

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

Date: 18th December 2008 (Thursday)
Time: 2:30p.m. – 3:40p.m.
Venue: Conference Room, 12/F, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central,
Hong Kong
Group: Land and Building Advisory Committee
No. of participants: 22

After briefly introducing the background of the URS Review, Mr. Laurie Lo, the representative of Development Bureau, and Mrs. Sandra S.C. Mak, the representative of A-World Consulting Ltd., invited participants to express their opinions. The key points were as follows:

1 Suggestions related to urban renewal

- 1.1 Many local industries in old districts (e.g. hardware stores and car repair shops in Tai Kok Tsui) could not continue their business after moving out from their original district. Their survival should be considered when carrying out urban renewal.
- 1.2 Most renewal projects of Urban Renewal Authority (URA) were quite large in scale. Since it resulted in the disappearance of certain streets, the original shops were unable to restart their business after renewal.
- 1.3 A clear and transparent set of criteria should be established to explain issues such as the priorities of urban renewal, heritage conservation and public space. Projects that would bring positive impacts to the district should be given priority for implementation.
- 1.4 A master land use plan of Hong Kong should be prepared to coordinate with the planning of urban renewal.
- 1.5 Sustainable development must be emphasized in urban renewal. In economic terms, it should not maximize development plot ratio; in social terms, it should be “people-centred”, emphasizing the renewal outcome, the change in social values and preservation of the community network; in cultural terms, local culture should be promoted through urban renewal; and in environmental terms, impacts of renewal on the natural environment should be attended to.
- 1.6 Urban renewal could be carried out in different modes. The problem was how many resources the community should invest. The public should discuss more on the issue.
- 1.7 Urban renewal should be carried out based on the vision of Hong Kong’s future development, e.g. the forecasted population, in order to determine

whether more residential flats should be constructed or an increase in the average individual living area was required. In addition, renewal of industrial areas should be of special concern.

1.8 The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) approach should be considered in urban renewal to develop old areas which lacked commercial value. In so doing, the current problem of over-emphasis on commercial value in urban renewal could be improved.

1.9 It should be reminded that urban renewal should aim at improving the living of residents.

1.10 URA should take the initiative to carry out maintenance for the buildings in need and assist in cases of 'missing owners'.

2 Compensation and mode of renewal

2.1 According to past experience, it was not quite practicable to adopt the '7-year-old flat' as the long-term approach for compensation due to the constant upgrading of the new buildings. In future, many renewal projects would be unable to proceed given the adoption of the '7-year-old flat' to calculate the amount of compensation for acquisition.

2.2 The current mode of property acquisition adopted by URA should be reviewed to see if it was the best and the most practicable.

2.3 How renewal projects could be carried out in different phases could be explored from an architectural point of view so that residents and shop operators would be allowed to move to unaffected places temporarily to continue their living and business during the renewal process.

2.4 The same standard of compensation should be adopted when offering compensation to shops and flats.

2.5 7-year old buildings were still quite expensive. Thus, preserving and maintaining old buildings might be a more appropriate approach.

3 Comprehensive consultation

3.1 Public consultation conducted by the Government and URA would sometimes be monopolized by certain groups or individuals. Hence, it was necessary to listen to the opinion of the whole community as far as possible, instead of selective collection of opinions.

4 Heritage conservation

4.1 Many areas in Hong Kong became huge malls of the same mode as a result of urban renewal. The original featured shops could not survive, rendering Hong Kong a dull and monotonous city.

4.2 A definition for 'monuments' should be set, which should be understandable and acceptable by the public.

5 URS Review

5.1 Landscape strategy had long-term rather than decorative value, and should therefore be part of the URS.

5.2 As the community's expectations were constantly changing, the URS should be reviewed regularly to respond to the changing community aspirations.

5.3 URA staff should have unique insights into the work of urban renewal because of the nature of their work. They should be regarded as one of the main stakeholders in the URS Review.