserve buildings and lots with rich historical values should be adopted. In carrying out planning studies, local communities should be engaged so that the vitality and characteristics of older



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communities will be preserved. HKIA would be delighted to contribute our architectural expertise and assist the Antiquity and Monument Office in completing the preliminary investigation and assessment on post-war modernist architecture, which has been carried out for quite some time.

9 In view of the recent brain drain and the resulting out-migration patterns, while there should be new strategies and initiatives to attract both local and overseas talent to stay and come to Hong Kong, a holistic review on local population projection should also be conducted to determine the scale of reclamation and redevelopment needs. For major redevelopment projects, the Government should seek collaboration from the Urban Renewal Authority, Housing Authority, District Councils, and other stakeholders on the implementation of relevant policies. Urban redevelopment in Hong Kong has often created unnecessary displacement of existing communities and disintegration of social fabric and small businesses, which leads to much public dissatisfaction and resentment. **A human centric approach should be adopted with decanting of existing residents and businesses within the same district being set as a top priority.** Besides, the current urban redevelopment strategy of relying on high plot ratio (development density) to cover renewal cost is not sustainable and healthy.

### Harbourfront Development

10 Under the mission of developing our harbour into a place of pride for the community, whilst the Harbourfront Commission has been doing an excellent job, their projects are piecemeal at best. It calls for **a comprehensive review of the long-term vision of the harbourfront, focusing on its relationship with the other major planned developments.** To support this vision, innovative operation models as well as additional resources will be needed. As to the implementation of our harbourfront development, reference can be made to successful overseas examples through private and public collaboration, such as Singapore, Shanghai and Qianhai.

### Territorial and Regional Development

11 The two mega projects, Northern Metropolis and Lantau Tomorrow, are expected to alter the territory's landscape if implemented as planned. In view of their significant impact on various fronts, such as transport patterns, commercial activity distribution and living habits of not only people but also other species, **careful planning and proper public engagement should be carried out before finalizing the blueprint of both projects.**



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12 The anticipated drastic change in the overall territorial development does provide an opportunity for us to construct a healthy and sustainable built environment through the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) in both public and private sectors as the top priority in carrying out the projects. As such, **government policies and regulations should be reviewed and updated to meet UNSDGs**. In particular, a proper UNSDG assessment of the two mega projects in the planning/feasibility study stage to final implementation is necessary.

13 Given the scale and complexity of the functions involved (design, construction, financing and operations) in these projects, **the new Administration should adopt the public-private partnership (PPP) approach to optimize project delivery in a cost-effective manner**. We are happy to see that it is also in your plan to restart the Private Sector Participation Scheme for public housing projects. Providing more efficient procurement, life-cycle maintenance, and private investment sources to augment government input, PPP offers a good model for implementing major public projects. The Government may consider introducing pilot development projects similar to Shenzhen's urban villages(城中村) in partnership with landowners in the New Territories. Similar concept has been applied to public housing development in the UK.

14 It's highly likely that the epidemic situation will be more or less under control in the near future, with the widespread vaccination and growing popularity and effectiveness of Covid drugs. Resumption of cross-boundary and international travels should not be far behind. It would also be opportune to help our younger generation to plan for their future career. As such, **the new Administration should consider providing more incentives to attract young people in Hong Kong to explore the abundant opportunities offered in the Greater Bay Area (GBA)**. In particular, under the GBA Youth Employment Scheme launched in January 2021, more coordinated support on accommodation and other services should help facilitate youngsters' adaptation to the unfamiliar working environment. The requirement of a Hong Kong employment contract should also be relaxed so that financially it's less burdensome for SMEs to participate in the scheme. Moreover, through negotiation with other GBA city governments, the new Administration should ask for the granting of quarantine-free working permits for young Hong Kong professionals to work in the GBA in general.

15 For Hong Kong businesses newly set foot in the GBA, especially young professionals and small practices, the new Administration should consider setting up dedicated offices to provide advice and assistance so that they could quickly familiarize themselves with the new environment and meet with the keen competition.



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## Land and Housing Supply

16 To successfully implement your proposed core policies, it is essential to have sufficient land bank for our future generations to meet their needs in the short, mid, and long terms. We opine that **a multi-pronged land acquisition approach allowing for innovative and outside-the-box thinking should be actively promoted at policy level**, instead of hanging on to the conventional one-size-fits-all approach, which no longer caters for the complex situations occurred and may lead to unnecessary administrative stalemates hindering land supply.

