

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

Date: 5 November 2008 (Wednesday)
Time: 6:30p.m. – 8:30p.m.
Venue: 1107, 11/F, Hong Kong Scout Centre, Scout Path, Austin Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon
Group: Advocacy groups – Community groups
No. of participants: 7 (2 observers)

The 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 3 parts – ‘Policy’, ‘Principle’ and ‘Execution’. Key points were as follows:

1 Policy

1.1 Carrying out a district-based social impact assessment as soon as possible

1.1.1 The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) should carry out a district-based social impact assessment for the redevelopment area and have appropriate rehousing arrangement for the affected residents before the commencement of the redevelopment work.

1.1.2 Social impact assessment should cover the whole district and the aspirations and wishes of the affected residents should be appreciated. For example, whether they felt puzzled about redevelopment, and whether they wished for “flat-for-flat” and “shop-for-shop” exchange arrangements and rehousing within the existing district, etc..

1.2 URS should tie in with the overall planning policy of the Government

1.2.1 The URS Review should tie in with the overall planning policy of the Government. Moreover, a mechanism should be in place to sum up the different opinions of the affected residents and work out the overall redevelopment planning.

1.3 Amendment to ordinances should tie in with urban renewal

1.3.1 The Government should consider tying in the amendment of the current ordinances (e.g. Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) Ordinance) with the actual situation of urban renewal in order not to harm the rights and interests of the residents.

2 Principle

2.1 Preservation of community network

2.1.1 The social impact assessment should focus on “whether the existing community network of the residents could be preserved”.

2.2 Urban renewal should increase transparency and consult the residents' opinions

2.2.1 Affected residents should sound out their wishes to URA, i.e. whether they wished to have redevelopment or rehabilitation. The authority should allow them to participate in the decision-making of urban renewal.

2.2.2 The Government and URA should increase transparency of urban renewal and explain to the public the standard and procedures in selecting projects for renewal.

2.3 Strengthening the communication with residents

2.3.1 The Government should strengthen communication with residents. It should handle the public opinions collected through consultation seriously and appropriately so as to avoid causing an opposed situation with the affected residents.

2.3.2 Development Bureau and URA should take the initiative to announce the schedule and progress of the urban renewal works to the public.

2.4 Improving people's living through urban renewal

2.4.1 Both the Government and the public agreed that urban renewal could improve people's living. Renewal could be carried out through different approaches, for example, redevelopment, rehabilitation or revitalization.

2.5 Sustainable development as the principle of urban renewal

2.5.1 Sustainable development was a principle of urban renewal. In addition to preserving the hardware of the projects with conservation value, the authority should also preserve the culture with historical value for the next generation.

3 Execution

3.1 URA should review the amount of compensation

3.1.1 URA should review whether the compensation was enough, as there

were residents who felt annoyed because of the insufficient compensation.

3.2 Conservation of community culture through public consultation

3.2.1 Renewal projects might destroy community culture. As conservation of community culture was vital, URA should consult the public in this aspect.

3.3 The Government should take the initiative to follow-up building maintenance

3.3.1 Many old buildings were now in poor conditions. The Government should take the initiative to follow-up the maintenance works.

3.4 Members of URA should master the local situation

3.4.1 The appeal board of URA should be composed of experienced members who should understand the living situation of the affected residents so as to make reasonable judgments.

3.4.2 Staff of URA should have a good grasp of the situation of the districts under redevelopment.

3.5 Gaining experience and improving works

3.5.1 URA should learn and gain experience from the past and present redevelopment projects in order to improve the urban renewal works in the future.