

# Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review

## Public Engagement Stage

### Public Forum 5

Date:	21 <sup>st</sup> November, 2009 (Saturday)
Time:	2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Venue:	Multi-function Hall I, 25/F, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Building
Number of Participants:	118 (including 2 members of the Steering Committee, also 2 representatives from the Development Bureau, 1 from the Planning Department, 10 from the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), and 1 from Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific, Chinese University of Hong Kong present as the observer <sup>Note 1)</sup>
Moderators:	Prof. Bernard, W. F. Lim Mrs. Sandra S.C. Mak

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#### Public Presentations

1. Topic: Not provided  
Speaker: Ms. Wong Yat Man

The speaker advocated the “flat for flat” and “shop for shop” compensation option, since it could safeguard the owners’ private property rights. She cited that Mr. Stephen Fisher of the former Planning and Lands Bureau sent a letter to the Legislative Council Panel on Planning, Lands and Works on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2001 to show the Government’s willingness to accept the “flat for flat” exchange plan, and would propose to the URA that the number of flat units available under the “flat for flat” exchange plan should not be less than 1.2 times of the number of owners participating in the plan. She opined that the citizens affected by the redevelopment in Kwun Tong and all other places in Hong Kong urged for: (1) the overall fulfilment of this undertaking; (2) the thorough fulfilment of the ownership participation scheme because the Basic Law protected private property rights.

She also thought that without supervision, the URA had become the beneficiary of urban redevelopment. The Government had to solve this problem. After the presentation, certain participants shouted the slogan “flat for flat” and “shop for shop” together.

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<sup>Note 1</sup> The observers were the representatives of the Development Bureau and the Planning Department, and the personnel of the Urban Renewal Authority. They were present to listen to the opinions and clarify or supplement certain facts and information. Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific, Chinese University of Hong Kong, would analyse the effective opinions collected in the “Urban Renewal Strategy” Review. Its representative was present to facilitate the analysis work. Their opinions or comments would not be regarded as valid opinions

2. Topic: Conclusion for the Redevelopment Policy  
Speaker: Ms. Yiu Siu Yung

The speaker pointed out that the redevelopment strategy had committed a serious breach of the “people-oriented” objective. The Government had used urban redevelopment to compete for profits with the general public. She pointed out that the Government drew up the redevelopment area at random without having obtained the owners’ consent, which took away their rights to trade their properties freely. The URA even divided the owners of residential flats and the owners of ground floor shops by luring the residential flat owners in financial terms to agree to the redevelopment, while the ground floor shop owners were compelled to accept the acquisition price offered by the URA. Those who did not comply with it would then be subject to compulsory land resumption. The ground floor shop owners relied on their properties for their livelihood or pension. The Government should not compel them to sell their shops. She quoted the “Sneaker Street” and “The Masterpiece” examples to point out that the URA was robbing and conspired with businesses to make “enormous profits”. She said that the original owners there should share the fruits of redevelopment.

Most old buildings were owned by investment owners, however with their compensation deducted, the owners were unable to buy back premises in the same district. Therefore, the community network was destroyed. Moreover, she considered it inappropriate to enact before the completion of this review the 80% threshold for the compulsory auction of the remaining properties within a lot which would result in the transfer of interests to property developers, monopoly and a soaring price index which affected all industries and business sectors and caused unemployment.

She agreed that the URA should change its role to assist the owners in organizing a redevelopment cooperative society to set the property price, provide the owners with various choices and let them participate in the development.

3. Topic: Video Sharing on Redevelopment Issues  
Speaker: Phoebe Fan, Lee Wai Yi (V-Artivist)

The speakers played two video recordings. The theme of the first one was “Urban Renewal Strategy – Review by the General Public (Sincerity Better than the Financial Secretary)”. This was a publicity video clip produced for the green paper “Urban Renewal Strategy – Review by the General Public” advocated by the H15 Concern Group. In the clip, a resident affected by Shanghai Street Conservation and Development Project indicated that he had been barely entertained when he made an inquiry to the Urban Renewal Social Service Team (SST) about rehousing issues. A member of the H15 Concern Group said that the SST was employed by the URA and therefore considered the URA as its service target. She proposed that it would be better should the SST be operated independently instead.

