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MANAGING DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Laying a Solid Foundation to Undertake a Dynamic and Forward-looking Urban Regeneration

When I took up the position of Managing Director last June, the URA was celebrating its 15th anniversary while urban renewal in Hong Kong has even a longer history, dating back to the setup of ex-Land Development Corporation in 1988. I took stock of the challenges we were facing, together with what has been done over the years and began to question myself "How much do we need to do?"

It is undeniable that urban decay is moving at a much faster pace than our redevelopment effort and that no matter how hard we do, we would never be able to arrest the problem under the current pace of redevelopment. The question "How much do we need to do?" would best be answered by "What else do we need to do?"

In order to tackle the problem and to meet future challenges, we need to take on new approaches and directions in our long-term planning and implementation of urban renewal work. 2016/17 was not only a fruitful year in which we made good progress in our on-going

work in redevelopment, rehabilitation, preservation and revitalisation (the 4Rs), but also a forward-looking year as we embarked on a number of initiatives in addressing the growing problem of urban decay, with a view to taking urban regeneration to a dynamic and forward-looking future.

Yau Mong District Study Guiding Future Urban Regeneration

To answer the question "What else do we need to do?", we would, first of all, need a thorough understanding of our problem in terms of both its depth and breadth. In May this year, we commissioned a multi-disciplinary consultancy to conduct a holistic study with an aim to formulate new strategies to guide the future urban renewal work of the

URA. Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok district was picked as the study area as this district is composed of a good mix of buildings of different ages and usages, of which about 10% of the residential buildings within the district area has already used up its plot ratio or has even exceeded its permissible plot ratio, making it an unviable option for redevelopment.

How much do we need to do?

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With in-depth analysis and assessments of the key issues, constraints and opportunities in the area against existing planning framework, development intensity and other criteria such as socio-economic factors, the Yau Mong District Study (YMDS) will come up with three resource options of the Master Renewal Concept Plan (MRCP), together with identification of Action Area Plans of urban regeneration. Each Action Area Plan will optimize the integration of the existing 4Rs together with a new mean of building rehabilitation – “retrofitting¹” as the 5th “R” in its concept plan. New initiatives of smart-city and place-making² will also be incorporated.

In order to unravel complexities and remove restrictions for a more robust implementation of urban regeneration, the YMDS will also review institutional framework governing requirements and specifications relating to planning, building and land controls. In parallel, the Study will also look into the URA's positioning, compensation and demand-led policies, new options of decanting and rehousing as well as business implementation modes, to come up with an Institutional & Implementation Strategy (I&I Strategy) integrating smart city and place-making concepts, to complement the MRCP.

The MRCP and I&I Strategy will be open for public consultation and engagement, before formulating the final strategic framework comprising a preferred MRCP with Action Area Plans and an I&I Strategy, an ultimate guide to the future urban regeneration in Yau Mong, and such concept plan and implementation model would also be applicable to other old districts.

Going Smart and Technically Advanced

When scarcity of land is common in old urban area, strategies like high density, new rezoning, plot ratio transfer and plot ratio reserve become inevitable in our urban renewal planning. The increased density, hence resulted, will have potential impacts on our different aspects of living, like traffic, infrastructure,

drainage, waste management, noise, etc. Going smart and employing innovative technology in building design and management to enhance infrastructure capacity, connectivity of buildings and roads will help address the land supply issue while maintaining living quality within a densely-populated area.

We have hence started introducing smart features, on top of the usual environmentally-sustainable provisions, with our joint venture partners of redevelopment projects, and a Smart Living Lab in a domestic flat was set up along this line to test the feasibility of some of the smart ideas and applications. Further down the road, we are also enhancing collaboration with private developers in some of the developments in Tsuen Wan to introduce the smart mall concept and parking system.

Can't Make Bricks without Straw

On the technology side, a map-based Urban Renewal Information System for comprehensive database management and analysis is being developed. It complements the YMDS to manage and process the vast amount of data on building profile, conditions, usages, demographic characteristics, socio-economic profile as well as historical and cultural aspects of the area. We have also started the use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) to enhance accuracy and improve design efficiency and effectiveness of development projects.

