

www.savethestreetmarket.com

www.savethestreetmarket.com is a campaign focused on reversing the disintegration of street markets. The objective is to ensure sustainable, vibrant, safe and hygienic open air street markets in Hong Kong for the enjoyment of residents and visitors, commercially viable for hawkers, and integrated into the fabric of any future development.

The street markets are dying – Act now!

The street markets will disappear unless immediate action is taken:

1. Since 1970 the Authority has adopted the policy of NOT issuing new hawker licenses;
2. The resumption of properties by the Urban Renewal Authority will eliminate the support facilities and disrupt the street market operations.

How to make the street markets a success

Five factors are critical for street markets to be able to function in Hong Kong:

1. Areas allocated as Hawker Bazaars with Hawker Permitted Places;
2. Hawker licences;
3. Area management (regular cleansing, traffic control);
4. Support facilities (storage, electricity);
5. Continuity (Minimal disruption).

Urgent action is essential

Time is running out for the licenced hawkers as many are now old people. Moreover, the URA is under pressure to commence soonest, as many property owners have waited for their compensation since projects were announced by its predecessor, the Land Development Corporation.

Urgent action and support is required from the community, District Councils, URA, FEHD and Transport Department to ensure healthy street markets by designating areas as permanent open-air hawker bazaars, by accepting fresh applications and issuing new hawker licences, and by including storage facilities at reasonable rent in the development plans for adjoining properties.

Changing attitude towards hawkers and open-air street markets

Vincent Fang of the Liberal Party moved a motion, supported by Kwok Ka-ki (Independent), Albert Ho and Yeung Sum (Democratic Party), in the Legislative Council on 17 January 2007, asking for new management rules and regulations to retain commercial bazaars.

Open-air street markets or bazaars are some of the most visited destinations by tourists according to the Hong Kong Tourism Board Visitor Profile Reports.

The Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food has confirmed that “We do appreciate the value of preservation and facilities with local characteristics” and “the Government retains open-air bazaars provided that they have the support of the relevant District Councils and the local community, and that their operation does not affect environmental hygiene, cause nuisance or obstruction.” (22 June 2007 email to Heritage Watch)

A clear mandate required for the Urban Renewal Authority

Projects planned by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) affect the greater part of the street markets, as this involves removal of stalls to clear the street for construction, and the resumption of the properties which include the support facilities of the hawkers.

Street hawkers use adjoining properties for storage and the provision of electricity. More than providing a number of small stalls after completion of a project, a clear mandate is needed for the URA to ‘enhance and support the existing street market economy and operations’ in the areas and ‘to address the needs of the hawkers in the planning of their projects to ensure sustainable street markets.’

A historic perspective of street markets in Hong Kong

In 1873, the government through the Registrar General started issuing licenses to hawkers. At the end of 19th century, there were 5,661 hawkers in Hong Kong, or about 50% of the total employment in the retail industry. In 1936, management of hawkers was taken over by the Urban Council. After the Second World War, more than 1.5 million refugees came from China and the number of hawkers increased from 13,000 to 70,000, of which only 10,000 were licenced. In 1960, the government set up the Hawker Control Department (小販管理隊) with a tough policy to minimize hygiene, nuisance and obstruction issues and in 1972 it adopted a policy to get rid of hawkers. The number of hawkers has now significantly decreased and some, such as the open air food stalls (大排檔) have all but a few (25?) been extinguished. Part of this policy was to limit hawkers in a select number of (temporary) open-air hawker bazaars.

Hawkers have long been an integral part of the community and the number dramatically increased when post-war refugees re-started in Hong Kong by making their living as street traders. This dynamic resulted in a diverse culture and street life experience which Hong Kong became famous for. The development model over the past 20 years has replaced much of this with inward oriented shopping malls and podium based high rise developments which contributed little to neighbourhood networks.

The value of preserving and enhancing street markets goes well beyond job creation, as the markets are highly communicative and promote social bonding. The educational and existence value are equally high as markets visualize entrepreneurship and offer the public a window on, and connection with, Hong Kong's history as a city of traders.

In 2003, the UNESCO noted that it is critical to prioritize the preservation of neighbourhood communities in the redevelopment of old city areas. In Europe and America, it has been proven that this is best done small scale and in dialogue with the community builders: the neighbourhood residents and the local businesses including the street traders.

An economic perspective of street markets

Street markets allow unskilled labour to start participating in the economy with little or no money. Income from their hard work is used to put their kids through school. The children of hawkers are likely NOT interested in their parents' hawker licences. With their education they move to Hong Kong's high value industries and in return look after their parents.

Entrepreneurs starting their own businesses and growing them bigger has been the core of HK's culture and success. Without new licences Hong Kong's unskilled labour pool is denied this opportunity to start their own small business. In Peel Street we can see only the old, and it is obvious that some are about to die. We need new licences allowing the young and able to have a chance, and their energy will then rescue the market.

Vibrant and pleasant open-air street markets for residents and visitors

Vibrant street markets give residents alternative shopping options and they are a proven sightseeing and shopping attraction for visitors. (See www.pps.org/markets for international references). The reality today is that every one of the last remaining street markets in Hong Kong looks run down. Owners stopped renovating properties adjoining many of the street markets after announcements that theirs would be resumed by the URA and with a current policy to stop new hawker licences, the 'retained' markets are now not managed for permanence by the FEHD.

To revitalize the street markets and improve their operation and appearance we need a policy to 'enhance the street markets for the enjoyment of residents and visitors'. Such policy would focus the efforts of relevant organizations and departments. This will steer the FEHD to issue new hawker licences which allow young people to join the trade and to positively manage the market beyond maintaining hygiene and fire access. Such positive policy will also guide the Transport Department's priorities in designating streets and loading/unloading areas. Importantly, such policy then becomes the starting point for the architects and planners of the URA in considering all the necessary support facilities in the design of the planned developments.

The www.savethestreetmarket.com campaign is supported by:

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