The theme of the second video was “Urban Renewal Kills Small Businesses”. This documentary comprised several interviews of citizens affected by urban renewal, for the purpose of understanding the effects on their daily lives, businesses and community network. Interviewees included stall vendors of the open market place at Graham Street in Central, the former ground floor shop owners at Lee Tung Street, as

well as the commercial and residential tenants in Sham Shui Po redevelopment area. They agreed that it was necessary to redevelop the old districts, but pointed out that Government officials in charge of planning and decision-making did not understand the residents' lifestyle and the community function, and consequently were unable to plan from the residents' perspective. The interviewees in Central and at Lee Tung Street indicated that the community network and the neighbourhood relationship had already changed when the redevelopment commenced. The interviewees in Sham Shui Po District indicated that the local economy was able to meet the needs of the elderly in the district and was therefore quite important.

As indicated by several shop owners, the URA often acquired the properties suddenly without detailed explanation. Moreover, business dropped drastically after relocation of their shops. Insufficient compensation or fast rising rent after redevelopment, meant it was unlikely that the shops could remain in the original district. Small business operators had profound influence on the street culture, the community network, the district characteristics and even the local economy. The current means of executing redevelopment had however not taken their needs into consideration.

4. Topic: Future Direction of Redevelopment  
Speaker: Mr. Ng Kam Chiu / H15 Concern Group

The speaker urgently demanded the fulfilment of the "flat for flat" and "shop for shop" exchange. He considered these options as helpful in maintaining the community's sense of belonging and harmony in society. He criticized the URA for acting in the contrary. For instance, the freezing survey actually encouraged owners to force tenants to move out. Moreover, the transfer of interests between the URA and property developers encouraged the latter to reserve premium urban land lots in Hong Kong.

He summarised the views of the H15 Concern Group on the "Urban Renewal Strategy" Review and reiterated their proposals and demands, including the fulfilment of "flat for flat" and "shop for shop" exchange, owner participation, improvement of neighbourhood living standard, preservation of district characteristics and maintenance of the community network, as well as minimizing the "bulldozing" redevelopment approach of the URA and instead reinforcing its roles in rehabilitation, conservation and revitalization. Moreover, he did not agree that owner participation was equivalent to taking risks, because the URA acquired properties at a low price and sold them at a high price after redevelopment. There would be no risks to the owners.

In the first instance, the URA should conduct a social impact assessment, and study how more residents could stay behind before proceeding with redevelopment.

5. Topic: "Urban Renewal Strategy" Review  
Speaker: Mr. Ho Kin Chung

The speaker said that there had long been many arguments and criticism in society against urban redevelopment and the URA. In his opinion, most people agreed that the aging old urban areas had to be improved. With regard to redevelopment, he suggested either (1) doing nothing and allowing the community to keep on aging, or (2)

let private developers or the URA proceed with redevelopment. He pointed out that private developers only considered economic benefits. Therefore, it was not good for the community residents, tenants, shops or owners. The URA was a public organization with more statutory power such as compulsory acquisition. Therefore, it must perform its social responsibilities to take care of the needs of the people in the community and even the wider society. He mentioned the example of “flat for flat” and “shop for shop” exchange, which helped to preserve the community network. The URA and residents could explore these aspects in detail.

Moreover, though the URA placed greater emphasis on consultation than in the past, its financial status should have greater transparency. On the other hand, the speaker felt uneasy that the URA, as a public organization, participated in the development of luxury flats on the basis of self-financing. He pointed out that it was not necessary for projects to be developed as luxury flats. The URA should think over how to make use of the huge profit to do something beneficial for the society.

6. Topic: Consolidated Views of the “Urban Renewal Strategy” Review  
Speaker: Mr. Lau Wai Chung

The speaker noted that the URA sent a letter <sup>Note 2</sup> to the Director of Broadcasting, Radio Television Hong Kong to complain about the recent broadcast of an untrue report on the Kwun Tong Redevelopment Project in “Hong Kong Connection”. He doubted the URA’s reason for sending a letter to Radio Television Hong Kong. He mentioned again that during his visit to Kwun Tong District in the past, Mr. Stephen Fisher of the former Planning and Lands Bureau had promised the residents that even a towel or a bed could be evidence of occupation and entitlement for compensation. Ultimately however, this was not the practice.

