

Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review

Gist of Envisioning Stage Focus Group Discussion

Date: 17th December 2008 (Wednesday)
Time: 9:30a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Venue: Conference Room, Hong Kong Housing Authority, 33 Fat Kwong Street, Ho Man Tin, Kowloon
Group: Hong Kong Housing Authority
No. of participants: 15

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

1 Collecting opinions from all citizens

- 1.1 Public consultation would sometimes be monopolized by the opinions of small groups. Therefore, public opinion survey on a random basis and other consultation methods should be considered to widely and fully collect public opinions towards urban renewal.
- 1.2 More information should be disseminated before public consultation to introduce to the public the history of urban renewal in Hong Kong and explain the social resources required for urban renewal.
- 1.3 Interactive methods should be used to consult local residents to ensure whether they wished for redevelopment.

2 Suggestions on urban renewal

- 2.1 Transfer of plot ratio to another piece of land for development and other innovative methods could be considered for redevelopment or heritage conservation.
- 2.2 Owners who had the ability and were willing to bear risks could be flexibly allowed to participate in urban renewal.
- 2.3 It could be considered to lower the application threshold for compulsory sale to a minimum of 80% property ownership based on the entire district rather than one single building. This could facilitate the implementation of urban renewal.
- 2.4 Urban renewal should be viewed from a wide ranging perspective so as to understand how much the community was willing to pay and the vision of urban renewal. It could also be considered to provide incentives from the policy perspective in order to achieve long-term goals through urban renewal, for example, urban greening.

- 2.5 Urban renewal was a huge task which should not be borne by Urban Renewal Authority (URA) solely. URA should not be self-financing. The community should discuss and determine how many resources they were willing to put into urban renewal.
- 2.6 It could be considered to carry out urban renewal by new companies formed by affected residents and tenants.
- 2.7 Urban renewal was not necessarily the responsibility of the Government or URA; it could be carried out by private organizations. The participation of private developers and residents should be encouraged to coordinate and develop urban renewal projects.
- 2.8 The aim of urban renewal should not be property development or profit-making only.
- 2.9 Urban renewal projects in the past were too piecemeal. Respective works should be co-ordinated by the Development Bureau. Instead of considering urban renewal only from an economic perspective, the future direction of Hong Kong's overall development should also be taken into account.
- 2.10 The development mode of urban renewal projects could be stated in the land grant provision to avoid all kinds of problems in the future.
- 2.11 Public facilities should be included in the planning of urban renewal.
- 2.12 URA's current scope of work was wide and very complicated, and it was impossible for them to achieve self-financing. URA should encourage partnering organizations to participate in urban renewal.

3 Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance

- 3.1 Amendments to the "Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance" should be considered to allow individual property owners to participate in redevelopment projects and to replace redevelopment by heritage conservation.
- 3.2 The initiative of individual property owners and developers in the participation of urban renewal could be enhanced through the amendments of ordinances.

4 Compensation policy

- 4.1 The compensation offered by URA for the affected residents was relatively lenient, while the compensation for the shop operators often varied with their expectations.
- 4.2 'Market value compensation, compassionate rehousing' should be adopted as the standard for compensation. The former should be

achieved through auctioning off the redeveloped properties and sharing the return with property owners according to their proportion of ownership. The latter should be achieved through rehousing of the affected residents according to their actual circumstances.

5 Enhancing civic education on urban renewal

5.1 Civic education should be enhanced for the public to understand that property maintenance should be the responsibility of owners. Waiting for URA's demolition and redevelopment was not the only solution to the ageing buildings.

5.2 The public should be informed of how much the community had to pay for urban renewal.

6 Heritage conservation

6.1 The current heritage conservation works were too piecemeal, lacking overall planning.

6.2 Communities with characteristics should be preserved to attract tourists. Preservation of buildings without historical value was not a must. The dilapidated conditions of buildings should be noted.

6.3 Urban renewal involved cultural behaviour and heritage conservation, which aimed to preserve Hong Kong's characteristics to attract visitors and talents, and maintain Hong Kong's competitiveness. As urban renewal was related to culture and conservation, its value should be measured by the overall benefits to the community, instead of the profit and loss of URA.

7 4Rs strategy

7.1 Currently, urban renewal relied too much on redevelopment. It should be considered to carry out more conservation work to preserve Hong Kong's history, culture and characteristics.

8 Community attachment and cohesiveness

8.1 Urban renewal might result in the disappearance of the whole marketplaces and related community networks. Therefore, community attachment and cohesiveness should be emphasized, and rehousing in the original district should be arranged where possible.

9 Professional support

9.1 More professional support should be provided to the affected residents when carrying out urban renewal projects, for example, the provision of social service teams.

10 Improving the environment

10.1 The valuable opportunity of urban renewal should be seized to improve the environment of the old districts, carry out greening and improve the cityscape of the districts and streets.

10.2 There was limited public space for Hong Kong people; the construction of multi-purpose public spaces through urban renewal should be considered.

10.3 Redevelopment of stand-alone buildings should not be pursued, as it could not improve local environment and would only increase development and population density.

11 URS Review

11.1 All information, including the results on the study of Asian cities, should be publicized at the public engagement stage. More stakeholders should be invited to express opinions, e.g. Town Planning Board and Environmental Protection Department, etc.

11.2 The wordings of the questions in the pamphlet of URS Review were too academic. More common wordings should be used.