

Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review Gist of Envisioning Stage Focus Group Discussion

Date: 9th December 2008 (Tuesday)
Time: 6:30 p.m. – 8:25 p.m.
Venue: 1104, 11/F, Hong Kong Scout Centre, Scout Path, Austin Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon
Group: Political organizations – District Councils
No. of participants: 10 (1 observer)

Representative of A-World Consulting Ltd. briefly introduced the background of URS Review. Mrs S.C. Mak, Sandra, the facilitator, invited participants to express their opinions. Key points were as follows:

1 Providing more recreational, cultural and public facilities

- 1.1 It should be considered to reserve land in the urban renewal areas for the construction of recreational, cultural and public facilities, such as open space, libraries, municipal services buildings and parks.
- 1.2 Kwun Tong was taken as an example. As the renewal area was situated at the heart of Kwun Tong, the construction of recreational, cultural and public facilities would benefit Kwun Tong residents. The Government could consider providing the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) with other areas for development and implement the above suggestion through land exchange.

2 Urban renewal planning

- 2.1 The current commercial, profit-oriented approach in the planning of urban renewal should be changed. Planning should be forward-looking, and at the same time take into account the revitalization of old areas. Heritage conservation in old areas should be continued, but standards had to be set.
- 2.2 The overall planning of the whole district should be emphasized, taking into account and balancing the peripheral areas and residents. Taking Nam Cheong Station as an example, as it was near the seaside, the construction of extremely tall buildings would be inappropriate.
- 2.3 Different government departments and organizations should coordinate to achieve overall planning of the whole district. Without the coordination of government departments, it would be difficult to pursue overall planning.
- 2.4 Urban renewal should include more greening and preserve local characteristics in order to solve the existing problems of the districts.
- 2.5 The URA's development projects in recent years had started to

emphasize rehabilitation of buildings, revitalization of old areas and heritage conservation. Renewal was no longer about redevelopment only, which was a correct approach.

- 2.6 The height of redeveloped buildings should be comparable to that of the surrounding buildings. The orderly arrangement of buildings with different heights would add beauty to the cityscape.
- 2.7 The site area of URA's development projects should not be too small. Otherwise, the construction mode would be restricted and the air ventilation and views of the constructed buildings could not be cared for. It might also be unable to achieve an orderly arrangement of buildings with different heights. Moreover, the small site area would create a sense of oppression to the constructed buildings.
- 2.8 Urban renewal should have long-term goals and the planning should not focus on pleasing the residents only.
- 2.9 In planning urban renewal, it should be considered to preserve the buildings with local characteristics in order to enrich the community. Sham Shui Po was taken as an example. Old buildings should be suitably rehabilitated to coordinate with, balance and harmonize the development of the whole district.
- 2.10 The number of old buildings in Hong Kong was small when compared with that in Macau.
- 2.11 More consultations should be conducted with professionals to study the overall impacts of urban renewal projects to the community.

3 Clarification of URA's positioning

- 3.1 URA should bear social responsibility. However, based on the current operation, there was no difference between URA and other private developers. URA's positioning did not match with the community aspirations, which would easily lead to dispute.
- 3.2 URA could make reference to the mode of operation of the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS).
- 3.3 The role and function of URA should not overlap with that of private developers.

4 Mode of compensation and redevelopment

- 4.1 URA should gain more support from stakeholders on the mode of compensation and redevelopment. Appropriate compensation should be arranged according to the different situations of residents. "Flat-for-flat" and "shop-for-shop" exchange arrangements or cash compensation should be considered having regard to the circumstances

of individual applications.

5 Comprehensive consultation

- 5.1 The Government and URA should conduct comprehensive and random public consultation, thus enabling the public to fully reflect their views. It could also prevent the consultation from being dominated by small groups, making it unable to reflect the real situation in the district. Public consultation should be extensive to minimize disputes and show the public the sincerity of the works. Urban renewal should be based on the benefits of residents in different social strata.
- 5.2 Public consultation should not be conducted solely by URA. District Councils and non-government organizations could also carry out consultation simultaneously.
- 5.3 URA should maintain conversation with District Councils and non-government organizations during the public consultation and make corresponding amendments to the redevelopment projects based on the opinions collected.
- 5.4 URA should release more information before public consultation to educate the community.

6 Criteria for selection of urban renewal locations

- 6.1 Buildings which were too old or had negative impacts to the cityscape should be given the first priority for renewal.
- 6.2 There should be a set of transparent criteria for selection of urban renewal sites. Priority should be given to projects which could bring about positive impacts to the district.

7 Rehabilitation of buildings

- 7.1 It was not easy to carry out rehabilitation for the old buildings which did not have owners' corporations. Therefore relevant government departments, URA and HKHS should provide related assistance.

8 Transportation and environmental protection

- 8.1 Urban renewal should pay attention to the factors of transportation and environmental protection to avoid traffic congestion or negative impacts to the environment in the future.