Moreover, he said that when the URA applied to the Town Planning Board for the approval of the Kwun Tong Redevelopment Project in the past, the former senior management of the URA told the residents that as long as they supported the project design with taller buildings and more spacious area, it would be good for the Kwun Tong residents after approval by the Town Planning Board. The compensation by the URA however, was finally based on the value of the seven-year-old buildings in the same district. He indicated that this was his understanding because the URA sought the approval for the project from the Town Planning Board as soon as possible at that time.

He opined that in recent years, what the URA had done worst was to lack sincerity in seeking the support of the residents in the neighbourhood, because the URA had turned into a “big white elephant”. Its staff had become more bureaucratic. They were reluctant to listen to the voices and opinions of the affected residents. He said that the Government had handed the URA excessive power and responsibility. It would certainly cause arguments in society, and the current modes and methods of operation would not bring about any improvement in urban renewal.

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<sup>Note 2</sup> The URA issued a letter to clarify that the compensation was in no way related to the development density concerning the issues related to the plot ratio and the compensation for the residents mentioned in “Hong Kong Connection”

7. Topic: Obvious Loopholes Existed between the Landlord and Tenant Ordinance and the URA policy.

Speaker: Mr. Ho – Shun Ning Road Redevelopment Concern Group

The speaker, representing Shun Ning Road Redevelopment Concern Group, reprimanded the URA that its announcement on 3<sup>rd</sup> November for optimizing the relief measures for the residential tenants was, in fact, to cover up the problems and to evade responsibility. The speaker pointed out that since the three-month-long freezing survey, which was launched by the URA after the Government gazetted the Shun Ning Road Redevelopment Project on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2009, at least 13 tenants who had their tenancy agreements terminated by the landlords, had even applied to the court to take back the flat units. The URA however, had not made appropriate arrangements for the tenants interviewed in the freezing survey and had been forced to move out. These tenants might lose the rights to obtain compensation and rehousing. The concern group had continually made inquiries to the URA with regard to the related arrangements at all times but no official reply had been received.

The speaker pointed out that loopholes were created among the Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) (Amendment) Ordinance 2004 which took effect in 2004, the Urban Renewal Strategy and the redevelopment procedure. This is because the former empowered the landlord to request the tenant to move out by giving one month's notice or by applying to the court to take back the flat arbitrarily. On the other hand, the Development Bureau would decide whether to substantiate the redevelopment only two months after the announcement of the redevelopment project and the launch of the freezing survey. Consequently, it had led to the loophole which enabled the landlord to force the tenants to move out in order to obtain more compensation. Such a situation was prevailing in the Hai Tan Street, Kweilin Street and Shun Ning Road projects. The URA had however not managed to remedy this policy loophole with any great effort and had even refused to intervene with the excuse that it was a dispute between the landlord and the tenant. As the URA was supported by Government funds and could apply to use the Land Resumption Ordinance, then it should not simply ignore the existing problems since it claimed to be "people-oriented", and had stated its intention to improve neighbourhood living standards. The URA claimed to have more than 180 redevelopment projects on hand. If the future policy was still unable to comply with it, then there would be more victims.

8. Topic: Follow-up Investigation of Sham Shui Po Redevelopment Project

Speaker: Mr. Yeung Kwok Kin – Working Group on Urban Renewal and Conservation of Historical Buildings, Sham Shui Po District Council

