

Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review

Gist of Envisioning Stage Focus Group Discussion

Date: 2 October 2008 (Thursday)
Time: 6:30p.m. – 8:30p.m
Venue: Conference Room, A-World Consulting Ltd., Unit 2402, 24/F,
Admiralty Centre II, 18 Harcourt Road, Admiralty, HK
Group: Advocacy groups – policy “think tanks”, green groups,
conservation groups
No. of
Participants: 21

1 Issues Identified

Issues related to URS

- 1.1 Visions of urban renewal
- 1.2 Rehousing in the same district
- 1.3 Compliance with international standards (Social Impact Assessment)
- 1.4 Importance of genuine consultation
- 1.5 Financial arrangement leading to high plot ratio
- 1.6 Respect for residents' wish
- 1.7 Damage on community network
- 1.8 The priorities of 4Rs to be discussed by general public
- 1.9 Consultation papers for projects in bilingual languages
- 1.10 Values of urban renewal
- 1.11 Policy review on cultural preservation
- 1.12 Review mechanism
- 1.13 Government's delegation of power for urban planning
- 1.14 Understanding the community before discussing redevelopment
- 1.15 Land use for redevelopment projects
- 1.16 Choices of “flat for flat” and “shop for shop”
- 1.17 Application of 4Rs
- 1.18 Prospect and timeliness of consultation

Issues related to roles of Urban Renewal Authority (URA) and other organizations

- 1.19 Roles of Town Planning Board (TPB), URA, Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) and other related organisations
- 1.20 Partnership between private and public sectors (relationship between URA and developers)
- 1.21 Role of URA and value of its existence
- 1.22 Role of URA as a co-ordinator
- 1.23 Publishing the financial status of the individual redevelopment projects of URA

Issues related to individual projects

- 1.24 Inappropriate choice of project (Macpherson Stadium)

Key issues related to the review process

- 1.25 Publishing notes of focus group discussions
- 1.26 Temporary suspension of renewal projects

2 Summary of Views

Issues related to URS

2.1 Visions of urban renewal

- 2.1.1 The Government must ascertain the visions of urban renewal in Hong Kong.
- 2.1.2 The current urban renewal projects were led by private developers without visions on cultural preservation policy.

2.2 Rehousing in the same district

- 2.2.1 The current practice of rehousing to public housing estates was not ideal, as it would not be in the same district.

2.3 Compliance with international standards (Social Impact Assessment)

- 2.3.1 The Government and the URA should refer to and comply with the international standards to preserve historic relics.
- 2.3.2 In the previous projects, there were precedents of incorrect records of the findings of the social impact assessment.

2.4 Importance of genuine consultation

- 2.4.1 The Government had made consultations, but it seemed that it had not listened to the opinions of the public.

2.5 Financial arrangement leading to high plot ratio

- 2.5.1 In order to achieve a balanced budget, the URA had significantly raised the plot ratio of the redevelopment projects; the plot ratio of some projects might be up to 15.

2.6 Respect for residents' wish

- 2.6.1 Residents affected by the redevelopment project had no power to object. The URA had not consulted them on whether they wished to stay behind in the same district.
- 2.6.2 The Government or the URA should give explanations if they did not accept the residents' opinions.

2.7 Damage on community network

2.7.1 Many redevelopment projects of the URA had damaged the community network, causing resentment from the residents.

2.8 The priority of 4Rs to be discussed by general public

2.8.1 For current projects, redevelopment had been given more weights among the 4Rs; while the community emphasized more on maintaining community networks (i.e. pReservation).

2.8.2 The priorities of 4Rs were very important and should be discussed by the public.

2.9 Consultation papers for projects in bilingual languages

2.9.1 Consultation papers for individual projects should not only be written in English. Otherwise, genuine community consultation would not be made possible. All consultation papers should be bilingual.

2.9.2 Taking the Kwun Tong project as an example, the contents of the consultation papers in Chinese and English had many deviations.

2.9.3 Consultation could only be considered fair when bilingual papers were available, such that the people-centred principle could be upheld.

