

**Presentation by Secretary for Planning and Lands
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on Wednesday, 21 March 2001**

Mr Chairman,

I have responsibility for formulating and coordinating policies for programmes in the Buildings, Lands and Planning policy area. The delivery of services and enforcement of legislation under this policy area are undertaken by nine departments. I have with me this morning the Controlling Officers of four of these departments and the Head of the Task Force on Building Safety and Preventive Maintenance.

2. Our work in the coming year will focus on three priority areas –

- i. long-term strategic planning for Hong Kong;
- ii. improving the safety and promoting timely maintenance of our buildings and signboards; and
- iii. accelerating the programme for urban renewal.

3. **On the planning front**, we will be taking forward the strategic planning study entitled "Hong Kong 2030: Planning Vision and Strategy". The 2030 study will formulate a broad, long-term land use transport-environmental planning framework for Hong Kong for the next 30 years. This will help realize our vision of developing Hong Kong as Asia's world city and a major city in China. We do not have a crystal ball with which to foretell the future. What we do have is a process which will enable us to work out different scenarios for Hong Kong's long-term development and provide a planning framework which is flexible and capable of being adapted to changing circumstances. A key factor for success is public participation in the planning process. The Planning Department is currently conducting Stage One public consultation to gauge public views on the study objectives and issues for detailed examination in the second stage. We will pay close attention to all the comments we receive.

4. Last year, a task force was set up in my Bureau to formulate a comprehensive strategy for building safety and timely maintenance. The task force has consulted widely on the proposed strategy with Members of

this Council, District Councils and the Land and Building Advisory Committee, as well as with professional and representative associations and the general public, including property owners in particular. The strategy has received warm support from all sections of the community.

5. We are now examining comments received, refining the strategy and preparing a plan for implementing the new initiatives in the years ahead. We have presented to Members the resource requirements in the Appropriation Bill 2001. These investments in public safety should provide long-term savings to the community and a better built environment for us all. We will shortly seek Finance Committee's approval to merge two existing loan funds, for building and fire safety, and to extend the ambit to include virtually all practical requirements for improving building safety and maintenance. This will provide enhanced support to owners in taking up their responsibility for keeping their buildings in safe condition.

6. With the growing consensus of our community and working in partnership, we are confident that a culture of care for buildings will evolve. It should be possible within seven years to -

- improve the safety condition and outlook of buildings 20 to 40 years old;
- clear illegal rooftop structures on all single-staircase buildings;
- regulate and control all signboards;
- raise community awareness of the dangers and liability posed by unauthorized building works; and
- enhance appreciation of the benefits of timely maintenance.

7. With our focus firmly on the future, we must make our future buildings durable, easy to maintain and energy and resource-efficient. A major task for my bureau and the Buildings Department in the year ahead is to review the Buildings Ordinance in order to modernize and update it, and allow for innovation while retaining public safety as the primary concern. The additional resources sought for the Buildings Department will enable us to complete this review and carry on the work started by the Building Innovation Unit.

8. In keeping with our strategy to achieve a world class urban environment in Hong Kong, we shall adopt a more pro-active approach to

urban renewal. To arrest the problem of urban decay, we aim to regenerate and re-plan older urban areas through a comprehensive programme of redevelopment, rehabilitation and preservation that genuinely addresses the needs of the community and adequately protects the interests of those affected. The Urban Renewal Authority Bill was passed by this Council in June last year. Many residents in the old districts eagerly await the setting up of the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) to take forward the 20-year urban renewal programme. The process of establishing the URA is dependent on the package of compensation for owners and tenants. We consider that our proposals are fair and reasonable. I sincerely hope that Members will support our proposals at the coming Finance Committee meeting on 30 March so that the urban renewal programme can proceed without delay.