

Hong Kong, August 30, 2007

Chair and Members  
H18 Project Conservation Advisory Panel  
Urban Renewal Authority  
10/F Low Block, Grand Millennium Plaza  
181 Queen's Road Central, Hong Kong

Fax: 2588 2559

Email: Mr Kam Nai-wai, Chairman, [kamnaiwai@yahoo.com.hk](mailto:kamnaiwai@yahoo.com.hk)

Mr. David Au, Secretary, [dcwau@ura.org.hk](mailto:dcwau@ura.org.hk);

**H18 project – The Central Street Market project.**

Honorable Chair and Members,

Our recommendation is to brand H18 – The Central Street Market project.

**The URA is the Government agent charged with the task to revitalize areas through enhancing and strengthening the socio-economic and environmental fabric for the benefit of our urban communities.**

The recent claims by the Urban Renewal Authority that the open-air street market falls outside the H18 project boundary and outside its jurisdiction may appear to be legally correct, however, it is an extremely irresponsible and unreasonable proposition. We urge the URA to embrace this street market as an opportunity to fulfill its mission as foreseen in the ordinance it operates under, and in response to the public's expectations of the URA as a responsible Government agency.

The 'central street market' has operated in this area since 1843. The market provides permanent jobs, a diverse shopping experience and a tourist attraction. It plays a vital role in community building and is an irreplaceable aspect of Hong Kong's culture and heritage as a city of traders and entrepreneurs.

The Central and Western District Council has on numerous occasions expressed its wish for this market to remain in operation. Equally the public and the Legislative Council have expressed themselves strongly in favour of maintaining and enhancing the street market.

**The design of the H18 project needs to change and the URA will need to mobilize the various Government Departments and Bureaus – including the FEHD - to assist in revitalizing this area.**

It is critical to make 'safeguarding, revitalizing and enhancing the open-air wet market in Peel Street, Graham Street and Gage Street' the starting point for the re-design of H18. Changes to the design must be made quickly to keep the project moving along efficiently, and to ensure that resumption and compensation proceed as promised for so long.

From the numbers we understand that this open-air market is a very sick patient and hardly alive. Of the 130 permitted places, an estimated 60 are in use, maybe 25 with original license holders (and most of them close to the end of their life), and the rest condoned to be used under helper licences.

**The 'central street market' needs to be regulated for permanence, not as a temporary welfare policy for a few last remaining old hawkers. Importantly, to revitalize the area we need to immediately accept fresh applications for hawker permits, redesign the drainage, and resurface the street.**

Under the current policy to condone the market operation out of welfare considerations for aging operators, the market has become dilapidated as none of the very old operators have invested. Moreover, the street surface is at times slippery due to a failure to use better non-slip materials. The failure to manage the market and design the drainage for easy maintenance may at times result in unhygienic situations.

**The intervention by URA with the H18 project has an immediate impact on the life expectancy of the socio-economy of the central street market.**

It is well recognized by the URA that the construction will impact the operation of the hawkers, and plans have been made for the temporary relocation of hawker permitted places. Less recognized and equally important is the fact that the affected properties provide the storage space and electricity for the market operators, and are home to a variety of shops (fish/meat/frozen foods) which make this street market a viable and diverse shopping destination.

Only with careful planning and a determined strategy to enhance and revitalize the open-air wet market can the URA avoid killing off this market economy forever. Although this may well be conveniently in line with the FEHD policy to reduce street hawkers and street trading where circumstances permit, as well as any policy to maximize land values for development and Government revenues, it is now widely recognized that this will destroy a valuable asset of Hong Kong.

