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Monday July 18 2005

Lawmaker sees merits in plan for giant park

Yi Hu

Executive Councillor Bernard Chan yesterday appeared to endorse a radical proposal to turn West Kowloon into a giant park, even though it would mean colossal financial losses for the government.

Speaking on RTHK, Mr Chan, who is also a lawmaker, gave guarded support to a large park on the site, first presented by a group of architects and activists against the government-backed cultural hub proposal. 'My personal opinion is that we need to make more financial sacrifices to give ourselves a better living environment,' he said.

'I want a better environment for myself and for my family. I'm sure most of you would say the same thing. We need to attract young, energetic, creative people to our city. But those sorts of people want a good living environment, and we are not delivering it. Even parts of Shenzhen today are looking nicer than Hong Kong, with wide sidewalks, trees and sitting-out areas.'

But he described as 'radical' the park proposal, made by the citizens' group, Hong Kong Alternatives. The biggest obstacle to expanding green spaces in the project would be 'billions and billions of dollars in revenue'.

'It's all about money. If it wanted to, the government could give us much more open space in our urban areas,' he said, 'But normally, the government will squeeze as much money out of the developers as possible. So the developers squeeze as much building into the site as possible.'

He said the expansion of green areas should be justifiable, even if it meant higher taxes. But he admitted it would be no easy task to convince the public that more trees and grass were worth all the financial sacrifices.

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