The speaker said that the URA implemented 13 redevelopment projects in Sham Shui Po, which involved 25% of the population in that district. Therefore, the Working Group on Urban Renewal and Conservation of Historical Buildings of Sham Shui Po District Council had proceeded with follow-up investigations since 2005. These investigations included the assistance provided by the Government departments for the residents, the residential conditions before and after the relocation, the conditions of the residents' new home and the problems they faced, the effect of the urban redevelopment and the property acquisition on the residents. Its scope involved Projects K20 to K25. The findings were as follows: (1) Most owners considered

that both the Government and the District Council had failed to provide assistance; (2) 50% of the owners having accepted acquisition were not satisfied with the consultation process. They were merely informed and choices were not available; (3) 61% of the owners were not satisfied with the compensation for the acquisition; (4) 48% of the owners having accepted acquisition considered the acquisition offers reasonable; 33% understood that the URA could cite the Land Resumption Ordinance to acquire the building and consequently they had no alternative but to accept acquisition; (5) Many residents in the neighbourhood were afraid of being “evicted” by the URA staff; (6) 53% of the interviewees agreed to the current policy direction of rehousing or compensation but thought that the compensation amount should be increased; 40% thought that there should be more choices of rehousing and compensation, which included the “flat for flat” and “shop for shop” exchange which was agreed by most of the interviewees. The speaker said that it was unfair to provide compensation at the “one-off price” only; (7) 58% of the owners still lived in Sham Shui Po after relocation, and many of their relocated residential flats were smaller in size, which reflected insufficient compensation; (8) Most of their relocated residential flats were in older buildings; (9) Many problems were encountered after relocation; (10) 51% of the interviewees said that they had phone contact with their neighbours before relocation but no such contact after relocation, however 90% of them indicated that they would greet the neighbours; (11) the community network and environment changed after relocation, the residents had to take time to adapt themselves again, which affected their mental and health condition; (12) 70% of the interviewed owners thought that the SST had not offered assistance, while around 90% of the interviewed tenants thought that neither the Housing Society nor the URA staff had assisted them in finding a new home. The speaker said however, that it was understandably difficult for the SST to assist in seeking compensation and rehousing; (13) 88% of the interviewed tenants continued to live in Sham Shui Po; (14) More tenants than owners needed the assistance of the Government or the District Council because most of them were in a vulnerable social group; (15) For quite a number of tenants, their relocated residential flats in newer buildings were smaller than before, however a higher rent was charged; (16) Most tenants faced the problem of employment after relocation; (17) The interviewed tenants had a weaker community network after relocation; (18) 83% of the owners were satisfied with the structural conditions of the building after relocation.

The speaker concluded that the URA was a public organization but profit-oriented. As it had a Government funding of 10 billion dollars and was entitled to apply for land resumption, it should safeguard the living standard of grass-root citizens. He said that the URA should re-structure its board of directors to have more members from the grass-roots or with in-depth understanding about redevelopment.

9. Topic: Did you know?  
Speaker: Mr. David Tam

The speaker pointed out that there were around ten thousand victims of redevelopment in the districts every year, and queried whether the top leadership of the SAR Government knew that these redeveloped districts were “smashed” by the URA policy. He considered the difficulties and policies faced by the residents of the redeveloped district were unfair and all the officials of the Government, the legislative council and the policy bureau knew it. The problem was why they still maintained such a policy and let the URA continue in this way without restriction. He thought that if the

Urban Renewal Strategy was “no good”, the citizens should not accept it and should abolish it.

10. Topic: Industry Relocation in Urban Renewal  
Speaker: Mr. Desmond Sham – Community Cultural Concern

The speaker said that he only got a subsidy of HK\$2,000 from the URA to proceed with this study <sup>Note 3</sup>, and therefore, the information is not sufficiently detailed. The redevelopment projects of the URA had destroyed the original business network of many trades. However, there had been industry relocation in the original district in Hong Kong too, for instance, the “Fabric Street” (that is, Wing On Street in Central) Project carried out by Land Development Corporation (LDC) in the 90s. LDC and the Government made many acquisition attempts but the compensation was insufficient for the owners to buy back shops or flat units in the original district. At that time, some owners raised alternative schemes but were rejected. Finally, LDC resettled the nearby characteristic trades affected by redevelopment via the Western Market Conservation and Revitalization Project (currently known as “Western Market”) however there were problems of insufficient shops which were too small in area, as well as a lack of consultation and improper location. LDC had however guaranteed the shops with a lease-term of 21 years. Unfortunately, after the URA had taken over Western Market from LDC, its management was out-sourced and the shops originally available for the characteristic trades were let to other shops subject to stringent lease terms. He concluded that this case allowed an initial step forward for industry relocation enabling the resettlement of the entire sector to provide protection for the industry, but it required the improvement of package facilities and matching Government policies.

