

2 March, 2010

Further to the discussions regarding the captioned subject.

I wish to tender the following points for your consideration:-

- Private sector's redevelopment agenda by virtue of their interests (driven by profitability and accountability to shareholders) conflict with those of the owners of the apartments in buildings of over 50 years old
- Compulsory sale of one's property is like the compulsory abortion of one's unborn child; it is an assault on one's basic rights as a human being; nobody should become a [government-facilitated] refugee of their own home so that the local property private sector can enjoy further commercial gains
- Many of the inhabitants of these old buildings are old and have impaired mobility, reduced ability to adapt to new environments and do not have the basic means to move elsewhere and compulsory sale of their property may be fatal
- Redevelopment destroys culture, neighbourhood societies, disrupts urban landscape and takes away from Hong Kong its essence and its history
- Very few, if any, has championed the work of the URA who have acted thus far as the property developers' proxy - evidence that urban redevelopment involving people having to leave their homes is not one favoured by our citizens

Solution

From the revenue received in land sales, property tax and stamp duty, the government should put this money back to the sector from where it came i.e. inspecting buildings when they reach the age of 50 years old and fixing them up if necessary

- When a building reaches 50 years old, the government can propose to the inhabitants to purchase their property for a said amount; if all inhabitants agree to the offer, then the government can purchase the building from the inhabitants and auction to the private sector
- If however, the inhabitants do not agree to the offer made, the government should conduct necessary surveillance and structural analysis of the said building and make any necessary fixing up so that the building will become safe again.
- The government should only fix structural problems of the building and the responsibility of non-structural defects should be entirely borne by the owners
- Following which, every 10 years thereafter, the government repeats the above procedure

Challenges

The above plan is not without its challenges, listed below:-

- The private sector whose strong lobby powers within Legco will find faults and oppose the solution provided as it will create an obstacle to their profitability; the key areas that will be targetted are budgetary, the government lacking the necessary expertise and they will exploit the fact that nobody in government want to take blame if a plan fails
- The initial inspection and reparation of ~3,600 buildings over the age of 50 years old will be a sizeable responsibility and undertaking for the government - perhaps the government could inspect older buildings first and prioritise accordingly

There are certain areas of our civilisation that cannot be privatised and they include areas such as basic rights, legal system, law enforcement, national security, et al. We cannot privatise the police force nor can we privatise our legal system for obvious reasons and in the same light we cannot privatise the urban redevelopment because the basic rights of human beings belonging to a civilised society are at stake.

Yours faithfully,
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