

Building an environmentally sustainable future for Hong Kong
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The Honorable Secretary for Development Mrs. Carrie Lam, distinguished speakers and guests, ladies and gentlemen.

A very warm welcome to everyone. It is wonderful to see that so many of you have taken the time to attend this seminar.

As most of us here, and increasingly the general public, are aware, we have to tackle environmental sustainability if Hong Kong is to enjoy a bright future and live up to its aspiration to be Asia's World City.

The Government recognises this and is lending its weight to many initiatives to help improve the environment and make Hong Kong a place where people from all over the world want to live and work.

In fact, firm leadership from the Development Bureau has resulted in the announcement of a wide range of energy saving and greening initiatives. For example, the Development Bureau, together with the Environment Bureau, recently announced the implementation of a set of target-based assessment criteria and framework for the environmental performance of government buildings.

The current situation

The problem of environmental degradation is a very serious one. When a problem is this large and pervasive, it won't be solved unless the entire community comes together and works together. So how bad is it? Here's an illustration: Hong Kong's green house gas emissions climbed to 45 million tonnes last year, up 18% over the past decade. It is a startling and unavoidable fact.

The most important greenhouse gas we are producing is carbon dioxide and the biggest source of carbon dioxide emissions is electricity generation.

We are surrounded by more than 40,000 buildings and another 500 to 600 new ones are going up every year. These buildings consume nearly 90% of our electricity and in the process they produce about half of Hong Kong's total greenhouse gas emissions.

But I am confident that with initiatives taken by Government and the private sector, we will see these kinds of numbers begin to fall. Environmentally sensible materials, processes and design of buildings and facilities are increasingly becoming the minimum standard acceptable to owners and developers of commercial buildings.

There will always be more that can be done, and one major front remains unopened as we build an environmentally sustainable future for Hong Kong: We must extend the reach of environmentally sustainable practices and policies into the residential area, where, as it happens, we all live.

URA's environmentally sustainable policy

Let me briefly describe to you the policy on environmental sustainability the Urban Renewal Authority set out two weeks ago. Environmental sustainability is the rock on which we are building our urban renewal strategy centering on redevelopment, rehabilitation, preservation and revitalization.

The URA's policy on environmental sustainability is the logical, even predictable, evolution of our work to date, which has done much in tackling urban decay and helping those less fortunate in our society to improve their living conditions.

The URA has taken on board the experience of many cities overseas, it has drawn on the latest environmental technology, and it has sought the advice of leading experts with hands-on experience in the field.

We hope our efforts will help boost public awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability, and encourage participation by stakeholders and the community at large in working together towards a sustainable future for our great city.

Sustainability should start with comprehensive planning

Environmental sustainability isn't technology alone. We won't have environmental sustainability unless we insist on proper planning and design. In the final analysis, I expect to see that smart planning and thoughtful design together will contribute just as much to environmental sustainability as technology alone.

The URA has all along stipulated that the design and construction of its redevelopment projects must be consistent with the government's Urban Renewal Strategy.

The URA itself has won two HK-BEAM platinum ratings, the highest distinction possible, for the environmental sustainability of two projects: Mount Davis 333 in Kennedy Town and Vision City in Tsuen Wan. They are a testament to the URA's commitment to environmental sustainability in our projects.

In a nutshell, the recently-announced policy guidelines cover the following six main environmental provisions:

- The first is energy efficiency. This covers such items as providing shade from the sun, water-cooled chiller systems and heat recovery systems.
- The second is water conservation, including dual flushing, low-volume cisterns, condensate collection systems and rain-water collection systems.
- Environmentally-friendly building materials is another important element, focusing on recycled and recyclable materials and materials that don't harm the atmosphere's ozone layer.
- The fourth item is greening and it is easily the most beautiful of all. Simply this: we must make maximum use of landscaping in open spaces, on roof gardens, in street planting and in vertical greening.
- There should also be facilities for the collection of recyclable waste, such as domestic waste, and they need to be the right size for the population they serve and they must be serviced adequately.
- Last and crucially, we encourage the reduction of construction waste and environmental nuisances during construction through proper waste management planning and the introduction of noise mitigation measures.

We're not resting there. The URA is looking into other practical technologies that can be adopted in future projects. Some of the more interesting technologies under study are:

- High thermal performance structural fabrics like low E-glass reduce overall cooling loads and heat island effects;
- Renewable energy lighting systems, such as hybrid street lamps and electronic sunlight collectors;
- Solar hot water systems that reduce carbon emissions;
- Low lighting power density, and advanced energy saving light fittings for common areas such as LED light fixtures, which reduce energy consumption;
- Energy saving air-conditioning devices such as those that use carbon dioxide sensors that reduce fresh air intake during non-peak hours;
- And grey water recycling systems for use in toilet flushing, cleaning and irrigation.

Benefits to the community at large

The URA's Lee Tung Street project will be the first to incorporate these environmental provisions in a comprehensive way. We estimate that by applying all of these features we will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 23%. This is equivalent to planting 170,000 trees, or 20% of the trees planted each year in Hong Kong.

The way forward

To achieve the goal of urban sustainability, we need to tackle the problem from all sides, coming up with well thought-out schemes for entire districts, rather than just focusing on individual projects.

No one who lives in, works in or visits a buildings regards that building outside its context – the streets and city and community which surround it – and urban renewal must be sensitive to that context, environmentally as well as aesthetically. District-based planning can facilitate far better environmental results than project-based planning, since it allows – even fosters – the interplay of different buildings and other elements together, maximizing efficiencies, minimizing environmental impacts and maximizing the public good.

This requires partnerships. Only through consultation with residents and the community, and working with government departments, industry professionals, developers, as well as academics and the public, will Hong Kong be able to approach urban renewal in a holistic manner.

This is what brings us together today to exchange ideas, to listen, and to learn. I am very encouraged by the level of support that has been shown from a wide cross section of organizations, and by the strong turnout that I see here in the hall.

Hong Kong's future is very much in our hands. At the URA we will continue to draw on the best examples from around the world of urban planning and design, and of sustainable environmental practice, using them to refine our policy and goals as we move forward.

As Chairman I will make it my personal concern to work with the community, the Government, district councils, professional bodies and others towards these goals.

By working together to make urban renewal a catalyst of change for sustainability, we can deliver what the people of Hong Kong want and deserve – a built environment that offers a high quality of life and the prospect of an even better one for our children.

That work, I hope, gains additional momentum here today, with the discussions we are going to have. What are the roles of the public and private sectors in a free economy like Hong Kong? Should Hong Kong consider incentives or mandatory regulations, or a mix of both? More broadly, should Hong Kong commit to a road map for carbon emissions reduction, following the example of other cities? And if so, what role should residential building standards play in achieving this?

These are just some of the issues I, for one, hope to hear more about today and there is no doubt that in today's speakers, we have just the right experts to facilitate such a discussion.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your support, and for participating in today's event.

I would now like to invite the honorable Mrs. Carrie Lam to speak before we begin today's series of discussions.