

Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review

Gist of Envisioning Stage Focus Group Discussion

Date: 21 October 2008 (Tuesday)
Time: 6:30pm – 8:00pm
Venue: Activity Room 2, Hong Kong Central Library, 66 Causeway Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
Group: Affected groups – landlords and tenants / concerned organizations
No. of Participants: 12 (3 observers)

Representative of A-World Consulting Ltd. briefly introduced the background of URS Review. Mr. Lam Yuk-wah, Peter, the facilitator, invited participants to express their opinions. After discussion, the opinions were grouped into 4 parts – ‘Policies’, ‘Principles’, ‘Execution’ and ‘Duties and responsibilities’. Key points were as follows.

1 Policies

1.1 Rehousing and compensation before planning and redevelopment

1.1.1 The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) should first rehouse the affected residents before planning and redevelopment. Currently some landlords ignored the maintenance of their buildings after being informed of the redevelopment plan, resulting in a poor living environment.

1.2 “Flat for flat” and “Shop for shop” / Choice to stay or leave / Compensating all residents including the disadvantaged groups

1.2.1 Affected residents wished for “flat for flat” and “shop for shop” exchange arrangements.

1.2.2 A mechanism should be provided in the urban renewal process for the affected residents to choose whether to stay or leave.

1.2.3 Compensation related to urban renewal should take care of all residents, including new arrivals and the disadvantaged groups.

1.3 Social Impact Assessment on the whole district

1.3.1 Social Impact Assessment on the whole district, instead of on the affected streets and lots only, should be conducted before commissioning urban renewal.

1.4 URA's senior officials should be remunerated based on the Social Impact Assessment results

1.4.1 Social Impact Assessments should be conducted before and after urban renewal to compare the level of satisfaction of residents and the comprehensiveness of the social network. The senior officials of URA should be remunerated based on the assessment results.

2 **Principles**

2.1 Treasuring social network, sense of belonging and core values / Rehousing in the same district

2.1.1 The opinions of local residents should be respected and the local social network should be valued.

2.1.2 The network of the local residents and shops and their sense of belonging should be valued. The current approach of "total redevelopment" could not develop a sense of belonging.

2.1.3 Civic education should be strengthened to develop a sense of belonging among local residents and to lay emphasis on the social network and core values.

2.1.4 Currently, many tenants were forced to move out from their original district because of urban renewal. In fact, many of them had deep attachment to their original district and hence, they should be rehoused in the same district.

2.2 Respect for local residents' wishes, rights of selection and community planning

2.2.1 The URA could improve its consultation. They should consult the affected residents on whether they wished to have redevelopment.

2.2.2 Local residents should have the rights to plan for the community and choose whether to redevelop or rehabilitate. Consultation with local residents should be carried out before planning and redevelopment, instead of after the implementation of the project.

2.2.3 The current consultation period was too short. The URA should understand the situation of the residents and the surroundings of the affected lots in depth.

2.3 Fair allocation of resources and performing social justice

2.3.1 The current allocation of resources in respect of urban renewal was unfair. Unlike property developers, the URA should perform social justice instead of emphasizing profit-making.

3 **Execution**

3.1 Paying attention to the law and order and traffic problems

3.1.1 The management of the construction areas under urban renewal should be strengthened to avoid deterioration of law and order caused by the vacant buildings.

3.1.2 The traffic arrangements of the construction areas under urban renewal should be improved.

3.2 Residents had the right to know the compensation criteria and procedures

3.2.1 Many of the URA's internal guidelines on the compensation criteria and procedures were not made known to affected residents. Residents had the right to know and URA should disclose such information to them.

3.3 Rehousing the elderly

3.3.1 URA should coordinate with relevant Government departments for appropriate rehousing of the affected elderly.

4 **Duties and responsibilities**

4.1 URA should be accountable according to the "Urban Renewal Strategy"

4.1.1 At present, URA would not be punished nor held responsible even if they did not follow the Urban Renewal Strategy in implementing renewal projects.

4.1.2 The legal status of the "Urban Renewal Strategy" should be raised such that it would be illegal for URA to act against the Strategy.

4.2 Abolition of the land resumption power of URA

4.2.1 The land resumption power of URA should be abolished, thus making it unable to conduct compulsory repossession of buildings.

4.3 URA to be divided into one authority and one department

4.3.1 URA should be divided into two institutions: (1) the Urban Renewal Services Department which acted as an intermediary to provide assistance, support and legal advice to owners who set up a company to implement urban renewal projects; and (2) the Urban Renewal Monitoring Authority formed by members from different social strata, which monitored the work and provided funding to the

above-mentioned department, as well as giving arbitration whenever necessary.

4.4 Renewal should be led by non-Government organizations (NGOs) instead of URA

4.4.1 The current mode of urban renewal should be changed such that instead of being led by URA, it should be led by an NGO formed by residents. The NGO would also conduct tendering, the costs of which should be borne by the developers who bid the tender successfully.

4.4.2 The power of urban renewal should be delegated to NGOs.