17 A major task of your proposed Steering Committee on Land and Housing Supply would be to identify potential land sites for development and re-development. To that end, **a comprehensive review and survey of the ecological values of all the land in Hong Kong (with built up urban areas obviously of lower priority) is recommended instead of relying on OZPs** which are often arbitrarily imposed to temporarily freeze land usage pending planning but subsequently block usage of land parcels that are actually low in ecological/amenities value. For instance, the industrial sites situating within Hunghom's residential neighbourhoods can easily be converted into residential uses; many industrial buildings in Kwai Chung are also currently underutilized and have potential for redevelopment. Besides, the development density of new development areas (NDAs) should be reviewed as the plan is for these areas to develop into future CBDs. As such, the allowable development density of NDAs should be on a par with the existing urban areas, creating more land for development.

18 We are glad to learn that you would seriously consider to apply the Land Resumption Ordinance more actively to resume land, which is in fact in the best public interest, for example, resumption of unused agricultural land for NDAs. It should not be considered as infringement of private property rights as land sale only provides the rights to private owners to use the land in a limited period and for specific uses. There is no obligation for the Government to extend the lease term, or not to change the land uses (in this event, changing from agricultural use to residential use).

19 Meanwhile, the pace of land creation has continued to be hindered by the cumbersome regulatory processes. The ongoing consultation on simplifying regulatory processes has revealed that there is much room for improvement. HKIA has submitted our views to the existing Administration, focusing on **streamlining and shortening certain statutory time limits, avoiding repetitively executing procedures of a similar nature, providing an express mandate for government departments to proceed with different procedures in parallel, rationalizing obsolete and ambiguous arrangements, and streamlining the internal administration process/time of relevant departments on the statutory approval process.**



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Oftentimes the bottleneck is due to the lack of communication and inconsistencies in processing applications among government departments. As such, our proposed SCFCD and your proposed Steering Committee on Land and Housing Supply should both be a good result-oriented approach to address this issue.

20 The recent speedy completion of quarantine facilities has illustrated that the construction industry can be very efficient and effective in delivering quality accommodation products, with determination and support from senior government officials. Accordingly, **the same approach can be adopted to address the public housing needs of subdivided residents and young home dwellers, as well as the homeless.** Nevertheless, in all cases, public housing quality should not be compromised, using long waiting queue, transitional basis, or good public housing reducing workers' motivation as excuses. A comprehensive study on the average individual living space for public housing should be conducted to ensure that the design is human centric, e.g. kitchen and toilet facilities are accessible to elderly people with deteriorated physical ability.

21 Whilst measures to increase public housing are mostly welcome, the new Administration should avoid repeating housing estate designs that nurture exclusive communities, such as Tin Shui Wai. Inclusive planning and mixed-use developments are preferred. In the longer term, the Government should continue to conduct research on high-density healthy city development, and encourage universities and NGOs to do the same. Since high density and liveability are not necessarily mutually exclusive, government policies should not only focus on reducing residential density but supporting facilities and other elements should also be considered.

### **Young Professionals and Small Practices**

22 Two of your core policies are to develop Hong Kong as an innovation and technology centre and to foster a city of culture to promote a creative economy, which require the cultivation of young talent and nurturing the creative industries. From our experience, these aims can be achieved through design competitions for public projects which can be an effective tool to promote local talent, engage the public and empower the community.

23 Many sectors, including the architecture profession, continue to face acute labour shortage, being complicated by the brain drain, an aging labour force and a lack of young people entering these professions. The new Administration should introduce initiatives to attract both local and overseas talent to stay and come to Hong Kong. Early career pathway exposure is crucial to arouse interest among the younger generation on future career choices. Accordingly, more government-funded



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programmes targeting to nurture innovation and creativity should be designed for not only university students, but also secondary (and even earlier) students.

24 **To show the determination in promoting innovation and creativity, the Government should take the lead in offering more internship and graduate openings for students in creative disciplines.** At the same time, financial aids should be provided to students from underprivileged families enrolling in non-UGC-funded professional graduate programmes to encourage student participation in the industry.

