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Paper for the House Committee meeting on 14 December 2007

**Proposed overseas duty visit
by the Panel on Development**

Purpose

This paper seeks the permission of the House Committee under rule 22(v) of the House Rules (HR) for the Panel on Development (the Panel) to conduct a duty visit to Amsterdam and Prague to obtain first-hand information on how the relevant government and quasi-government agencies --

- (a) initiate and manage changes in the townscape of their cities through town planning to meet prevailing and long-term social, economic and environmental needs and how they strive to build up community consensus in the planning process; and
- (b) formulate and update their urban renewal strategies and how they deliver the urban renewal projects to enhance the physical living environment of old districts and at the same time preserve the uniqueness and community networks of the localities concerned.

Background

2. Since the 2006-2007 legislative session, in light of growing public concern over ongoing and planned development projects and urban renewal projects, the Panel has actively monitored the work of the Government and relevant public bodies on town planning and urban renewal.

Town planning

3. There is growing public awareness of the need to study how town planning may impact on the social, economic and environmental development of an economy.

Since the 2006-2007 legislative session, the Panel has monitored the progress of a number of development projects and planning proposals which have reached an advanced stage. These projects/planning proposals include the Kai Tak Development, the Wan Chai Development Phase II, the Revised Concept Plan for Lantau, and the new Central harbourfront. In the 2007 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announces the Hong Kong-Shenzhen joint development of the Lok Ma Chau Loop and the revival of the planning work on New Development Areas (NDAs). This has prompted the Panel to start consolidating previous deliberations on issues of concern relating to the planning of these projects and examining the ways to address public concern on town planning. In this regard, the issues which require more detailed examination are as follows --

- (a) There are growing sentiments within the community towards conservation of historic buildings and heritage features and thus there is a need to undertake a critical review of territory-wide as well as district-based planning strategies with a view to striking the right balance between development and conservation;
- (b) The public's aspirations for quality living space have risen with crucial changes in terms of priorities and emphases; as such, it is imperative for the Government and relevant agencies to articulate and translate the present-day public aspirations into concrete planning strategies and measures;
- (c) The present town planning mechanisms have failed to ensure that the views and concerns of stakeholders can be effectively gauged and channeled to the relevant authorities; as such, the Government is often confronted with strong dissenting views for its planning decisions that are purported to have undergone due statutory and public consultation procedures;
- (d) The present planning control and building approval mechanisms are inadequate to ensure that important planning intentions can be effectively implemented; and
- (e) Effective mechanisms for public engagement in the planning process are yet to be devised, notwithstanding that there is growing enthusiasm among Hong Kong people in town planning matters. Such mechanisms are important for harnessing the wisdom and enthusiasm of the civic society and for building up community consensus in planning matters.

Urban renewal

4. The Panel is also aware of the growing public concern over urban renewal in the community. The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) has launched a number of urban renewal projects since its establishment in May 2001 and various problems have come into light during the implementation process. In reviewing the work of URA, the Panel has given particular attention to the planning approach and implementation strategies adopted by URA in delivering redevelopment projects. While the URA purports to adopt a holistic "4Rs" strategy¹ to address the problem of urban decay and to improve the living conditions of the residents, members in general have observed that the main approach adopted by URA is to "evacuate, demolish and redevelop", as opposed to conservation and revitalization. This approach falls far short of meeting public aspirations of bringing vibrancy and quality living space to old districts in a sustainable manner, as local heritage and community networks are uprooted in the renewal process. Moreover, the land resumption process of URA's redevelopment projects is often protracted and acrimonious, and affected property owners and tenants often complain that their interests are not adequately protected under the relevant legislation and URA's compensation policy. Members have also pointed out that the present mode of operation of URA cannot effectively cater for a collaborative approach whereby the affected residents can play an active role in the planning process or opt to have a stake in the redevelopment projects.

5. As the Government provides policy guidelines on urban renewal for URA through the Urban Renewal Strategy, which was promulgated in November 2001, members consider it high time to undertake a comprehensive review of the Urban Renewal Strategy. The Panel has decided that it would keep a close watch on the work of URA and its future plans, and, where appropriate, review the relevant policies and strategies with the Administration and URA.

Proposed overseas duty visit

6. In view of the importance and complexity of the issues pertaining to town planning and urban renewal, the Panel decided at its meeting on 24 July 2007 to study relevant overseas experiences to shed lights on the relevant world trends and alternative strategies and approaches adopted by other places to tackle problems and confront challenges that are similar to those faced by Hong Kong. Based on Panel members' suggestions, the Research and Library Services Division had conducted preliminary research on the town planning and urban renewal in Amsterdam,

¹ The "4Rs" include the redevelopment of dilapidated buildings, rehabilitation of buildings in need of repair, revitalization of the economic and environmental fabric of old districts and preservation of buildings with historical, cultural or architectural value within its urban renewal project areas.

Barcelona, Prague, London and Boston. Having regard to the findings of the preliminary research, the Panel agreed at the meeting on 27 November 2007 that it would be worthwhile for the Panel to undertake a duty visit to Amsterdam and Prague to obtain first-hand information on their experiences in town planning and urban renewal. The Panel specifically noted that the following recent developments in Amsterdam and Prague --

Amsterdam

- (a) The Amsterdam government takes the initiative for the programming and planning of spatial development. Under a new national urban renewal policy promulgated in 2000, a long term development programme has been formulated for revitalization of the urban centres of the city. The land use and zoning plans are given substance and formulated by means of a series of joint decisions reached by the government with commercial parties, developers, architects and local citizens.

Prague

- (b) A Strategic Plan for Prague was formulated in 2001 to provide a vision for what Prague plans to achieve in spatial planning in the next 10 years. The basic strategic aim in spatial planning of Prague is the change-over from a monocentric to a polycentric city to achieve a more balanced use of all its territory. The city government plays a key role in formulating the urban renewal policy but consults various stakeholders in determining the best urban renewal option.

Visit programme

7. The duty visit will last for about eight to nine days within the period from 14 to 22 March 2008. The delegation will visit Amsterdam and Prague. Apart from conducting site visits to appropriate places, the delegation will meet with representatives of relevant government and quasi-government agencies.

Members of the delegation

8. Ten Members (including 1 non-Panel Member) have indicated interest in joining the visit. The Panel has agreed that the proposed visit will also be open to non-Panel Members. A circular has been issued to invite their participation. A tentative list of participants is in the **Appendix**.

Funding arrangements

9. As approved by The Legislative Council Commission, each Member is provided with an overseas duty visit account of \$55,000 for the purpose of duty visits outside Hong Kong organized by committees of the Council. The fund in the account is for use by the Member in a four-year term. Any expenditure incurred in excess of the available balance in a four-year term has to be paid by the Member personally.

10. A rough estimate of the expenditure (including airfare, travelling expenses, hotel accommodation and overseas subsistence allowance, etc.) to be incurred by each participating Member for the proposed visit is about \$38,500 (economy class air passage) or \$70,000 (business class air passage). The estimate is based on normal airfare quotation, and the expenditure will be reduced if promotion airfare is available.

Advice sought

11. HR22(v) provides that should any Panel consider it necessary to undertake any activities outside Hong Kong under the name of the Panel of the Council, the prior permission of the House Committee shall be sought.

12. The House Committee's permission is sought for the Panel to undertake the overseas duty visit as proposed.

Panel on Development

**Members who have tentatively indicated interest in joining
the duty visit to Amsterdam and Prague in March 2008**

(Position as at 7 December 2007)

Panel members

Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBM, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC

Non-Panel Member

Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, SBS, JP

(Total : 10 Members)