

Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review Gist of Envisioning Stage Focus Group Discussion

Date: 25th November 2008 (Tuesday)
Time: 6:30p.m. – 8:30p.m.
Venue: Activity Room 1, Hong Kong Central Library, 66 Causeway Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
Group: URA District Advisory Committees
No. of participants: 11 (4 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 Compensation based on ‘7-year building age’ and rehousing within the same district

1.1.1 The key issues of URS Review should include compensation based on ‘7-year building age’ and rehousing within the same district for the affected residents.

1.1.2 Taking Sham Shui Po as an example, it was considerably important for residents to be rehoused within the same district.

1.2 Providing ‘Flat-for-Flat’ and ‘Shop-for-Shop’ exchange arrangements as choices

1.2.1 Different compensation schemes should be provided for affected residents and shop operators so as to enable them to make the most suitable choice.

1.2.2 ‘Flat-for-Flat’ and ‘Shop-for-Shop’ exchange arrangements should be provided so that the affected residents and shop operators could have more choices.

1.3 Concern on private street renewal

1.3.1 Many private streets in Kowloon City District were in poor condition and poor hygiene. Renewal should be carried out as soon as possible.

1.4 4Rs

1.4.1 After years' of experience, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) should have new ideas on which R should be adopted during the process of urban renewal.

1.4.2 Mechanisms and objective standards should be in place and other related factors should be considered so that the decision on which "R" should be adopted for urban renewal could be made in a transparent way.

2 **Principle**

2.1 Urban renewal should be in line with urban planning vision

2.1.1 Urban renewal should not be independent from the overall vision of urban planning. It should be considered from a macroscopic perspective. Moreover, it should not be URA's sole responsibility but should be coordinated by other organizations, such as Town Planning Board and Development Bureau.

2.1.2 There should be long-term policy on urban renewal, which should coordinate with the overall town planning.

2.2 Aim of urban renewal

2.2.1 The Government's major aim in urban renewal should be "improving the environment", which is different from that of private developers. A division of work between the Government and private developers on the participation of urban renewal should therefore be necessary. Less profitable projects could be put forward by URA.

2.3 Improving the living and business environment of affected residents and shop operators

2.3.1 URA should conserve and maintain old buildings to improve the environment.

2.4 Taking into account opinions of experts

2.4.1 When drafting urban redevelopment projects, the Government should take into account opinions of experts before putting forward the projects for public discussion.

3 Execution

3.1 Adopting the 'People-centred' Approach

- 3.1.1 The current “top-down” development mode should be reversed to “bottom-up” so as to satisfy residents’ needs.
- 3.1.2 The public should be invited more frequently to participate in the setting of future directions of urban renewal. There should be more public consultations and community discussions should be encouraged. Urban renewal should not proceed highhandedly.
- 3.1.3 As different people might have different needs and wishes, it would be difficult to achieve the ‘people-centred’ approach. Yet URA might try to increase transparency in related policies.
- 3.1.4 URA had improved its work when compared with the past. The existing ‘people-centred’ approach should be kept.

3.2 Conducting post-redevelopment surveys

- 3.2.1 A post-redevelopment survey should be conducted to understand whether the affected residents could benefit from urban redevelopment, thereby assessing whether urban renewal could bring about benefits and improvements to the residents. Sham Shui Po District Council had carried out similar surveys in the past.

3.3 More consultation with the District Councils

- 3.3.1 The District Councils should be consulted more to obtain a thorough understanding of the local residents’ opinions.

3.4 Speeding up the progress of urban renewal

- 3.4.1 Taking Kwun Tong as an example, the progress of urban renewal should be speeded up. At present, some redevelopment projects progressed slowly due to the town planning-related regulations.

3.5 Rehousing of tenants

- 3.5.1 Special circumstances of individual tenants should be considered when carrying out urban renewal; and they should be assisted in rehousing.

3.6 Reviewing the definition and criteria of ‘owner’s residence’

- 3.6.1 The current definition of ‘owner’s residence’ was different from that in the past. Its definition and criteria should be reviewed.

3.7 Reviewing the 'Lands Resumption Ordinance'

3.7.1 The Lands Resumption Ordinance should be reviewed in the course of URS Review with a view to balancing the interests of various sectors.