Another example was the construction of Yuen Po Street Bird Garden for the rehousing of the original vendors of the stalls and shops at “Bird Street” (i.e. the former south section of Hong Lok Street). The speaker said that the merits of this project were that both licensed and unlicensed operators were entitled to rehousing at reasonable rent and the hygienic environment was better after relocation. The project, however also had the problem of inconvenient traffic, improper design and the absence of matching industry policies.

He concluded that although the characteristic trades replacement by LDC did not achieve an optimal outcome, its feasibility and necessity should not be denied. It was capable of fulfilling the replacement of the entire sector and providing protection for the trade with minimum adverse effects. It was necessary to improve the industry policy, traffic, design, package facilities and level of participation of the general public. Finally, he raised several questions for the participants to consider, including the issue of whether the URA-driven or the community-driven approach would bring about higher efficiency, the participation modes (the passive investigation and consultation or the community-driven planning and management), and whether the consequences of the redevelopment (such as deteriorating traffic conditions, wall effect buildings and gentrification) should be borne by the peripheral communities or jointly both the beneficiaries and the victims.

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<sup>Note 3</sup> In fact, Community Cultural Concern has actually obtained, through the “Partnership Organisation Programme” of the Urban Renewal Strategy Review, an allowance of nearly HK\$10,000 for the actual expenses of coordinating its programme activities, and HK\$2,000 was for the single-item expenses regarding the “write-up of the study report”.

11. Topic: Urban Renewal Strategy: Differentiation between Big and Small?  
Speaker: Dr. Wong Kam Cheong – Hong Kong Institute of Real Estate Administrators

According to the speaker, it had been said recently that even professionals and the well educated were incapable of buying properties. As his institute members were also professionals, he was therefore sympathetic with the participants at the forum. The Institute was going to convene its general meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November to discuss the Urban Renewal Strategy Review and submit the relevant proposal report to the Government.

He said that on the whole, the Institute was of the view that in order to have effective redevelopment, the planning should be considered on the basis of the entire district instead of proceeding with isolated individual projects. The Institute supported rehabilitation and conservation in the first instance but objected the “bulldozer approach” which should be the final option. He cited the advantages of a large-scale project: (1) It was easy to obtain a balance of the 4Rs (that is, Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, pReservation and Revitalisation); (2) Greater value added and environmental improvement to the community after redevelopment; (3) Faster and more prominent effects; (4) Better planning for the community facilities, traffic, overall design and ventilation; (5) Better design layout of individual buildings or flat units; (6) Comparatively lower unit construction and consultancy fees; (7) Higher building efficiency and usage rates; (8) Less interference by a large-scale project on its neighbourhood and peripheral communities compared to that of several individual and small-scale redevelopment projects.

The conditions for implementing large-scale projects properly were as follows: (1) The macro urban redevelopment or renewal strategy was essential; (2) The interests of various stakeholders were balanced; (3) The residents in the neighbourhood were entitled to participate in making decisions through open and transparent discussion and consultation; (4) When private developers participate in the redevelopment, the process must be transparent with specified participation rules, so as to avoid conspiracy between officials and the business.

The speaker concluded that large-scale projects were more suitable for the urban renewal mode, however, as it involved different stakeholders, it would affect the entire society. Consequently, it was essential to conduct extensive consultation and public participation. After rapid development for half a century, Hong Kong had quite a number of very dilapidated buildings. Therefore, the Institute was of the view that it was essential to have redevelopment on the premise of not destroying the harmony of the community and the society. As for the redevelopment mode, the means of its execution and the executing party were subject to public debate.

## **Public Discussion**

The public discussion was hosted by Prof. Bernard, W. F. Lim. The principal views were as follows:



## **1 4Rs Strategy of Urban Renewal**

A participant hoped to preserve monuments, antiquities and community history, whilst expediting the redevelopment of the old district. What she said reflected that the dilapidated buildings were the “time bombs”. If they were not demolished as soon as possible, they would be a threat to the safety of the general public. She proposed that the Government classified these dilapidated buildings as the rehabilitation or redevelopment projects after thorough examination and verification.

