

**Public Affairs Forum
Summary of Comments on
“Urban Renewal Strategy Review - Consensus Building Stage”**

Forum members posted a total of 28 messages. Their comments were summarised below.

1. Some members commended that the consultation on “Urban Renewal Strategy Review” (URS Review) was very comprehensive and open. Some members opined that the urban renewal strategy had to be reviewed as the Government’s earlier measures failed to curb the soaring property prices. Furthermore, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) should review whether lowering the threshold of compulsory sale of old buildings for redevelopment would make it easier to acquire properties and whether the redevelopment policy and compensation package kept up with the times.
2. Many members agreed that the “people-centred” principle should be closely adhered to as it met the needs of a modern city. In urban regeneration, efforts should be made as far as possible to increase the provision of leisure venue and public open space as well as to enrich the cultural ambience and improve the environment to foster harmony among people.
3. A number of members agreed that a “District Urban Renewal Forum” (the Forum) should be established in each of the old district and the “bottom-up” public engagement processes be implemented. A member considered the proposal creative and could meet public expectation. Another member opined that the Forum could help strengthen

communication with the stakeholders and the specific cases discussed could be collected as sources of reference. Active participation of the stakeholders could also help expedite the building of consensus. One member was of the view that in the urban renewal consultation machinery, district representatives of the redevelopment projects should form the majority and consultants with no association with the property sector should also be engaged.

4. The majority of the members agreed that urban regeneration should proceed on the basis of the 4R strategy, namely, “Redevelopment”, “Rehabilitation”, “pReservation” and “Revitalisation”, and in particular, towards “Redevelopment” and “Rehabilitation”. The incident of the building collapse in Ma Tau Wai Road highlighted the importance of proper maintenance and building safety. One member, however, considered that unnecessary redevelopment should be avoided.
5. A member supported the URS Review but opined that at present, the role of the URA focused on property development without a broad vision for district development. In addition, it had laid undue weight on development ratio without taking into account public space and the affordability of home buyers. Another member considered that the URA should review its role and be “unpegged” from property developers.
6. A member pointed out that, in development projects, the URA only stressed the number of buildings to be developed or built small flats to suit the affordability of home buyers. The need for larger flats in the community was ignored. Another member opined that properties developed by the URA should only be sold to local residents and that each resident should only be allowed to buy one flat. Some members suggested that the URA consult the public on setting a reasonable standard for living space.

7. A member opined that the URA should safeguard the interests of the majority in its development projects. More space and greenery should be provided and heritage preserved in line with long-term town planning. Another member doubted whether the objective of heritage preservation could be truly achieved as many projects involving private developers attached greater importance to commercial value and profit. The interests of the residents of old districts were often sacrificed for the development of society and economic benefits.

8. A number of members agreed that the URS was a government strategy, its implementation agents should not be confined to the URA, since town planning and development were involved and a long-term implication on the next generation. Some members agreed that apart from playing the role of “implementer”, the URA should provide services as “facilitator” to property owners who intended to undertake redevelopment of their own accord. However, these services should not involve invoking the Government’s land resumption power, nor should it be subsidised by public funds. A member opined that the URA should focus on handling rehousing and compensation of the affected residents while the Development Bureau should focus on redevelopment. Another member agreed that URA’s work in heritage preservation should in-principle be confined to its redevelopment project areas. Reference should be made to the Government’s policy on heritage preservation to provide more opportunities for the public to enjoy the use of the revitalised buildings.

9. A member agreed that in the Government’s review of the self financing principle of the URA, due consideration should be given to the economic benefits that urban regeneration would bring to the areas beyond the boundaries of the renewal projects. Another member suggested that some of the funds be reserved for assisting the affected residents to rebuild their social network. In weighing the economic benefits, whether the living standards of the residents would be raised after renewal should also be taken into account.

