

Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review

Gist of Envisioning Stage Focus Group Discussion

Date: 18th December 2008 (Thursday)
Time: 4:30p.m. – 5:35p.m.
Venue: Conference Room, 30/F, World Trade Centre, 280 Gloucester Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
Group: Hong Kong Housing Society
No. of participants: 21

After briefly introducing the background of the URS Review, Mr. Laurie Lo, the representative of Development Bureau, and Mrs. Sandra S.C. Mak, 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 Finance was the biggest problem of Urban Renewal Authority (URA) at present. Urban renewal was a complicated issue; URA should not and would not be able to be self-financing. URA should face and handle urban renewal not only from a financial but also from a social perspective, and it should not simply focus on short-term returns. From a broad perspective, urban renewal was a social investment, which was different from the current practices.
- 1.2 Sustainable development was the core issue faced by urban renewal in Hong Kong. Since the community no longer accepted high-density development, URA's current practice which achieved self-financing by means of increasing the development plot ratio of redevelopment projects was no longer practicable and was not a sustainable development mode.
- 1.3 Since URA awarded redevelopment projects to property developers following "the highest bid" principle, redeveloped buildings would unavoidably become very expensive.
- 1.4 Urban renewal should be in line with the long-term positioning of the future development of Hong Kong in the coming 10 to 20 years.

- 1.5 It could be considered to implement urban redevelopment by companies formed by affected owners based on their property ownership.
- 1.6 Urban redevelopment projects should be selected from a broad perspective of the entire community, and should be in harmony with the surrounding environment. Urban redevelopment works should not be piecemeal.
- 1.7 A master land use plan of Hong Kong should be prepared to coordinate with the planning of urban renewal.
- 1.8 The work of URA was currently restricted by many rules which were mainly set by other authorities (for example Legislative Council). URA was only responsible for execution.
- 1.9 “Urban Renewal” should be renamed as “Community Renewal” and the Government should emphasize community-building and group-building.

2 Heritage Conservation

- 2.1 The current work of URA on heritage conservation was insufficient. The Woo Cheong Pawn Shop in Wan Chai was taken as an example. It was unable to achieve culture inheritance as the building had been turned into restaurant.

3 Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review

- 3.1 Whether the current URS was in line with the principle of sustainable development and whether it was sufficient for URA to be solely responsible for urban renewal projects were issues that should be considered in the URS Review.

4 Maintenance of buildings

- 4.1 The role of the Government in urban renewal should be studied carefully, and the message that “owners should be responsible for maintenance of buildings” should be further promoted. The Government should implement compulsory building maintenance and establish owners’ corporations.