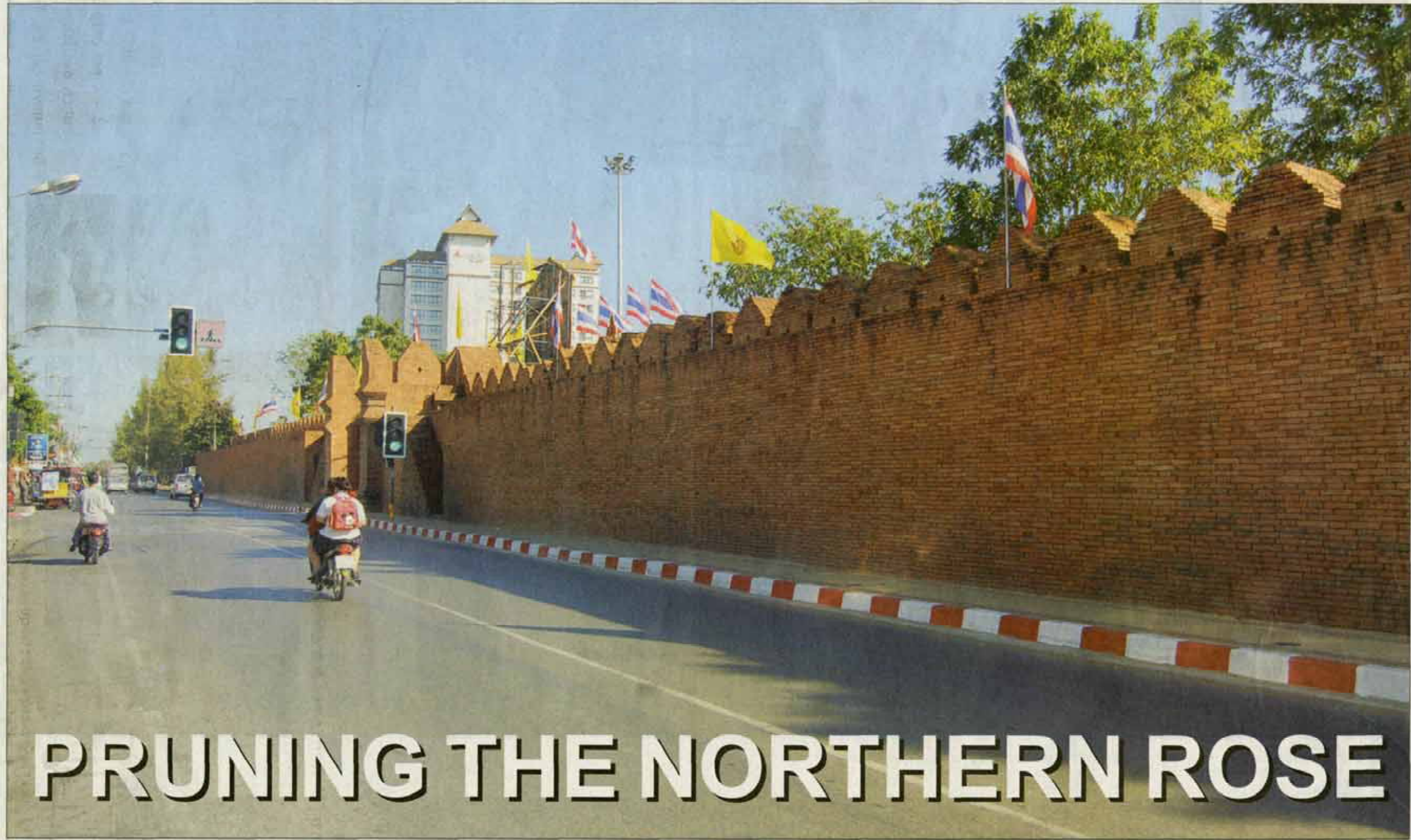


# @thailand

### Feedback welcome

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## PRUNING THE NORTHERN ROSE

The wall of the Pae Gate in Chiang Mai. While the town planning regulations prohibit high-rise buildings in the nearby area, some structures like the one in the background were built before the law can take effect.



The wall of the Pae Gate in Chiang Mai. While the town planning regulations prohibit high-rise buildings in the nearby area, some structures like the one in the background were built before the law can take effect.

The city's first fully-comprehensive zoning plan is splitting the country's second largest metropolis and opponents are up in arms against the blueprint they say will be a "birth control pill" for the housing sector with many nasty side effects.

