

Statement on the Conservation of Street Markets

The Civic Party

1. Hawkers have long been an integral part of the community in Hong Kong. This is especially significant since the post-war period when a large number of refugees and immigrants re-started life here by building their livelihood on street trading. This dynamic resulted in a rare heritage environment criss-crossed with diverse and distinctive urban culture and vibrant street-life experience which Hong Kong is now well-known for.
2. It is unfortunate that the urban development model over the past two decades or so has replaced much of these distinctive street markets (open-air bazaars) with inward-looking shopping malls and podium-based high rise developments that contributed little to fostering neighbourhood networks and social harmony.
3. Open-air bazaars are some of the most visited destinations by tourists according to the Hong Kong Tourism Board. But if the current development plans continue, the variety and diversity of the street-markets concerned which attract many visitors to stay a bit longer in our community will be replaced by similar commercial and residential complex typical of other parts of Hong Kong. This means we will lose yet another of the city's distinguishing and distinctive "cultural" districts right at the heart of our urban communities.
4. The renewal and regeneration of the entire "heritage district" known as the the Wanchai market area, which includes the Grade III historical building of the Bauhaus-style Wanchai Market (1937-), should actually be based on its conservation as a functioning part of the city. This historical building must also be conserved as an integral part of the Wanchai lifestyle and street market neighbourhood. Our heritage and urban development policies must work to maintain the distinctive character and unique sense of place as an integral part of Hong Kong's contemporary social fabrics and urban history. This should be the gist and the way of heritage conservation in our urban context.
5. The following factors are conducive to the healthy development of street markets as part of the urban livelihood of Hong Kong, as identified by Heritage Watch:

- (i) Areas allocated as Hawker Bazaars with Hawker Permitted Places;
- (ii) Hawker licences;
- (iii) Area management (regular cleansing, traffic control);
- (iv) Support facilities (storage, electricity);
- (v) Continuity (Minimal disruption).

To better coordinate all the efforts needed to preserving and developing such local street markets in accordance with an overall policy for sustainable development, Government should designate specific areas with such livelihood histories and potentials as permanent open-air hawker bazaars. Once a specific site is identified for development as a sustainable community cultural district, Government should issue new hawker licences and maintain storage facilities at reasonable rent for the hawkers in the relevant renewal plans.

6. Overall, Hong Kong needs a new general policy on Street Market (Open-air Bazaar). But this ought to begin at the same time with a thorough review of the Urban Renewal Authority (“URA”) and its current, outdated, strategy of demolishing old buildings regardless of their community ties and heritage values. The new orientation for building viable contemporary urban communities must focus on rejuvenation and re-activation of the community, for a more balanced and sustainable model of urban development.
7. Street markets allow unskilled labour to start participating in the local economy with little financial resources. Without new licences Hong Kong's unskilled labour pool is denied this opportunity to build their livelihood by starting their own small business. Again, here the URA is completely out of line with most other developed cities where proper, multi-layered community engagement and thoughtful preservation and conservation policies have been the norm. A new mandate is needed for the URA to enhance the existing street market economy and operations in the local community.
8. To revitalize the street markets and their community networks, and improve their operation and appearance we need coordinated efforts under a consistent policy to enhance the street markets for both the residents and visitors. Such a policy would focus the efforts of relevant organizations and departments, who must work together to issue new hawker licences that will allow young people to join the trade, and to manage the market beyond routine hygiene and fire access

maintenance, etc.).

9. In brief, the Civic Party calls for an integrated approach to dealing with heritage, urban renewal and sustainable development in our local communities. Specifically, street markets (starting with the case of Wanchai) should be properly conserved with respect to their value for:
 - (i) Strengthening diverse cultural life and active community networks in urban areas;
 - (ii) Enhancing local economy on the basis of existing social fabric;
 - (iii) Tourist attraction;
 - (iv) Maintaining an important aspect of Hong Kong's intangible cultural heritage.

10. We call for a comprehensive review of heritage and urban renewal process and hawker control policy pertaining to the conservation and enhancement of street markets as an important asset of Hong Kong's culture.

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