10. A member expressed that in selecting the seven major districts for renewal, it had to be ensured that the residents in the districts concerned had knowledge of the layout plan as well as the potential risks and inconvenience to the buildings they lived in during the preparation and implementation stages. Another member considered it necessary for the URA to assess the impact on the community after renewal. It also needed to explain to the public at the later stage of development how the social impact assessment and financial arrangements would be made.
11. A member opined that the Government should implement the urban renewal scheme in a systematic manner as soon as possible. Tax incentives should be provided to encourage property owners to participate in the renewal so as to preserve the appearance of the old districts and promote tourism. Another member was of the view that the authorities should, in the light of the past experience in urban renewal, reconsider whether Hong Kong needed to continue the development of high-density commercial districts or to preserve the appearance of the old districts. One member thought that community renewal should bring about diversity, vigour and social-economic activities.
12. A member suggested that the Government should first conduct a comprehensive inspection on the structural safety of the old buildings. A number of members were of the view that consensus had to be reached on urban renewal and a fair and reasonable valuation formula for old buildings should be developed. An open and fair appeal mechanism should also be provided to safeguard the interests of flat owners of old buildings. Another member proposed that an appeal panel which comprised members of the district councils and representatives of non-governmental organisations be formed.
13. Some members considered that the “flat for flat” scheme was feasible. The authorities should also offer various repayment options to owner-occupiers participating in the scheme as well as flexible repayment periods on the basis of the ratio of family size and ages of the family members. Besides, the prices should be set according to the size, floor level and orientation of the flats so that the potential buyers could make

their choice commensurate with their financial capability. To enhance the scheme, the authorities should explore means to attract the first batch of buyers, and concessions should be given to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients, single-parent families and new immigrants etc. A member suggested that the authorities should refer to the example of Prosperous Garden in Yau Ma Tei and build housing estates with usable floor space in the relatively remote area in the district to rehouse residents in the same district.

14. Some members opined that there were difficulties in implementing “flat for flat” as it was not easy for the URA and the owners to reach consensus on flat size and price. In addition, a number of members expressed concern whether the elderly residents could be rehoused in the same district to maintain their social network. There were concerns that the elderly had to face the problem of adoption in case they needed to move to a new community.

15. Regarding the proposal that shop operators should be provided with more assistance to re-start their business, and the option to return to the redeveloped project to resume business as tenants as suggested in the consultation paper, a member commented that it would be difficult to implement the idea as many shop operators had affection for their shops and were often reluctant to move. Even if they restarted their business in the same district, they might still facing problems such as rent increase, reduction of shop size and change of room for business, etc. Another member opined that the feasibility of the “shop for shop” option should be further explored while others considered that the provision of reasonable compensation would suffice. One member was of the view that this should be market-led since the business environment would have been changed even if the shop operators resumed business in the same district. They might not be able to enjoy the fruits of community renewal. Another member suggested that the URA should provide the figures of the compensation packages accepted by shop operators or data of business resumption in the same district in the past for reference.

16. A member agreed that to ensure the living conditions of tenants residing in old buildings could be improved through the URA redevelopment projects, the URA should examine measures to positively assist the tenants so that they would not lose the opportunities for rehousing. Some members shared the view that social impact assessment should be carried out both on a district basis and on a project basis, and the rights advocacy work and case handling work of the Social Service Team (SST) should be segregated. Furthermore, the SST could also serve as the bridge between the URA and the affected residents. To enhance its independence, the selection and management of the SST could be undertaken by the Social Welfare Department.

17. Some members opined that priority of urban regeneration should be given to “Rehabilitation”, since detailed survey would be conducted beforehand to give the owners a fuller understanding of the property before deciding whether it should be redeveloped. A further advantage of rehabilitation was to preserve the original status of the property. For instance, many buildings in Wan Chai were constructed taller after redevelopment, making the problems associated with the “concrete jungle” worse. Another member, however, opined that of the 4Rs, “Redevelopment” should come first. In addition, factors such as the physical environment of the district, housing needs of the residents and room for business of the small shop operators should be taken into account so that the buildings could be truly “pReserved” after “Redevelopment” and “Rehabilitation” rather than being artifacts for display, having forms without substance. One member pointed out that as “Redevelopment” took time, the stakeholders should be proactive in shouldering responsibilities such as maintenance and management of the old buildings before redevelopment.

18. A member considered it necessary for Hong Kong to strike a balance between preservation and development, or it might lose its unique cultural heritage. Another member opined that it was feasible to use economic incentives instead of cash compensation to preserve privately-owned heritage, and revitalise heritage buildings via collaborative partnership with non-profit making organisations as “Revitalisation” meant bringing history to life through proper use of architectural heritage.

19. A member suggested that the concept of urban renewal be instilled among students to enable them to acquire more information and adopt a rational attitude when they faced urban renewal in future.

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