The future of urban planning for Chiang Mai, also known as the "Rose of the North", now rests with the draft zoning plan, which is the first of its kind in the province, conceived with the vision of re-defining the layout of the city.

The plan promises to restore Chiang Mai's old-world charm and to help turn the province into an economic engine to accommodate the growth of the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

But businesses have pointed to potential flaws in the plan prepared by Chiang Mai's public works and town planning office.

They claim the plan has placed too much emphasis on conservation by designating areas around the ring roads as "green zones".

By definition, the areas will be reserved as the lungs of the city which are off-limits to commercial or industrial developments.

Residential housing in the green zones is allowed but buildings in these areas must not be higher than 12 metres.

However, the buildings can be no higher than nine metres if they are located within a 100-metre radius of a temple, and the city has many temples.

There are 247 temples in Chiang Mai, according to town planning officials.

"My fear is that this plan is going to divide society," said Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce chairman Narong Tananuwat.

"I expect the issue will eventually end up in court."

Mr Narong said local businesses were not consulted about the plan. They feel the residential and commercial areas

## Zoning plan causing some controversy in Thailand's second largest city

Story and photos by CHEEWIN SATTHA  
CHIANG MAI



The Hua Rin ancient pond, or Jaeng Hua Rin, is one of four ponds which are classified as historical sites. They are to stay off-limits to commercial and industrial development.

must be given room to expand because the city keeps growing.

The plan appears to have lost sight with reality, he said.

A study conducted by Chiang Mai University expects the need for housing estates to rise from 345,552 units in 1990 to 401,996 units in 2015. The controversial plan would exacerbate the housing shortage, according to the Chiang Mai-Lamphun association of real estate agents.

The Chiang Mai Federations of Thai Industry is also concerned the plan may ban the use of 429 square kilometres of land in seven districts for industrial

purposes. The districts in question are San Sai, San Kamphaeng, Doi Saket, Saraphi, Hang Dong, Muang and Mae Rim.

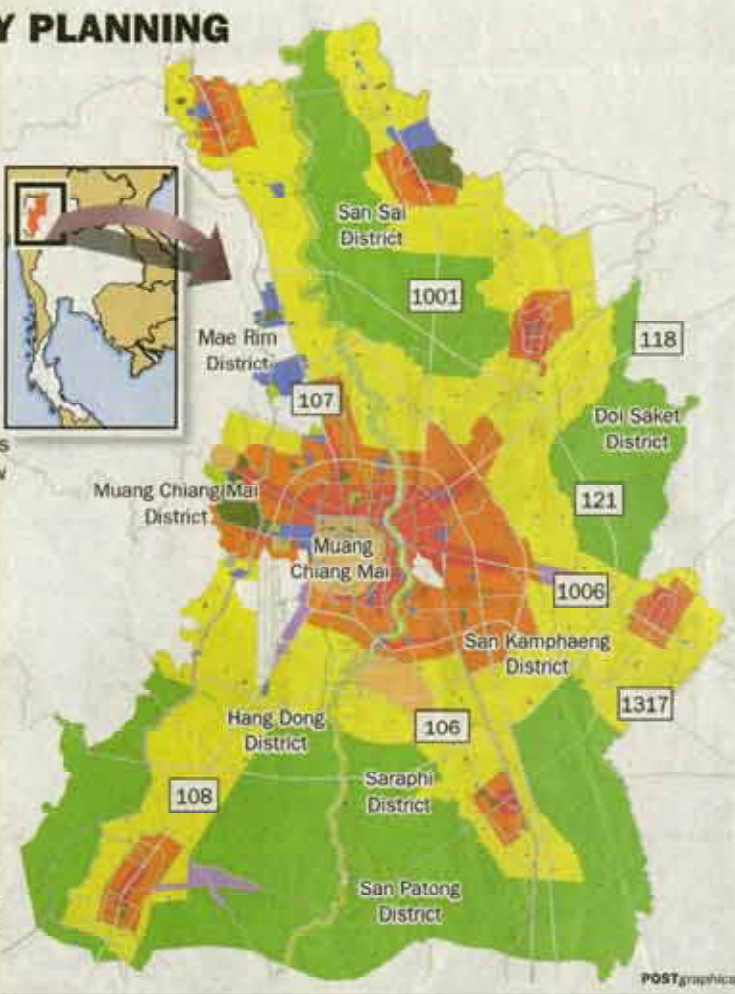
"It's like a birth control pill for everything. We won't be able to continue economic development," Mr Narong said.

