



香港建築師學會
The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

21 October 2010

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Your Ref. : CR1/PL/DEV

Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBM, GBS, JP
Chairman
Panel on Development
Legislative Council
c/o Legislative Council Secretariat
3/F Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road
Hong Kong

By Fax and By Post
Fax No. : 2869 6794

Dear Mr Lau

Review of the Urban Renewal Strategy
Stage 3 Public Engagement – Consensus Building Stage

Thank you for your letter dated 2 June 2010 inviting the Institute to give views on the captioned subject at the meeting of Panel on Development on 10 July 2010.

Subsequent to the attendance at the meeting on 10 July 2010, we are pleased to deliver our written views on the same subject. Please find enclosed our paper for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Anna S Y Kwong MH FHKIA
President

c.c. Prof Hon Patrick Lau, Member, Legislative Council (Architectural, Surveying and Planning)

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Written Views to Respond to
Consensus Building Stage of Urban Renewal Strategy Review**

With reference to the ten preliminary proposals in the booklet Public Views and Future Direction - Paper for the Consensus Building Stage of the Urban Renewal Strategy Review, published by the Development Bureau, please be informed of our comments as follows (using the numbering in p. 27 & 28 of the booklet):-

People-centred Principle, Bottom-up Public Engagement Processes, and DURF

1. We support the proposal that the authorities should plan for urban regeneration at the district level, adhere more closely to the “people-centred” principle, and put into implementation the “bottom-up” public engagement processes. We agree in principle to the setting up of a District Urban Renewal Forum (DURF) in each of the old districts. For successful implementation, the following issues need to be addressed:-
 - a. Guiding principles need to be established to maintain a balance between regional and district planning requirements to avoid overprovision of desirable facilities and the not-in-my-backyard syndrome regarding undesirable facilities.
 - b. Urban renewal projects of the whole territory need to be prioritized such that resources for urban renewal among districts are balanced.
 - c. The composition of the DURF must be endorsed by the public, in order for its opinions to be recognized as being “people-centred”, and the DURF as a real “bottom-up” engagement process.
 - d. A mechanism has to be devised for reconciling the possibly diversified or polarized opinions from the different members of the DURF.

Role of URA and Other Public and Private Organizations in Urban Renewal

2. We agree that implementation of the Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) should not be confined to URA, and the participation of other public and private organizations should be articulated more clearly.
3. While the 4Rs (Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, pReservation and Revitalisation) could remain as the basis of urban regeneration, the Government should re-appraise the value of Redevelopment vis-à-vis the other Rs, namely, Preservation, Revitalization and Rehabilitation, and formulate a real urban renewal strategy that gives justice to its name. To this end, we do not object to URA’s future role in urban regeneration being an agent with a balanced focus on Redevelopment and Rehabilitation, with possible shift towards Rehabilitation in the long run.
4. We agree that URA’s work in heritage preservation should be confined to within its redevelopment project areas. However, the government should properly promote the preservation and revitalization of heritage buildings through other means and agents.
5. The proposal of URA to provide service as a facilitator to owners to undertake redevelopment, without invoking the Government’s land resumption power or subsidy by public funds, is worth exploration.



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Compensation to Owners and Tenants

6. For maintaining the community fabric before redevelopment, we support the provision of a “flat for flat” (in the same neighbourhood) option for compensating residential owner-occupiers.
7. Similarly, a “shop for shop” option should be offered to owners of shop premises if possible. We also suggest the government to consider that, for those new shops provided in the redeveloped areas, there could be a “rent subsidy” system for a certain period of time, in order to give a group of qualified shop tenants who can foster the right ambience for the newly redeveloped district, or who are genuinely rooted in the district, a chance to re-establish themselves in the new neighbourhood, thus preventing the “wipe-out-and-start-anew” situation.
8. We agree that, to maintain the social network and to be truly people-centred, URA should come up with measures to assist the tenants who lose their chance of rehousing or compensation due to non-renewal of tenancy by their owners after the freezing surveys.

Social Impact Assessment

9. While we support the carrying out of Social Impact Assessment both on a district and project basis, we believe the results of the assessment should be supplied to the DURF for its reference, before the DURF comes up with its opinions.

Self-financing Principle of the URA

10. Urban renewal by the government, in itself, does not necessarily require it to be profitable or self-financing. There are many other non-financial factors justifying urban renewal and the government should consider freeing up urban renewal from this overly restrictive principle of self-financing. It is also difficult, if not impossible, to carry out urban renewal without redevelopment under this restrictive principle for existing buildings that have not reached their allowable development potential. And this has led, all too common, to the removal of local residents to other districts due to gentrification. Financial viability should not be considered as the first priority or the ultimate goal of urban renewal.

We note that, while many of our comments on the URS Review mentioned in our letter to the Development Bureau on 18 December 2009 were taken up in the preliminary proposals; some of our comments, especially those in the urban design aspect, remain unaddressed and we would reiterate them below:-

- “Canyonization”, happening where huge buildings replace existing low-rise ones without corresponding setting-back and evident in recent urban renewal projects, is alienating for street users and should no longer be continued.
- Careful consideration should be given to the effect of increasing or decreasing the density of a district due to an urban renewal project. In particular, and especially if urban renewal is freed from the self-financing principle, opportunity exists for the government to reduce the density of overcrowded areas by replacing dilapidated buildings with lower density ones or open spaces.



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- A more three-dimensional and human approach to urban renewal should be adopted. As the city fabrics are interwoven with each other, the context and relations of areas within and outside community areas (which do not actually have boundaries) must be taken into consideration. The interfaces of one area to another must also be addressed and taken care of to maintain an integrated community and cityscape. Two-dimensional dissection of land parcels as renewal targets can create more problems than solutions.
- From the perspective of public health, energy conservation and sustainable urban living space, urban renewal should closely integrate with the principles of urban climatic map, which is of paramount importance especially in the context of high density urban areas.

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