

## **Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review**

### **Gist of Envisioning Stage Focus Group Discussion**

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> November 2008 (Tuesday)  
Time: 6:30p.m. – 8:30p.m.  
Venue: Activity Room 2, Hong Kong Central Library, 66 Causeway Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong  
Group: General Public / Advocacy Groups  
No. of participants: 31 (14 observers)

Representative of A-World Consulting Ltd. briefly introduced the background of URS Review. Ms. S.C. Mak, Sandra, the facilitator, invited participants to express their opinions. After discussion, the opinions were grouped into three parts – ‘Policy’, ‘Principle’ and ‘Execution’. The key points were as follows:

#### **1 Policy**

##### **1.1 Tenants forced to move out without compensation**

1.1.1 The period from freezing survey until completion of property acquisition was too long. Some tenants were forced to move out by their landlords without compensation during the period. It was therefore necessary to confirm the identity of the registered tenants immediately after the announcement of redevelopment projects.

1.1.2 Early arrangements should be made to rehouse the affected tenants unconditionally before the commencement of redevelopment works.

1.1.3 The compensation for tenants should be formulated by an independent intermediary organization. The amount of compensation should also be increased.

##### **1.2 ‘Compensation after land resumption’ not appropriate**

1.2.1 The current policy of ‘compensation after land resumption’ was inappropriate and contradicted the ‘people-centred’ approach.

1.2.2 The compensation for the affected residents should be fair, just and open.

##### **1.3 Providing “Flat-for-Flat”, “Shop-for-shop” arrangements and ‘ownership participation’ as choices for future urban renewal**

1.3.1 “Flat-for-Flat”, “Shop-for-shop” and other rehousing arrangements related to ownership participation should be provided as choices in implementing urban renewal in future, thus allowing shops to continue their operation in the same district.

- 1.4 Urban Renewal Authority (URA) Review Committee
  - 1.4.1 Representatives of affected residents should be invited to the URA Review Committee.
- 1.5 Abandoning the policy of 'non-sole residence'
  - 1.5.1 'Non-sole residence', which was not part of the "Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance" but a policy implemented solely by URA, should be abandoned.
- 1.6 Review on past urban renewal projects, making reference to past experience of European and American countries
  - 1.6.1 URA should review the urban renewal projects they had implemented. Meanwhile, they should make reference to the past urban renewal experience of European and American countries apart from those of the Asian countries.
- 1.7 Social service teams should be recruited and managed by intermediary organizations
  - 1.7.1 It was improper for URA to recruit social service teams. The recruitment and management of the teams should rest with intermediary organizations (e.g. Hong Kong Council of Social Service).
- 1.8 Town Planning Board (TPB) should be completely democratic; the planning process of urban renewal should be transparent and open
  - 1.8.1 It was improper for the Government to appoint members of the TPB. Instead, they should be elected in a democratic way. Meanwhile, the planning process of urban renewal should be transparent and open.
- 1.9 Urban renewal should not aim at profit maximization
  - 1.9.1 At present, some redevelopment projects included public space in the scope of development with a view to maximising profit. Urban renewal should not aim at profit maximization.
- 1.10 Review on the "Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance" (Evil law)
  - 1.10.1 The "Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance" should be reviewed through the URS Review.
- 1.11 Allowing residents to participate in urban renewal
  - 1.11.1 Affected residents should have the right to participate in urban

renewal and related planning work.

1.12 The “Lands Resumption Ordinance” should not be applied

1.12.1 The “Lands Resumption Ordinance” should not be applied in the resumption of private land for urban renewal.

2 **Principle**

2.1 Objection to scrambling private property ownership

2.1.1 Scrambling private property ownership during the urban renewal process was strongly opposed to.

2.1.2 The Government and the URA should respect private land ownership. Redevelopment should not be implemented reluctantly should land owners refuse to sell their property.

2.2 Maintaining the harmonious community network, local characteristics and local economy

2.2.1 At present, redevelopment projects were mainly implemented by large property developers, causing damages to the community network, local characteristics and local economy.

2.3 Objection to the ‘complete demolishing’ and ‘homogeneous’ modes of development

2.3.1 The ‘complete demolishing’ and ‘homogeneous’ modes of development currently adopted by the Government and property developers were opposed to, as it hindered on-street shops from continuing their business.

2.4 Conservation through reinforcement and rehabilitation

2.4.1 Conservation should be carried out through reinforcement and rehabilitation; and the ‘software’ should also be maintained in addition to the preservation of the hardware.

2.5 Dissolving URA

2.5.1 URA should be dissolved. Redevelopment should be carried out by property owners with government assistance, and it should be regulated by the market or through property acquisition by developers. The bargaining right for the sale of private property ownership should be returned to land owners.

3 **Execution**

3.1 URA disregarded regulations and lacked supervision

- 3.1.1 The power of URA was too great. It disregarded regulations, lacked supervision and was unable to perform the expected functions. The Development Bureau and the Board of URA should enhance supervision and increase transparency of URA's operation.
- 3.1.2 URA Board should comprise resident representatives to supervise the daily operation of URA.
- 3.1.3 URA's finance currently lacked supervision. Its financial situation and financial arrangements should be completely open to and accountable to the public.
- 3.2 The valuation mechanism should be mutually agreed by URA and property owners
  - 3.2.1 It was unfair for URA to engage surveyors from their side only to assess property value, as land owners would be unable to bargain under the circumstances.
- 3.3 Sincere and comprehensive consultation
  - 3.3.1 URA should consult the affected residents and property owners sincerely and comprehensively in order to understand their situation.
- 3.4 Insufficient supply of residential housing in the same district
  - 3.4.1 Despite the rehousing arrangement in the same district, it was in fact impossible to arrange rehousing for all affected residents due to the insufficient supply of residential housing in the same district. As a result, some residents were forced to move out from their original district.
- 3.5 Social service teams should have sufficient resources
  - 3.5.1 Currently, the social service teams were very limited in terms of both team members and resources. It took long time to arrange a successful appointment, thus delaying the redevelopment schedule.
- 3.6 Social impact assessments should be performed by independent intermediary organizations
  - 3.6.1 Social impact assessments should be performed truly and accurately by independent intermediary organizations, taking the affected residents as the basis of consideration.
- 3.7 Strengthening communication, facilitating redevelopment
  - 3.7.1 URA should strengthen communication with affected residents and organize regular meetings, thus facilitating the redevelopment

process.

3.8 Different percentage of usable floor area affected the amount of compensation

- 3.8.1 As the percentage of usable floor area in old buildings were normally be higher than that of the new ones, it was inappropriate to adopt '7-year building age' as the basis of compensation, which affected the amount of compensation.