

Steering Committee on Review of Urban Renewal Strategy

Study on Building Maintenance

At the fifth meeting of the captioned Steering Committee, it was proposed that a desk-top study to take stock of the work of the Government and other public agencies in building maintenance should be conducted. This paper provides an overview on the proposed methodology of the study.

Background

2. The Government has been adopting the following principles in its building maintenance policies –

- (a) it is the owners' responsibility to ensure that their buildings are in good repair;
- (b) the Government should ensure safety standards through enforcement against non-compliance with statutory requirements; and
- (c) the Government should, in collaboration with other partner organisations, suitably assist building owners to conduct repair and maintenance works.

3. The Government has been reviewing its policies on building maintenance regularly. In 2001, the Government announced the Implementation Plan for the Comprehensive Strategy for Building Safety and Timely Maintenance, involving a range of initiatives to promote building maintenance. In 2003 and 2005, the then Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau conducted two rounds of public consultation with an aim to mapping out further initiatives to arrest the long-standing problem of building neglect. The major proposals that emerged as a result of the two consultation exercises include the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme, Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme and the Voluntary Building Inspection Scheme.

4. The policy study consultant of the Urban Renewal Strategy Review remarked in the concluding chapters of its report that building rehabilitation in Hong Kong was progressing well and was moving ahead of other cities. It was proposed that a desk-top study to take stock of and analyse the work done by the Government and other public agencies in building maintenance should be conducted. This would facilitate the Administration to consolidate the work of the various parties involved over the years and identify room for further enhancement.

Existing Work

5. At present, a number of Government bodies and public agencies are involved in building maintenance related enforcement programmes and assistance schemes in Hong Kong. They include –

- (i) Development Bureau, Buildings Department (BD), Electrical and Mechanical Services Department and Water Supplies Department;
- (ii) Security Bureau and Fire Services Department;
- (iii) Food and Health Bureau and Food and Environmental Hygiene Department;
- (iv) Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS); and
- (v) Urban Renewal Authority (URA).

6. The aforementioned organisations have been collaborating with one another and adopting a multi-pronged strategy in promoting proper and timely building maintenance. On the one hand, the BD is the major enforcement agency on building safety and has been undertaking various enforcement actions and programmes to tackle building defects, unauthorised building works, illegal rooftop structures, abandoned signboards, etc. Under the Coordinated Maintenance of Buildings Scheme, the BD and relevant Government departments also take coordinated enforcement actions while the HKHS provides comprehensive support to owners to repair and maintain their buildings. On the other hand, preventive measures, namely the proposed Mandatory Building and Window Schemes, are also being taken forward, with the relevant legislation scheduled for introduction into the Legislative Council by end 2009. In order to facilitate building owners to comply with BD's enforcement actions as well as repair and maintain their buildings, the aforementioned organisations run various schemes providing advisory and financial assistance to owners. Examples include the BD's Comprehensive Building Safety Improvement Loan Scheme, the HKHS's Building Management and Maintenance Scheme as well as the URA's Building Rehabilitation Loan Scheme and Building Rehabilitation

Materials Incentive Scheme. The assistance schemes are also applicable to voluntary repair and maintenance works. Apart from the above, the Administration launches various timely assistance programmes to encourage and help building owners properly repair and maintain their properties. Recent examples include the \$1-billion Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Elderly Owners and the \$2-billion “Operation Building Bright”.

7. To dovetail with the research on the URS Review, it is considered timely to conduct a desk-top study on Hong Kong’s experience in building maintenance, in particular what the Government should and could do to encourage owners to maintain their own buildings.

Proposed Methodology of the Study

Objectives

8. The proposed objectives of the study are as follows –
- (i) To take stock of the various policy initiatives, programmes and assistance schemes administered by the various public agencies in building maintenance; and
 - (ii) to identify issues concerning the interface amongst various agencies and schemes under the current regime.

In-house Stock-taking

9. As the first phase of the study, we propose to conduct an in-house stock-taking exercise with the various public agencies involved in building maintenance. Factual details on their policies, modus operandi of their schemes and statistics would be collected. In addition, the agencies will be invited to provide comments and offer insights on the interface issues and room for further improvement in the current mode of operation. With ample operational experience, the various public agencies will also be invited to suggest ideas and options to address the issues in the existing system.

10. We aim to complete the in-house stock-taking exercise by September 2009 and will brief members in due course. Subject to the findings of the study, further research may be conducted, and independent consultants may be hired for such further exercise.

Advice Sought

11. Members are invited to note the proposed study.

**Development Bureau
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