

URS Review
Final Report – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Urban Renewal Strategy (“URS”) was promulgated subsequent to public consultation and has since been the guiding principle for the Urban Renewal Authority (“URA”). To meet with societal progress and changing public aspirations on urban renewal, particularly in recent years, the Secretary for Development (“SDEV”) announced on 17 July 2008 a review seeking, among other things, to update and align the URS with the latest developments and expectations.

The review, comprising an overseas comparable city policy study and a 3-stage public engagement process, namely Envisioning Stage (ES), Public Engagement Stage (PES) and Consensus Building Stage (CBS), was scheduled over two years. A-World Consulting Limited (“AWC”) was appointed to provide consultancy services for the public engagement while the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of the University of Hong Kong (“HKU”) was assigned to conduct the policy study. The Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of Chinese University of Hong Kong (“HKIAPS”, “CUHK”) was also engaged to collect, collate and analyse public views throughout the consultation period.

2 REVIEW OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORT

A comprehensive and extensive range of public engagement activities has been conducted at three stages, aiming to involve as many members of the public as possible. Whether proactively or in response to public requests, ample opportunities were given to the people of Hong Kong to access the relevant information and engagement activity details so as to facilitate public participation.

Information was shared with the public using the internet, and the e-blog and e-forum was introduced in October 2008 to give the public an alternative and convenient method to submit and share their views. Three pamphlets/booklets were published at different stages to enable the public to partake in the informed debate. 8 Road shows (roving exhibitions), 5 public forums, 8 topical discussion sessions, a workshop and a mass meeting were held for the public to voice their opinions. 20 focus group discussions, 7 outreach meetings and 2 consultation forums were also conducted with professional bodies to seek their views. An innovative idea – the Partnering Organization Programmes (“POP”) involving 20 organizations and schools was designed to broaden the reach and relevance of engagement to a wider target audience. The first-of-its-kind urban renewal ‘Idea Shop’ located in Wan Chai also acted as information and resources centre as well as an events venue.

The mass media were also deployed to inform and share information as widely as possible with the public. Newspapers, radio and TV were used in different forms throughout the review process.

The HKIAPS of CUHK conducted structured face-to-face interviews at the eight road show exhibitions and a telephone survey during the PES and CBS respectively to

proactively capture the general wider public's views on urban renewal issues.

The public engagement process was carefully carried out in three distinctive stages and allowed a progressive development of views, from general to specific, and provided a clear guiding focus in each stage for effective and efficient discussion. Starting with a root and branch review with no pre-determined agenda, at the ES, a range of questions were suggested for discussion and the public were invited to help set the agenda for the URS review process. The feedback from the ES was summarised into seven key issues for discussion throughout the PES. They were:

- (1) Vision and Scope of Urban Regeneration;
- (2) 4Rs Strategy in Urban Regeneration i.e. Rehabilitation, Redevelopment, pReservation and Revitalisation;
- (3) Roles of Stakeholders;
- (4) Compensation and Re-housing;
- (5) Public Engagement;
- (6) Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Social Service Team (SST); and
- (7) Financial Arrangement.

The views collected during this stage were discussed and reviewed, and in response ten preliminary proposals formed the framework for discussion in the CBS. For public discussion, the ten preliminary proposals were grouped in three major topics. Namely:

- (1) District-based, Bottom-up Approach (including District Urban Renewal Forum (DURF) and SIA/SST),
- (2) Compensation and Rehousing, and
- (3) Scope of Regeneration, Roles of the URA and the URA's self-financing model.

The Steering Committee on the URS Review (SC) actively guided and was involved in the entire review process and also commissioned a series of research studies to learn from best and relevant practice.

3 OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC VIEWS

A total of 2,488 valid written comments, views or suggestions were collected in the three stages of the review (excluding duplicate submissions and irrelevant documents). Over the whole public engagement process, there was a consistent call for more participation by the public, the offer of more choices for the public and a more balanced role for the URA. Based on the three major topics for public discussion, these views are summarised below.

District-based, Bottom-up Approach (DURF, SIA/SST)

- *Urban Renewal Planning and Public Engagement*
During the review process, there was a consistent demand for a district-based, people-centered, bottom-up approach in planning for urban renewal. In response to this, a District Urban Renewal Forum (DURF) was proposed to be set up in each of the old districts to strengthen urban renewal planning work.
- *Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Social Service Teams (SST)*

In line with the people-centered, bottom-up and district-based approach for urban renewal, it was suggested that the Government should consider appointing independent parties to conduct the SIA, as well as tracking studies to understand the impact of urban renewal on affected residents. It was also suggested to detach the SSTs from the URA and to set up independent trusts to finance them. A study on “The Future Directions of Providing Social Work Services under the New Urban Renewal Strategy” was commissioned by the SC in April 2010 to review the current role of the SSTs engaged by the URA to gain insights for the future directions of the SSTs.

Compensation and Rehousing

Some members of the public felt that it was difficult for owners to buy back a seven-year-old flat in the same district with similar size, location and transport networks based on the current compensation policy. Most people demanded an additional option of “flat for flat” for owner-occupiers, so that they could continue to live in the same district and maintain the social network they have established. In response, a “flat for flat” option was proposed to affected owner-occupiers and an explanatory note on the “flat for flat” model was published on the URS website. However, there was no consensus on how the “flat for flat” option could be implemented.

Scope of Regeneration, Roles of the URA and the URA’s self-financing model

➤ *Scope of Regeneration*

Some members of the public felt that in order to avoid gentrification of the redeveloped areas, the URA should preserve unique local retail networks to facilitate fair competition between bigger enterprises and smaller shops, and to provide “affordable housing” instead of luxurious flats in future redevelopment projects. The public also believed that the current URS stressed too much on redevelopment and that the weightings among the 4Rs should be reviewed.

➤ *Role of URA*

It was suggested that the URA should also act as a ‘facilitator’ to assist owners in undertaking redevelopment by themselves, or by cooperating with the developers, so as to accelerate the pace of redevelopment. However, questions were raised regarding possible unfair competition between the URA and the private sector if and when the URA acts as a facilitator.

➤ *URA’s self-financing model*

Besides the self-financing principle, it was suggested that the URA should recognise and take into consideration the economic benefits that urban regeneration brings to the neighboring areas. Some had requested that the URA should also make public its financial situation and the financial information concerning individual renewal projects.

4 CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

Despite the fact that many comments were long-held views related to compensation from concerned parties and those with vested interests of one kind or another, broad consensus was however observed over general directional issues such as the establishment of a district-based, bottom-up engagement process for future urban renewal activities, the provision of flat-for-flat as an option to cash compensation for affected residents and the proposed broader, more balanced role of the URA, all of which addressed the public's desire for more participation by the public, more choices for the public and a more balanced role of the URA in the revised URS.

The Steering Committee, which actively guided the whole process, had considered the views collated during the CBS and proposed some refinements to the ten preliminary proposals for revising the URS by end of 2010.

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