

Health and Open Space Planning

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Open space is reserved as zones on town plans under the *Town Planning Ordinance* of which an objective is the promotion of health. Open space is also developed in major housing estates (private and public) to provide local amenity. The amount of open space in either case is reserved in accordance with planning standards denominated on the basis of the size of population forecast to build up upon full development of a planning area.

Statutory open space zoning and open space development in major housing estates have left a number of issues that should be addressed to accomplish better the statutory aim to promote health, if not general welfare, of Hong Kong. These issues are:

1. Some small pockets of open space zones in the urban area have not been developed, creating *planning blight*.
2. *Planning conditions* (whether or not imposed with reference to master layout plans) requiring provision of open space in private development have not been audited as to factual compliance or use.
3. The actual *amenity and health contribution* of some developed open space zones is doubtful, given such problems as size, accessibility and hostile environment (notably severe traffic noise and air pollution, isolated by roads).
4. The *actual utilization and health implications* of open space within and without housing estates are not generally known.
5. Major new open space zones tend to be developed on major reclamation areas, which are *remote from* the old urban areas.
6. *Urban renewal projects* have not made a major contribution to the open space system of Hong Kong by the injection of major and attractive public open space packages in the urban core.

The gist of the matter is the predominantly *numerical and static approach* in open space zoning and the absence of a systematic and periodic environmental monitoring system. The nature of the problem has *historical, institutional* and *financial* dimensions. However, this should not deter government from rethinking about the better strategy to provide open space.