

Planning board to let groups into meeting

Chloe Lai

The Town Planning Board yesterday backed down from an earlier decision and will allow three pressure groups to present alternative plans for the Central reclamation at its next meeting. The public will also be allowed to attend.

Waiting outside the meeting for two hours were five members of the Society for Protection of the Harbour, Save Our Shorelines and Clear the Air. The board had earlier insisted the groups could not attend the meeting, which discussed their proposals, because their submissions had been made before a decision earlier this month to partially open up board meetings. The proposals will now be added to the agenda for a meeting in two weeks.

The board's spokeswoman said it was a "special circumstance" and a matter of public interest. Members had thought it important to let the public know the decision-making process over the waterfront was "fair and reasonable", she said.

Although the public will be allowed into the meeting, deliberations will be behind closed doors.

The government says the Central reclamation is essential to provide land for a road network including the Central-Wan Chai bypass.

The Society for Protection of the Harbour has been trying to force the government to send the 18-hectare reclamation plan back to the board for approval.

In March last year Mr Justice Michael Hartmann upheld the chief executive's powers in the planning process. The society later changed the battleground. It submitted a rezoning request last October, calling for a cut in the size of the reclamation and the roads to be built. It also objected to having commercial developments on reclaimed land.

Save Our Shoreline called for a 70 per cent reduction in the reclamation by using a tunnel for the bypass. Clear the Air proposed immediate implementation of tolls.

Meanwhile, a last attempt to save Wan Chai's "Wedding Card Street" failed when the board, again, rejected a proposal to preserve Lee Tung Street.

But it said some of its elements, such as "people-oriented" design and "preserving the character of the street", will be added to the planning brief for development.