A participant accused the URA that it had never given a clear account of the effects of its past work and the amount of money involved. He thought that the URA should not merely study the cases of other districts or cities but should review the actual local situation and the past work instead.

Some participants criticized that the conservation effects of the URA were not good. For instance, in the cases of the Woo Cheong Pawn Shop, Wan Chai Market, “Old Shops” Street and Lee Tung Street, they simply ousted the old shops and old neighbours. Following the conservation works, only the empty shell was left without contents. The URA had long been unable to provide the assessment report on the effects of the H18 project on the heritage. It only made people doubt whether it had conducted any assessment. Some historical buildings such as the Bridge Street Market, which were fortunate enough to have more complete preservation, were retained merely after the general public had sought to motivate the Government to do so. There were worries that the URA might not be able to handle the Central Market Project, and only its shell would be retained.

## **2 Role of Stakeholders**

### **2.1 The Role of the URA**

A participant pointed out that San Francisco had laws to protect the citizens’ interests in the USA. It was for the people in the community to decide in the first instance whether any problems existed in that community and which required community renewal. They also had the statutory power to confirm whether a case was classified under dilapidation and improper land use. Only upon completion of the process would the local redevelopment authority launch the community renewal project. He said that Hong Kong citizens or the local people in the district had no right to participate in urban renewal, all of which was decided by the Government. He proposed that local people in the community should identify dilapidated buildings or examples of inefficient land use in the first instance, with in the last resort the case being referred to the URA to proceed with redevelopment or renewal.

## **3 Compensation and Rehousing Policy**

A participant criticized the URA’s current approach in calculating the area of a flat to be acquired and standard for compensation. He pointed out that the calculation of the compensation amount should be based on the price per square foot and the construction area at the time when the owner bought the flat. He queried why the URA bought at a low price and sold at a high price. He hoped that his query could be forwarded to the Secretary for Development.

Quite a number of participants stressed that the “flat for flat” and “shop for shop” exchange option should be offered to the affected people for selection. For instance, the Government department had to resettle the affected people in the construction of public facilities as well. They thought that if the URA wanted to take back the residential flats or commercial shops for redevelopment, it was reasonable that the affected people should be compensated with another flat unit or shop but not simply compensated with money to settle the case. The residents worked hard for decades in order to own the property which was demolished in the end, but they were compelled to look for a place by themselves to live in after all. A commercial shop supported the livelihood of the owner’s family for several generations but the URA took advantage of the “imperial” power conferred by the Government to acquire property at a low price and sell at a high price. Moreover, some participants pointed out that the “flat for flat” and “shop for shop” exchange arrangement existed in other places. It was really upsetting that there was no such arrangement in Hong Kong.

Some participants indicated that the current compensation and support for the tenants were insufficient. In particular, there was little compensation for tenants of “wood partitioned rooms” who were also not necessarily eligible for public housing. Moreover, the Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) (Amendment) Ordinance 2004 empowered the landlord to request the tenant to move out simply by giving one month’s notice, without giving any reasons and even without compensation. It has created the loophole for the landlord to oust the tenant in order to obtain more compensation.

A participant described the reasonable and fair means of land resumption by the Mainland government. When the government took back the property, the owner would be compensated with land and provided with the allowance for constructing a new house, a rental subsidy equivalent to 15 months rental and the general decoration expenses. Moreover, the location of the compensated land was not bad. The owner must however construct the building within a specified term. Otherwise, the government would resume the vacant land.

A resident in Kwun Tong criticized that the URA deducted the compensation of owners of property which was non-owner occupied property or which was not the owner’s only owned home. He thought that such a measure discriminated against the “investor” owner. He pointed out that the URA was also doing business by demolishing the property of the owner in the redevelopment district to construct luxury flats. Consequently, the URA was equivalent to such an “investor” owner.

Some owners in Hai Tan Street were not satisfied with the URA’s approach when conducting the freezing survey. An owner lost his eligibility for compensation because he was unable to present effective evidence which identified his address. Another owner also pointed out that because he himself was not present when the freezing survey was conducted, the URA merely calculated his compensation amount by treating his property as a vacant flat unit. He said that the owner should be entitled to set the selling price for his own property.