**Under the leadership of the URA as the agency in charge of the revitalization of this area, the open-air wet market in Graham, Peel and Gage Street can increase its value for Hong Kong, and at the same time enhance surrounding property values.**

Here is a two-step approach to ensure that the H18 project can successfully become 'The Central Street Market' project under the URA:

**Step 1: Recognize what makes a successful central street market**

- How to make sure that young people can make fresh applications for licences to operate in Central ASAP (there many unskilled people looking for such opportunity to start their own business)?
- Minimum permitted places (current 130 – too few does not make a market, too many may create conflicts with traffic)?
- What size (current 3x4 is too small)?
- What products (which wet goods)?
- Number of supporting shops in adjoining properties to ensure a diversified shopping experience and broad range of goods?
- Which street sections (Graham/Peel/Gage street)?
- Should the hawkers be in the center of the street so that people walk between stall and shop? Or as now, immediately abutting the shops? Or all hawkers on one side, and shops on the other?
- Size of storage facilities required in the adjoining H18 property at reasonable rent for hawkers' merchandise and for stall equipment?
- Adequate loading/unloading space?
- Cleaning (Special drainage design for easy cleaning of the road)?
- Road surface (non slip, the road is at a gradient!)?
- Electricity provision?
- Review successful open-air wet markets overseas and discuss the operation of markets with hawkers in other markets in Hong Kong (incl Mongkok and Wanchai) to identify relevant success factors?

**Step 2: Design H18 to become the 'best' street market and top attraction for residents and tourists.**

- Where are the storage facilities for the hawkers?
- Where are the shops?
- Where do you locate the building entrances?
- What and where are the street level uses of the buildings?
- What and where are street level interfaces?
- Where are fire access routes?
- Which old structures do we keep?
- If street access and fire access is reduced because of the market – then what size buildings are permitted if you apply the existing rules and regulations?

How can H18 be redesigned efficiently, to minimize the delay in the project, and to revitalize the dying market soonest?

**Urgent is agreement on a common objective to make the 'Central Street Market' in Graham, Peel and Gage Street a vibrant, successful, active, open-air street market for wet goods.**

**Secondly, agreement is needed on a clear process and time line for making the necessary changes to H18, and amending the licencing policy for hawkers in the area.**

Through an honest and open atmosphere which fosters close cooperation with a positive spirit between all stakeholders, the URA can fulfill its role in revitalizing urban communities in a responsible manner, and everyone comes out a winner.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Zimmerman  
Convenor, Designing Hong Kong Harbour District  
25/f, Caroline Centre  
28 Yun Ping Road  
Causeway Bay, Hong Kong  
[Paul@t-e-g.com](mailto:Paul@t-e-g.com)  
M: 9096 0250, O: 2923 8688

P.S. Under '**heritage conservation values**' in Google one can find international best practice info on development and heritage conservation, including 'living heritage', 'social fabric' and 'culture' (as against the more common known heritage conservation expressed in the preservation of built structures):  
<http://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&aq=t&ie=UTF-8&rls=RNWE,RNWE:2006-15,RNWE:en&q=heritage+conservation+values>

P.S. International best practices in street markets and the value for modern cities can be found on: <http://www.pps.org/markets/>

CC Chairman and Members of the Board of the Urban Renewal Authority, [inquiry@mail1.ura.org.hk](mailto:inquiry@mail1.ura.org.hk)  
CC Secretary for Development, [devbenq@devb.gov.hk](mailto:devbenq@devb.gov.hk)  
CC Secretary for Food and Hygiene, [fhb@ghb.gov.hk](mailto:fhb@ghb.gov.hk)  
CC Chair and Members of the Town Planning Board, [tpbpd@pland.gov.hk](mailto:tpbpd@pland.gov.hk)  
CC Legislative Council, Panel on Planning, Lands and Works, [cshiu@legco.gov.hk](mailto:cshiu@legco.gov.hk)  
CC Legislative Council, Panel on Home Affairs, Heritage Subcommittee  
CC Legislative Council, Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
CC Heritage Watch, [committee@heritagewatch.hk](mailto:committee@heritagewatch.hk)  
CC Central and Western District Concern Group, [ktylaw@gmail.com](mailto:ktylaw@gmail.com)