

Harbour groups fail to sway city planners

Board rejects three alternative plans submitted for Central reclamation

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Proposals from three harbour interest groups have failed to convince the Town Planning Board that it is feasible to scale back the Central reclamation.

The board rejected rezoning requests from the Society for Protection of the Harbour, Save Our Shoreline and Clear the Air yesterday.

"Board members agreed with the government's argument that the current reclamation is already at a minimum," its spokeswoman said after the meeting.

The board also said as one of the applications touched on the Wan Chai reclamation plan, which is under review, it would be wrong to make a decision now.

But board members agreed that some of the concerns raised by the Society for Protection of the Harbour were valid, such as the potential "wall effect" of a massive commercial development.

The board pledged to use a planning brief to ensure good designs and add new conditions to the land-sale document.

Save Our Shoreline called for a 70 per cent reduction in the reclamation by using a tunnel for the traffic bypass.

Clear the Air proposed electronic road-pricing and immediate implementation of tolls to replace the Central-Wan Chai Bypass.

The Society for the Protection of the Harbour proposed an almost complete revamp of the existing zoning plan.

The society said there was no need for commercial development on the reclaimed land and was worried that a low-rise development would be too large and become a "horizontal version of Two IFC".

The society's demands concentrated on turning the reclaimed land into public open space to compensate for reclamation of the harbour.

One of the most disputed points between officials and the society's representatives was whether it was essential to use sea water for pumping stations.

The society argued that by using fresh water for cooling, the government could relocate the pumping stations, reduce the number of stations needed and also reduce reclamation.

But officials stressed that fresh water was scarce in Hong Kong and the entire Pearl River Delta and its use for cooling was unsustainable.

The society's campaign manager, Angus Ho Hon-wai, said: "We're very disappointed by the board's decision.

"We're not convinced the current reclamation is already a minimum [level] and we questioned the effectiveness of the so-called actions to ensure good design."

The society also disputed the board's criticism that part of their application related to the Wan Chai reclamation review. "The society is aware that this specific area has never been consulted on during the Wan Chai review. This reflects the government's planning process is incomplete and poorly organised."