

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Background

Commenced in July 2008, the Urban Renewal Strategy (“URS”) Review is scheduled to last over two years, involving a 3-stage public engagement process. This report gives an account of the public engagement programme of the first stage, i.e. the Envisioning Stage, and the public views collected.

2. Envisioning Stage Programmes

	<i>Initiatives</i>	<i>Contents and remarks</i>
Standard programmes		
1	Focus group discussion	(a) 20 focus group discussion sessions were held. (b) The gist of each has been uploaded to the URS Review website.
2	Website revamp	(a) The URS Review website was revamped in December 2008 to be more attractive and user-friendly. (b) An e-forum, e-blog and e-questionnaire were developed.
3	Announcement of Public Interest (“API”)	The API was launched in early December 2008 on television and radio.
4	“Models and Challenges of Urban Renewal - Sharing of Asian Experience” seminar	(a) Urban Renewal Authority (URA) organised a one-day seminar on Asian experience on urban renewal with speakers from overseas and Mainland China. (b) Participants’ views were recorded for consideration in the Envisioning Stage.
5	Overseas study visits	Study trips to Tokyo and Shanghai were organised to provide the opportunity for key stakeholders to gain up-to-date and first-hand information.
6	Publicity	(a) Apart from issuing press releases, interviews with Steering Committee members were arranged and articles published. (b) Columnists briefing was organised.

3. Public Views Collected in the Envisioning Stage

Views from the public were received via the URS Review website, focus group discussions and written submissions, among others. Collation and analysis were done by The Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies (HKIAPS) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. A total of 127 relevant copies of views were collected and analysed. These views have been categorised into eight major issues (see below), with those that could not be categorised grouped under “Others”.

(a) Vision & Considerations

- Many suggested that the vision of urban renewal should be part of town planning and economic development strategies, whilst some opined that urban renewal should be part of the overall district planning.
- Specific concerns included development density, urban design, environmental protection and public transport. More studies on related areas and policies as well as improvement on their co-ordination were suggested.
- There were extensive discussions on the meaning of a “people-centred approach”, the relationship between development and quality of life, the importance of preserving and revitalising social network, local culture and heritage, and the local economy. There were views that the improvement of living conditions in dilapidated buildings was in fact a welfare rather than a redevelopment issue.
- There were suggestions to extend urban renewal to cover industrial and non-targeted areas.

(b) Balance & Coordination among 4Rs¹

- Some called for more emphasis on rehabilitation, preservation, and revitalisation, whilst some supported early redevelopment for buildings with poor conditions.

¹ Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, Revitalisation and pReservation

- Some raised concern about the practicality for URA to undertake 225 projects in 20 years.
- Many recommended better co-ordination among the 4Rs.

(c) Role of Stakeholders

- Many emphasised that different stakeholders should play their roles in urban renewal, but there were diverse views on whether the Government should play a leading role.
- Some said URA should implement projects independently, while others opined that URA was not adequately equipped to implement the 3Rs besides redevelopment.
- Some suggested a strengthened role for the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) in the rehabilitation of buildings, better co-ordination among URA, HKHS and Buildings Department, and better collaboration with Hong Kong Housing Authority in rehousing.
- Some requested to facilitate the role of the private sector in urban redevelopment.
- There were suggestions to encourage residents to undertake redevelopment by themselves, with financial and technical assistance from non-government organisations, developers and URA. Some requested to strengthen the role of owners in redevelopment, rehabilitation and preservation.

(d) Compensation, Rehousing and Resumption

- There were conflicting views on whether the prevailing compensation policy was too generous or insufficient. Some suggested to offer owners and tenants more options of compensation and rehousing, like “shop for shop” and “flat for flat”. Others suggested providing compensation and re-housing before approval of the statutory plans or development projects.
- Some were concerned about the protection for tenants, noting that some owners terminated their tenancies after the announcement of redevelopment projects. Some others queried the justification in allowing URA to apply for land resumption.

(e) Public Engagement

- Some requested that stakeholders and the general public be engaged to identify target areas for the implementation of the 4Rs under the district-based approach.
- There were calls for public engagement throughout the entire urban renewal process, community education and project monitoring through community alliance(s). Others were concerned that public engagement might slow down the pace of urban renewal.

(f) Social Impact

- It was recommended that the scope of social impact assessments be expanded to evaluate both social benefits and social costs, to cover areas outside project boundaries, and to conduct assessments before and after redevelopment.
- Some were concerned about the current arrangement whereby URA commissioned non-government organisations to set up social service teams as the teams would be accountable to the affected owners and tenants, as well as to the URA. Some suggested establishing an independent mechanism for appointing such teams.

(g) Financial Arrangement

- There were mixed views on the current self-financing model of the URA. Some considered that this would lead to URA raising the development density of its projects and being reluctant to improve compensation and re-housing arrangements. Others believed that the URA should be listed in the stock exchange to raise funds and that other organisations should be invited to share the burden of implementing non-profitable projects.
- Some suggested the Government to invest more on urban renewal while others recommended reducing URA's role and strengthening that of the private sector.

(h) Urban Renewal Programme

- There were calls to speed up the pace of urban renewal. Some requested early publication of planned urban renewal programmes for residents' better planning.

(i) Others

- There was a suggestion to turn the URS into a statutory regulation.
- Some suggested that “opportunities for design excellence” should be included in the URS.

4. Conclusion & Remarks

In the 2009-10 Budget, the Financial Secretary encouraged various sectors of the community to participate in the review of the URS. An initial sense of openness and transparency has already been cultivated through the Envisioning Stage, which should facilitate further community participation.

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