25 Whilst there are at present public financial supporting schemes for SMEs in general, small architectural practices are facing serious disadvantaged hindrance in their business operation under the regulatory framework. For instance, the Government's practice of bundling a number of minor works projects into term consultancies and term contracts for tendering by large contractors and consultants has deprived of small practices' opportunity to gain business and valuable practical experience. As such, the Government should farm out a sufficient number of minor works individually for small practices and young professionals to bid.

### **Innovation and Technology, and Smart City**

26 Amidst technological advancements, menu-selection of standardized components such as windows and interior fittings is now possible thanks to BIM, DfMA and RFID workflows. Allowing home-dwellers to have a say on their housing interface may improve their sense of ownership and belongings. On the other hand, while public incentives are provided to encourage the wider application of MiC, some sites actually don't lend themselves to adopt MiC. In those cases, traditional construction methods should be adopted to save public money.

27 At present, construction companies are lacking incentives to adopt new technologies due to the "lowest bid" system in public tender evaluation. **To promote innovation, the Government should revise the tender marking system, assigning more weights to tenders with more creative approaches.** Similarly, bonus points should be awarded to proposals which help reduce carbon emissions or conserve/revitalize built heritage.

28 Several of our local universities currently score quite high in global academic rankings, and they produce many quality researches. Nonetheless, not many of these research findings have been converted into commercial uses. The Government should encourage the conversion of these early-stage R&D into pilot projects and provide funding support for the industry, particularly SMEs, to apply them into real-life practices.





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29 The focus of our smart city development should be more on citizens' needs than technological advancements so that Hong Kong can evolve positively into a work-smart and live-smart city. NDAs should all be planned with the mindset of mobility, adaptability and urban design. Apart from the use of new technologies, smart land use and smart management of land resources should be considered favourably. Under a district-wide approach, a three-dimensional, multi-layer, multi-use, and vertically integrated development strategy both below and above ground should be adopted to increase land and housing supply.

### **Liveability and Sustainability**

30 Sustainable development should be actively promoted. Innovative urban planning such as 3D planning, green transportation, smart city concepts, carbon-neutral and integrated landscape design, and the like should be explored to address the climate change challenge.

31 The pandemic has drawn the public's attention to people's well-being and a healthy built environment. We suggest the Government to **launch a "Jointly Build a Healthy City" campaign to promote the integration of health into building design and urban/territorial planning**. The campaign should encourage research institutes to study related topics, such as sporty building and city designs, and amending building regulations to increase natural ventilation so as to reduce virus transmission.

32 Tradition management of our streets and public open spaces by the Transport Department and Leisure and Cultural Services Department no longer satisfies expectations of today's Hong Kong citizens. New models must be derived to improve livability and revitalize our streets and public spaces, optimizing their uses. As an example, sidewalk cafés/retail shops should be allowed to add buoyant activities to appropriate streets. These cafés/shops are economically self-sustainable, and the Government can regulate them through licensing and collect rent. Their design could be vetted by a professional review panel such as the Town Planning Board to ensure good integration with public urban spaces. In addition, the new Administration should actively explore other innovative management to enhance liveability and commercial viability of Hong Kong.

33 All in all, good urban and landscape designs enhance liveability which helps attract talent to come and stay in Hong Kong. As such, more collaborative efforts should be made to the design of public space and greenery that transcends the cityscape from engineering infrastructures to urban patterns that are pedestrian friendly and encourage unpurposed wayfinding, exploration and discovery.



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34 To mitigate traffic congestion and environmental issues associated with our high density development patterns, the Government should consider introducing regulatory requirements for both public and private developments to provide supporting facilities for active mobility, i.e. cycling and pedestrianization. Promotion of pedestrianization in business and shopping districts and increasing the number of vehicle prohibited zones would enhance the territory's liveability. By the same token, establishing parking zones for cycles in urban areas, improving cycleway networks and encouraging cycling as a transport mode to work will help facilitate the achievement of the net zero goal.

### **Conclusion**

35 We very much hope that our suggestions can help ensure Hong Kong's success and prosperity to be elevated to new heights in the coming years. In particular, we share the same goal as your good self in opting for result-oriented and solution-driven policy initiatives so as to create a desirable and sustainable built environment for all people in Hong Kong.