2.10 Values of urban renewal

2.10.1 The Government and the URA should treasure the values of urban renewal. Apart from tangible values, they should also treasure the intangible values (e.g. improvement in quality of life).

2.11 Policy review on cultural preservation

2.11.1 When considering cultural preservation, overseas experiences should be referred to and the opinions of local residents should be respected, instead of referring solely to relevant conservation legislations.

2.11.2 Whether cultural preservation should be put under the purview of the URA was a topic worth assessing.

2.12 Review Mechanism

2.12.1 As time passed by, some projects were no longer accepted by the general public. The URA should have a mechanism in place to halt these projects.

2.13 Government's delegation of power for urban planning

- 2.13.1 The Government should delegate power for urban planning to allow representatives of the public to participate in the relevant authority at the decision-making level.

2.14 Understanding the community before discussing redevelopments

- 2.14.1 Before carrying out renewal projects, the URA should first understand the preference of the local residents. For instance, local residents had different opinions on the issue of "Good urban renewal means development of clean, tidy and tall landmark buildings".
- 2.14.2 Opinions and decisions of local residents on individual development projects should be more important than that of the District Council or URA.

2.15 Land use for redevelopment projects

- 2.15.1 Urban renewal should not focus on construction of buildings only. Whether the developers monopolized the land uses for redevelopment projects should also be considered.

2.16 Choices of "flat for flat" and "shop for shop"

- 2.16.1 The feasibility of "flat for flat" and "shop for shop" should be considered as feasible options for resettling local residents, as the current compensation might be insufficient for residents to buy a flat of similar quality in the same district.

2.17 Application of 4Rs

- 2.17.1 The adoption of 4Rs during the urban renewal process should not be determined by URA. The Government should consider establishing a mechanism to facilitate decision making by other means.

2.18 Prospect and timeliness of consultation

- 2.18.1 As public consultation should be timely, the URA should conduct consultation again after a development proposal was in shape.
- 2.18.2 The crux of "People-centred approach" was to allow the local residents to have choices during the urban renewal process. However, the only choice at the moment was cash compensation.
- 2.18.3 Consultation should be forward-looking for 10 to 20 years. However, it was doubtful whether URA was capable in conducting such forward-looking consultations. For instance, some projects were of economic value to the entire society of Hong Kong, while URA did not consult the wider public in Hong Kong.

2.18.4 URA should conduct “genuine consultation”, and listen to “real opinions”, instead of merely transferring the benefits of urban renewal to the developers.

Issues related to roles of URA and other organizations

2.19 Roles of TPB, URA, HKHS and other related organisations

2.19.1 The roles between TPB, URA and HKHS during the urban renewal process should be clearly stated. The current practice of public consultation by the TPB was inappropriate.

2.20 Partnership between private and public sectors (relationship between URA and developers)

2.20.1 The relationship between the URA and developers should be disclosed to the public. There were some defects in their relationship, including its inability to safeguard public interest, providing assistance to the developers, insufficient consultation and lack of arrangement for rehousing in the same district, etc.

2.21 Role of URA and value of its existence

2.21.1 The community had raised many different opinions to the URA on urban renewal projects in the past, yet it seemed that the URA had not taken them into consideration. As such, the public should discuss the roles of URA and the value of its continued existence.

2.21.2 URA should play a back-stage role, leaving the community to make decisions on urban renewal.

2.22 Role of URA as a co-ordinator

2.22.1 During the urban renewal process, URA should play the role as co-ordinator in collecting opinions from the community.

2.23 Publishing the financial status of individual redevelopment projects of URA

2.23.1 URA should publish the financial status of the individual redevelopment projects.

Issues related to Individual Projects

2.24 Inappropriate choice of project (Macpherson Stadium)

2.24.1 It was inappropriate for URA to participate in the Mongkok Macpherson Stadium renewal project.

Issues related to the Review Process

2.25 Publishing contents of focus group discussions

2.25.1 Contents of the focus group discussions should be published in full.

2.26 Temporary suspension of renewal projects

2.26.1 URA should consider whether the current projects should be suspended, and not launching any new projects before completion of the URS Review.