

Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review Consensus Building Stage Radio Response Programme (1) - Gist of Discussion

Date: 6th February, 2010 (Saturday)
Time: 10a.m. – 11a.m.
Channel: Commercial Radio 1
Host: Mr. Michael Fung
Guests: Mrs. Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet Ngor, Secretary for Development, Mr. Vincent Ng, member of the Steering Committee on Review of the Urban Renewal Strategy (the ‘Steering Committee’)
Topic: 4Rs Strategy in Urban Regeneration and the Future Role of the Urban Renewal Authority

1. The radio show host said there were concerns in the press that this programme was sponsored by the Government and thus might only reflect the Government’s point of view. The Secretary Mrs. Carrie Lam said there was no need to worry as the radio offered an open platform for everybody to have his say. She said the Government often used sponsored-programmes for promotion and this time the Government chose Commercial Radio 1 to listen to people’s views.
2. Mr. Vincent Ng explained the formation and operation of the Steering Committee on the URS Review. He said the committee members would listen to people’s opinion on urban renewal, and would give advice to the Government from a professional point of view.
3. Mrs. Lam stated that many people opined that the 4Rs¹ of URA should be district-based and match up with different features of the districts. They said that since some old buildings had fallen into disrepair and renovation was not viable, then the only solution was redevelopment.
4. A caller, who is a property owner in the K7 project, said the measurement of the unit’s usable area in this project was not transparent. While the measurement was done by one surveyor who might make mistakes, the valuation was done by 11 surveyors. He did not understand why there was such a big difference in URA’s policy. Mrs. Lam explained that K7 was URA’s largest redevelopment project; therefore, 11 surveyors were hired for valuation in order to improve the degree of accuracy. It was technically

¹ 4Rs refer to redevelopment, rehabilitation, preservation, and revitalisation.

impractical however and too time-consuming to hire so many surveyors in every case.

5. The caller also said he still had no choice but to move out in the end no matter whether he wanted to sell his property or not. Mrs. Lam said this reflected the difficulties in carrying out rehabilitation or redevelopment in Hong Kong as property titles were dispersed and thus it was difficult to obtain consents from all property owners. Mr. Ng said redevelopment projects in other cities (e.g. Tokyo) might spend more than 10 years to negotiate before they could obtain consents from all property owners. He agreed that as the current 200 redevelopment projects were treated as confidential information, when the project was announced, the residents did not have sufficient discussion time. The residents thus had no option or bargaining power. Many people opined that residents ought to be given choices.
6. Another caller from Central and Western District said the building collapse incident in Ma Tau Wai Road reflected that there were problems in property inspection. He added that URA has spent much of its resources to acquire properties in Soho District but those tenement buildings have been renovated. URA should put the resources to other districts which have genuine needs for redevelopment. Mrs. Lam said that urban renewal was an issue of the society as a whole and its goal was to improve the living environment of residents in old areas. The Government could not yield to the wills of individual property owners and implement certain policies. Mrs. Lam said that there were so many buildings in Hong Kong and people should not simply rely on Government departments' effort in property inspection. She said the property owners also had obligations to maintain their properties and tenants should only rent properties that were safe.
7. Mr. Ng said redevelopment should consider the conditions of different districts and the needs of the residents. We should avoid bulldozing and try to keep those streets that have special features. Mrs. Lam said she agreed that, ideally, urban renewal should be an organic transformation, however many property owners were not capable of renovating their properties or providing timely maintenance to their buildings, thus Government's intervention was needed.
8. A caller suggested that developers should first acquire old buildings, whilst acquisition of those already renovated buildings should be deferred. Mrs. Lam said the objective criteria for redevelopment or rehabilitation lied in the building condition. During this Review, the Bureau has asked the URA to conduct a study on building conditions. In addition, developers could apply to the Lands Tribunal under "The Land (Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) Ordinance" for a compulsory sale, however, the subject

building should be a dilapidated building.

9. A caller said he hoped that the compulsory sale threshold could be lowered to 80% as soon as possible. Mrs. Lam said the lowering of the threshold could speed up redevelopment of buildings over 50 years old. The majority of the property owners could apply for a compulsory sale themselves or they could sell their properties to a developer which would help improve the people's living standard.
10. Another caller said the residents of his building intended to carry out maintenance works but they faced a lot of difficulties. They lacked relevant information and the required majority of consent has not been obtained. Mrs. Lam said the Hong Kong Housing Society, the URA, and the Buildings Department have provided supporting measures to help repair and maintain old buildings and assistance would be given to those in need, such as elderly owners. She said that the authority would conduct a study in the future so as to improve and coordinate different schemes of assistance.
11. A caller said property owners had an obligation to repair their buildings and they should not simply wait for redevelopment so as to get compensations and wasting public money. He urged the Government to improve law enforcement and civic education. Mrs. Lam said the Government's policies included legislation, law enforcement, civic education and providing aids for those in needs., She said however that the disrepair old buildings had presented unsolvable problems as there were always people using loopholes to evade responsibility or breaching the law due to ignorance. Mr. Ng said it was not possible to rely on the Government alone to solve the problem, however the Government should provide aids and assistance to those in need.
12. A listener left a message on the Commercial Radio's website bulletin board. He suggested setting up four different organisations, namely Redevelopment Authority, Rehabilitation Authority, Preservation Authority, and Revitalisation Authority to strike a balance between the 4R. He said the URA has not set out the priority of the 4Rs and the goal of redevelopment was simply for property development. Mrs. Lam said it was necessary to review the current operation. For example, current redevelopment projects were kept confidential and thus it was not a bottom-up approach. Could a project be initiated by property owners who have agreed among themselves to redevelop the building and then invite the URA to participate? She hoped that through this review some common views could be obtained.
13. Mrs. Lam said one could only apply for a compulsory sale under "the Land (Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) Ordinance" when 80% or more titles had been

obtained. The Lands Tribunal would review and approve the upset price of the public auction based on the redevelopment value. The money obtained would be distributed among the owners according to their title share. Mrs. Lam however said this Ordinance would not solve all the problems posed by urban decay.

14. Mrs. Lam said the target buildings of the “Operation Building Bright” also included old buildings without owners’ corporations, and those who had difficulties to co-ordinate property owners to carry out repair works would also be helped.

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