

URBAN PLANNING FOR HEALTHY PHYSICAL LIVING ENVIRONMENT

Dr. K.S. Pun

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Executive Summary

Development form and housing density have been cited as reasons for the speedy spread of the SARS virus in Hong Kong in early 2003. The correlation between physical development characteristics, spread of diseases and human health is yet to be proved conclusively. The real reasons are still to be identified.

Further investigations have already discovered that the rapid spread of SARS in those housing areas was more likely due to faults in building design, construction and maintenance.

Irrespective whether causal relationship exists between development form and epidemic diseases, it is the duty of the urban planner to assist in providing a good physical living environment. We must look for possible urban planning measures to ensure that housing suppliers, private or public, will provide at least the physical basis for a high-quality living environment.

Housing provision in Hong Kong should have by now moved a long way from the days of providing the bare minimum. As the economy improves and aspiration rises, expectation on the quality of housing increases. Urban planners can help housing suppliers of today to construct high-quality housing schemes with adequate internal facilities inside living-quarters and at least a satisfactory and satisfying external environment built according to sound urban design principles. The Comprehensive Development Area approach should be useful in this.

Further, ways must be found to ensure that the housing blocks and whole housing schemes are always well managed and adequately maintained. In the same vein, the public sector should arrange for a sufficiently acceptable supporting surrounding outside the housing areas. More environmental upgrading as well as urban renewal and rehabilitation projects are necessary in the old urban districts.

Contrary to what has been proposed as a way to achieve better environment,

consideration should be given to the possibility of increasing the maximum permitted plot ratios for urban development sites. This will help to preserve the precious countryside, increase the willingness of the private developers to provide high-quality housing and environment, and encourage urban renewal.

All these are fundamental for the residents to lead a healthy, and happy, life. The key is “quality”. How can this be achieved? It requires not only the change in the attitude of the housing suppliers; it also calls for the close cooperation among all who are concerned about the environment – housing suppliers, housing managers, the Government, the politicians and, far from being the least, the residents and owners.