Comprehensive Building Rehabilitation Strategy and Information Sharing

As revealed by the Government's Hong Kong 2030+ study, there will be 326,000 private building units aged 70 or above by the year 2046, which is nearly 300 times of the building stock of the same age in 2015, with a lapse of just 30 years. The ageing of buildings is at such a fast pace that redevelopment alone cannot be the only solution. We have to also rely on effective building rehabilitation strategy as a two-prong approach to tackle the issue. In order to better

¹ Building retrofit is a strategy to furnish old buildings with new and up-to-date features and technology that were not available when it was originally built. Adding “retrofitting” to the URA's business as its 5th “R” enhances the magnitude of building rehabilitation work, prolonging the lifespan of buildings.

² Place-making is the process to leverage existing local and socio-economic characteristics, heritage and historical buildings of an area to create quality public spaces for the community. It helps enhance a district's own identity and is an indispensable part in urban regeneration.

facilitate, encourage and assist building rehabilitation with a target to prolong the lifespan of buildings, a holistic study on the building condition of buildings of all ages in Hong Kong is of paramount importance. We have hence commenced the New Strategy for Building Rehabilitation to map out effective strategies, from preventive maintenance to rehabilitation and retrofitting, targeting different "age groups" of buildings. This also includes a review on the existing regulatory and administrative measures on young buildings in terms of owners' obligation to conduct regular inspections and maintenance to their buildings.

While building maintenance and rehabilitation are considered owners' obligations, we understand that owners may encounter obstacles as most of them lack information and the technical know-how to handle the complicated building rehabilitation works. The URA, taking on a facilitator's role, is working on assisting these owners and the owners' corporations to overcome obstacles by providing an all-in-one information and services platform to assist them to look for appropriate consultants, contractors, inspectors and other related professions for building rehabilitation works. In this regard, we have recently commenced setting up a new "Building Rehabilitation Platform" which will invite Government departments, law enforcement authorities, statutory bodies and various professional institutions to join forces and offer comprehensive assistance and reliable information to owners in need. The Building Rehabilitation Platform, being first of its kind in Hong Kong, is expected to launch in full swing by first to second quarter next year.

Sustainability Indicator for Urban Renewal

Being forward-looking in urban renewal, sustainability is an essential part not to be missed. We are investigating into the social, economic and environmental impacts of a number of our 4R projects to establish a framework for long-term monitoring, evaluation, and review of the different initiatives of URA's work. A set of "social", "economic" and "environmental" indicators will be developed to measure the sustainability, social value and community benefits of URA's operations, as well as to track performance. The development of the indicators will pave the way for setting strategies, goals, and objectives for future projects into a sustainable development of urban regeneration.

Sustainability in Human Resources

Urban regeneration is a long journey requiring a stable management to carry through the various strategies that take time to fruition. In this respect, the URA is committed to ongoing staff development and training. Emphasis has been put on equipping staff members with up-to-date technological knowledge and skills, as well as broadening their horizons, bringing in best practice into the organisation by sending colleagues to attend overseas conferences and seminars. We have also looked into the age profile, professional qualifications and development needs of the team to address succession planning issue, with a view to paving the way for a more dynamic and prosperous workforce.



Ir Wai Chi-sing shares his thoughts with URA staff on urban renewal strategy at a staff communication session.

With the many new initiatives kick-started, 2016/17 was indeed a fruitful year as well as a year symbolising hard-work. I hope one would also feel the excitement we have on these promising initiatives that would lead us to a dynamic and forward-looking urban regeneration. I would like to take this opportunity to give my profound gratitude to the URA Board for trusting us to take urban regeneration to a courageous move. My heart-felt thanks to my Management team as well as all staff members who have walked with me and contributed their best over the past year. I am sure we will continue to contribute and realise our goals in the years to come.

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