

Planning a disaster: Government meddled with mandate, made arbitrary changes to Development Plan

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The Maharashtra government recently released the Development Control and Promotion Regulations (DCPRs), one element of the Development Plan 2034 (DP) for Greater Mumbai, for public suggestions and objections. However, this partially-released DP has made a mockery of the decade-long public consultation process.

In an unprecedented inclusive process, which began with the release of the Existing Land Use (ELU) plan in 2012, various stakeholders studied it and identified nearly 3,000 discrepancies. Following this, the BMC engaged with citizens' groups, stakeholders and state departments, and conducted workshops on health, education, water supply, sanitation, digital inclusion, affordable housing, transportation, urban form and environment. The inputs became a crucial part of the Erstwhile Draft Development Plan (EDDP), published in February 2015.

The EDDP, however, faced widespread opposition – about 72,000 suggestions and objections were filed – as it failed to incorporate the majority of suggestions and recommendations and was denigrated to talking merely about FSI increase. In June 2015, buckling under pressure, the government appointed a committee to revisit the EDDP and instructed the BMC to prepare a revised DP.

In May 2016, the BMC released the Revised Draft Development Plan (RDDP), which evoked over 82,000 suggestions and objections. A statutory planning committee, under bureaucrat Gautam Chatterjee, studied every suggestion and objection and gave a hearing to those who had submitted them. After this exercise, the

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committee submitted recommendations to the BMC in March 2017 and published the relevant documents in both, English and Marathi.

On approving the PCRs, the BMC sent its report to the state for its final sanction to the DP. The report and PCRs reassured citizens that the DP was headed in the right direction. But the battle seems to have started all over again. The DCPRs, now released by the government with nearly 350 modifications, 85% of them substantial, have come as a shock to Mumbaikars and organisations involved in the public consultation process. Callously ignoring all the hard work put in by citizens and the BMC, the state has unilaterally made biased modifications to the land use reservations and DCPRs.

If any state department wanted its concerns reflected, it had ample opportunities to do so by submitting its own suggestions and objections during the consultative process. Instead, the state government has foisted its own arbitrary and autocratic decisions by superseding the consultation process, so the public consultation exercise has turned out to be one in futility.

The latest modifications include elimination of vital definitions, such as that of ‘affordable housing’, ignoring gaothans, koliwadass and adivasi padas, diluting heritage regulations, relaxing high-rise buildings’ threshold, to name a few. They seek to transform the Municipal Commissioner into a veritable demigod, endowed with sweeping powers, inter alia, to shift land use reservations as well as zonal boundaries and overrule the Heritage Committee and even constitute the High Rise Committee.

This DP 2034 is fraught with fundamental errors and undermines the spirit of the 74th amendment to the Constitution intended to empower urban local bodies and improve their efficacy. Instead of ensuring compliance with its own laws, the State has meddled with the DP prepared with popular mandate. What is needed, is a tsunami of objections so as to frustrate the State’s exercise to subserve the illegitimate motives of vested interests.