If residents and businesses cannot relocate to suburban areas, they will be forced to stay within the inner city. Land prices in central Chiang Mai will skyrocket and traffic will be even worse, he said.

The centre of Chiang Mai is notorious for traffic congestion and air pollution as more new cars hit the roads, while

## CHIANG MAI'S NEW CITY PLANNING

- 1 Low-density residential areas (yellow) change to medium-density residential areas (orange) covering 11,583.26 rai.
- 2 Commercial and high-density residential areas (red) covering 953.71 rai outside the city walls and medium-density residential areas (orange) covering 211.55 rai around Wat Suan Dok change to Thai artistic and cultural conservation areas (light brown) covering 1,165.26 rai.
- 3 Areas for particular industries (light purple) covering 1,357.34 rai in part of Mae Rim, San Sai and Saraphi districts change to low-density residential areas (yellow).
- 4 Rural and agricultural areas (green) covering 1,496.18 rai in Muang district change to low-density residential areas (yellow) to pave the way for future development.
- 5 Rural and agricultural areas (green) covering 377.21 rai in Hang Dong district change to areas for particular industries (light purple).
- 6 Areas for recreation and environmental conservation (light green) and areas of state agencies and public utilities (blue) change to Thai artistic and cultural conservation areas (light brown) covering 209.12 rai including the Chiang Mai Zoo.



public transport is insufficient, say many locals.

Supporters of the plan, however, argue that it is time the city, which has grown without any real planning or system, was put in order.

Many scholars and academics hope the plan will draw a clearer line separating the old quarters of the city and result in

a better design for its cultural preservation policy.

Opponents have been given 90 days of the plan being put into effect to lodge any petitions against it.

The Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce, business groups and some communities are reportedly seeking to review the plan.

They insist the plan must not be implemented at the expense of economic progress.

Mr Narong, however, said that all sides should come together to resolve any contentious issues.

"Thailand is beset by too many conflicts already. It doesn't help adding to the social divisions," he said.

# Making floods a thing of the past

Chiang Mai's new town planning regulations may disappoint property developers, but they're for the greater good

The new town planning regulations in Chiang Mai may disappoint property developers, but will benefit the whole province by making the landscape more attractive and preventing floods, according to a local town planner.

Surapol Sarathornthat, city planning analyst at Chiang Mai's public works and town planning office, said the new planning regulations were long overdue.

Without the regulations, the problems would extend far beyond building ordinance and urban planning. There would be protracted floods in the city because houses and buildings may occupy and subsequently block areas where accu-

mulated rainwater flows through.

He added that the new regulations will also conserve historical sites.

The draft plan will be put up for public debate and possibly amended afterward.

The Interior Ministry will then look at the draft and the legality of the draft will be vetted by the Council of State before it is forwarded to the cabinet for approval.

The process of approval should take about 40 days.

The new regulations are expected to

take effect in the middle of the year.

The plan is reportedly supported by 40 local organisations and civic groups.

The new plan is illustrated by different coloured zones. Green denotes agricultural zones where buildings must not be taller than 12 metres.

Orange zones are residential areas with medium population density where buildings must not be higher than 15 metres.

The orange zones refer to residential areas of medium density and buildings

must not be higher than 15 metres. Also permissible will be agriculture and commercial buildings.

The red zone will be defined as high density residential areas and tall buildings will be allowed.

The light purple zone will serve particular industries. Large buildings for living and commercial purposes will be permissible, while agriculture will be prohibited.

The new urban plan could cut the price of land in the green category, while

tracts in the eastern and northern parts of downtown Chiang Mai are likely to fetch higher prices, according to a source.

The price of land from the western side of Chiang Mai's ancient moat to the foot of Doi Suthep mountain and parts of the Chang Phuak municipality should drop due to building height limits.

The zone includes the vicinities of Chiang Mai-Hot road, Chiang Mai Airport, Nimmanahaeminda road, Chotana road and the Suan Dok area.

House rents could go up as there will

be fewer housing projects. Construction businesses could suffer with less income for construction workers.

In the long term, new buildings will tend to have flat rooftops and each floor should have lower ceilings due to the building height cap.

The tourism business could also take a battering as a possible rise in room rates would deter low-income visitors from the province.

Medium- and high-income earners who want detached houses will move to suburban areas, but they still have to commute to red areas causing traffic congestion.