

# *Managing Director's Statement*



Ms Iris TAM Siu-ying, JP





Ms Iris Tam visits residents of the Castle Peak Road/Un Chau Street redevelopment project during freezing survey.

It has always been my firm belief that an organisation is defined as much by its mission as by its people. Existing in a symbiotic relationship, the mission sets out the general directions and goals, while planning and execution fall on management and staff.

Being a statutory body, the URA is necessarily bound by its legislative framework and established policies, but that has not prevented us from pushing the proverbial envelope whenever possible and reasonable. Indeed, the thinking process involved in the formulation of new policies and initiatives is a highly informed one with our frontline staff playing a crucial role in reflecting the sentiments and aspirations of our stakeholders on the one hand, and often making practical suggestions on how to address them on the other. Such unique insights and pragmatism not only constitute the fundamental building blocks for many of our urban renewal schemes, but also expertly inform our decision-making process.

Like previous years, 2013/14 has been an eventful and challenging year. Working in concert, Management and staff have tackled various challenges with ingenuity and dedication.

The clearance of Development Areas (DAs) 2, 3 and 4 at our Kwun Tong Town Centre redevelopment site (5 DAs in total) had been accorded top priority during the year. It was a formidable task due to the number of remaining occupiers (legal and illegal) and the complex logistics involved. Much effort has been dedicated to the clearance of illegal structures in Yan Shun Lane and the relocation of the fixed stall operators at the Mut Wah Street and Hip Wo Street hawker bazaar. The relocation of the long-standing bus and mini-bus termini was also fraught with challenges. All these entailed lengthy negotiations with the people concerned, and the adoption of some special measures by the URA. In order to encourage the operators to vacate their stalls before the end of February 2014 but after the business peak during the Chinese New Year, an early bird incentive amounting to 50% of the special removal allowance was offered to those operators who were willing to vacate their stalls on the fifth day of the Chinese New Year (4th February 2014). This practical approach was very much welcomed by the operators, resulting in 114 out of 119 taking advantage of the early bird arrangement.

In addition, the design of the new interim hawker bazaar is based on many rounds of consultation, and has the approval of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. A particular feature that is highly appreciated by the operators but not usually found in hawker bazaars is the provision of toilets in the new interim bazaar. But for the revelation by our staff of the plight of the operators who previously had to limit their water intake at the old bazaar to avoid making long trips to public toilets, the critical need for such basic amenities would not have surfaced, let alone dealt with.

In 2013/14, rehabilitation in Hong Kong has received an extra boost with the introduction of the “New Tendering Arrangement” aimed at curbing tender-rigging that has been rife in recent years. The idea relating to this new arrangement originated from our staff after much reflection. Independent consultants have been engaged to handle the invitation and receipt of expression of interests and tenders, thereby ensuring a fair and transparent process. Results so far have been very encouraging. Usually, a tender would attract around 20 to 30 bids with most of them returning a fee quote higher than the independent building surveyor's estimates. For the nine cases with tenders that were opened in June and July 2014, some 50 to 60 bids had been received with around 15% of the quotations similar or lower than the estimates of the independent surveyors. A fair tender process is without doubt highly conducive to the fair pricing of rehabilitation.

In the area of revitalisation, our “crown jewel”, the much lauded and multiple award-winning “Comix Home Base” at Mallory Street/Burrows Street has become a standard-bearer of sorts not just locally but on the international level. Since opening in July 2013, it has attracted a monthly average of over 45,000 visitors. The project has given new meaning to, as well as fresh impetus for revitalisation efforts in our city and its success speaks volumes for our colleagues’ innovative thinking, attention to details and overall boldness in doing something that is rarely seen but obviously much welcomed in Hong Kong.



Ms Iris Tam and the little artists at the opening ceremony of Comix Home Base.

While much has been reported about the new zest of life that the project has given to the preserved building, something also needs to be said about its impact on the



Home visit by Ms Iris Tam to a resident of the Kai Ming Street Demand-led project.

immediate neighbourhood. For instance, the choice of the Ho Wah restaurant as one of the building's ground floor tenants was not incidental but has been carefully considered. With its long association with Mallory Street that could be traced back to 1952, the original restaurant has been operating at the shop lot adjacent to the preserved building since the 1980s. Although the new shop space could only obtain a refreshment licence due to the constraints of the preserved building, it is well supported by the adjacent restaurant. The extended shop space puts an end to the usage of part of the pavement to serve customers as was the case in the past and the restaurant no longer needs do their dish-washing at the back lane, bringing significant improvement to the street environment. It is an altogether win-win situation.

In going about our daily work, the URA has to adapt to changes on a continuous basis. Gradual changes are naturally preferred but more often than not, circumstances do not afford such luxury. In these situations, our colleagues have proven themselves to be highly adaptable and resourceful. A recent example is the enactment of the Residential Properties (First-hand Sales) Ordinance which imposes very stringent provisions relating to sales brochure details, advertisement, show flats, flat sale procedures and so on. Being the land grantee, the URA has to balance the commercial interest of our joint venture partners to launch the sale of units as soon as possible, while ensuring the legal compliance of the proposed sale through due diligence checking, long hours of co-ordination with the partners concerned, and provision of timely advice and support. To date, five of our projects including Park Metropolitan at DA 1 of our Kwun Tong Town Centre redevelopment project, and The Avenue



The appreciation ceremony of Community Service Partnership Scheme, a tripartite effort of URA, NGOs and tertiary institutions.

at the Lee Tung Street redevelopment project had been successfully launched under the Ordinance. This is no small feat and our colleagues from different divisions have acquitted themselves very well under the aegis of the new statutory regime.

Since the coining of the term “people-centred” approach, it has been used exclusively to describe the URA’s commitment to serving our stakeholders. However, I would posit that it is an equally apt depiction of the URA as an organisation. We are not a faceless entity that mechanically applies established policies. The URA is made up of a dedicated body of staff whose talents and hard work are the driving force behind our urban renewal efforts. With empathy, integrity and commitment, our own people are at the centre of our operation – a completely fitting and logical “people-centred” setup to serving a “people-centred” cause.

**Iris TAM Siu-ying**

**Managing Director**

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