A participant criticized that the URA took over the projects of the LDC but did not adopt its compensation standards. The current compensation option was far less than that of the LDC.

#### **4 Public Engagement**

Some participants proposed to let the owners of limited means or elderly owners participate in the redevelopment by way of a guaranteed share-holding system. As for those owners who did not want to take risks, they could sell the shares to retain the original value of the property.

A participant thought that in the process of this review and consultation, the URA neither accepted the public opinions nor responded to the citizens' demands. Consequently, it was a false consultation. He was of the opinion that the authority concerned should prepare a timetable, announce how to take action, how to respond to the citizens' opinions, and allow the citizens to have the right of acceptance or refusal.

Some participants thought that the URA was not acquiring dilapidated buildings but resuming land. As the owners were requested to sell their land rights, they should be allowed to participate as owners in the projects. The acquisition price should be calculated accordingly to include the land value or the land rights and not simply be based on the market value of the flat.

#### **5 Social Impact Assessment and the Social Service Team (SST)**

A participant queried the intention of setting up the SST. He thought that if the URA had not deprived the owners or the residents in the neighbourhood of their interests, it was basically not necessary to set up the SST. Moreover, he thought that there was a conflict of interests for the URA to pay for employing the SST, which could not be independent. It was difficult to believe that they would provide services for the residents faithfully.

A participant did not believe that the URA had not intervened in the work of the SST. He proposed that this review should explore the operation and independence of the SST and the possibility of setting up a community planning service centre. Moreover, he opposed the comment by the URA's senior official on "Hong Kong Connection" that policy advocacy was not within the remit of the social workers' work. He pointed out that the Social Workers Registration Ordinance specified that the social workers should advocate to formulate or amend the policy.

#### **6 Financial Arrangement**

Some participants queried the financial status of the URA because most of the redevelopment projects redeveloped the dilapidated buildings comprising a few floors into tall buildings of tens of floors. The URA, however never disclosed its financial status to the public and claimed to have suffered a loss and required the Government to contribute capital to help balance the books. It was indeed difficult to understand such a situation.

#### **7 Miscellaneous**

- The URA should prepare a timetable for redeveloping badly dilapidated and dangerous buildings.

- Some participants requested the representatives of the URA to respond immediately<sup>Note4</sup> to the questions and opinions raised by the participants.
- Some participants requested to have the Chinese version of relevant reports and documents available for inspection by the citizens and residents in local District Offices upon completion of this review.
- Some pointed out that the URA's recent announcement to launch the "scheme of optimizing the relief measures for the residential tenants" was, intended, to cover up the problems and evade responsibilities. The URA should actually be people-centred and provide a secured and happy home for the citizens.
- Some participants said that the acquisition for redevelopment was equivalent to the practice of "buying people's life" because some residents in the neighbourhood involved in the redevelopment project incurred mental illness in the process.
- Some participants indicated that the compensation provided by the URA was far too little, but its staff enjoyed high remuneration. Therefore, they did not believe that it suffered losses.
- When the URA proposed acquisition to the residents in Kwun Tong, it has immediately caused a shortage in the supply of property and an increase of property prices in the vicinity.
- During redevelopment, flats left vacant following property acquisition had caused various problems such as social disorder, and compensation amounts were not enough to allow the affected residents to buy the flat units of the seven year old buildings in the same district. It has caused worries among residents about housing or rehousing problems.

A-World Consulting  
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<sup>Note 4</sup> Ms. Tam Siu Ying representing the URA responded that the URA had long listened carefully to the opinions and proposals raised in all public participation activities. At present, the compensation policy was based on the approval adopted by the Legislative Council in 2001. However, in the current policy, there was no "flat for flat" and "shop for shop" exchange arrangement. Any amendment of the policies involved had to be passed with resolutions adopted after discussion by the Government and the Legislative Council. When Ms. Tam Siu Ying was speaking in response, a lady came up to interrupt her and indicated her disagreement to her response. The forum procedure was also interrupted. The forum continued until it was in order again and most of the participants agreed to continue.