

CONSTRUCTING

A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Housing Society chairman Marco Wu has mastered the arts of winning hearts and minds and keeping the bigger picture in mind over a 48-year career in the housing field, writes May Chan Rhodes.

May Chan Rhodes

Housing has always been one of the most challenging and controversial issues in Hong Kong, but a passion for finding a win-win solution for the millions of people in the city has kept Marco Wu in the game for over 40 years.

“Housing has been an ongoing issue for decades. Different issues arise time and again in different ways because of the particular social, economic and political factors of our times,” said Wu, now the Chairman of the Hong Kong Housing Society.

“Throughout my years in the public sector, I have encountered many issues. It is not boring at all, as the issues differ every day.

“I always believe that whatever one does, one should put one’s heart in it and give it one’s all. And when you think about the fact that public and subsidised housing will affect almost half of



the city's population, it is natural to put all your heart and mind in what you do.”

Wu went into the public sector in 1967 upon finishing his training in surveying with the Hong Kong Polytechnic. He spent the first 10 years of his career in the Rating and Valuation Department before moving to the Housing Department, where he would spend the next 26 years of his career, until he eventually became the Department's Deputy Director, spearheading important policies such as the Home Ownership Scheme.

Wu says that he did not have an ambitious target when he first joined the government, but attributed his rise from a general practice surveyor to one of the city's key housing policy formulators to the willingness to learn, and the ability to be a team player.

One thing he learnt from the public sector is that one's work is not about a particular building, a particular estate, or even a particular district. It is about how one is able to work with different stakeholders towards the common goal of meeting the housing needs of the public against the backdrop of the long-term development trajectory of the city.

“It is more important to find out how you can work closely with other team players for a common purpose than to prove that you are above the others,” Wu says.

“If you always want to be the winner in the game, you will find that you have fewer and fewer people who would like to play the game with you. But if you focus on what you have in common with the others and try to achieve a ‘win-win’ situation, you will find that more and

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more people would be willing to join your team to achieve a common goal.”

Wu says it is also important to understand and appreciate what your team members are aspiring to achieve, instead of just focusing on your own goal. It means communicating with other professionals such as the architects, engineers, planners, housing managers and various other parties about what they think of the project, and taking their views into account to come up with solutions.

Such a mindset has helped Wu manage countless projects, formulate policies and make decisions, especially in times of crisis and controversy. One of the most memorable moments in his career was the implementation of the “85,000 housing units target” between 1997 and 2003.

In the 1997 Policy Address, right after hand-over, Hong Kong's first Chief Executive, Mr. Tung Chee-hwa, announced the target of building 85,000 flats a year to address the housing shortage and the skyrocketing property prices that far outpaced the growth of household income.

However, subsequent macro-economic incidents, such as the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, the IT bubble and eventually SARS, had led to an abrupt end to the policy. Property prices slumped 65 per cent between 1997 and 2003, and the government had to suspend the 85,000 policy, and instead launched a housing stimulus package to revive the property market.

“It is the most memorable moment in my career life because the situation called for a complete policy U-turn,” Wu said.

“There is no time for detailed evaluations. It pushes one to honestly assess what kind of crisis is at hand, and how to minimise the damage: in some cases, sites have been allocated; building contracts have been signed; foundations have been laid; or building works have commenced. It would not be possible to call a halt to all the projects overnight. We have to sit down with all the concerned parties and come up with solutions.”

The ability to listen was invaluable, Wu says, as it enabled him to continue to enrich himself through taking time to listen to the concerns and inputs of the multitude of professionals, team members and stakeholders he worked with.

“Learn not only from success stories, but also from past failures because there must be a reason behind each case,” he says. “And that reason would be useful and valuable.”

When asked about his management philosophy, Wu says that it is important to set an example for your subordinates. For example, if you wish everyone to arrive at work on time, first of all you would need to be punctual yourself.

“You must lead by example,” says Wu. “Action speaks louder than words.”

Wu was elected in 2012 as Chairman of the Housing Society, where he previously served as Vice-chairman after leaving the government as its Buildings Department head.

Looking ahead, he says the major housing challenge facing Hong Kong is its ageing population. Many of the existing residential buildings are not elderly-friendly, and would not be suitable for those who live on their own.

Safety designs such as hand-rails on walls to facilitate everyday activities at home for those who are less mobile, leisure facilities that cater to the elderly, and an integration of health and rehabilitation services have yet to be seen in the city’s private and public housing developments, Wu says.

This issue, combined with the trend towards smaller households and the home ownership aspirations of the younger generation, points to the urgent need to increase land supply for housing and related facilities. At the same time, there are demands for better nature conservation and more sustainable development.

“The challenge is how we can strike a balance and reach consensus,” says Wu. “And that is also why I am passionate about working in the public sector - it is not about achieving a business goal, or taking advantage of a market opportunity. It is about building a future with our community.”

This article is published courtesy of Classified Post.

創建

美好未來

他投身房屋界逾48年，顧大體、全大局，深得人心。他就是May Chan Rhodes筆下的房協主席鄔滿海。

May Chan Rhodes

香港的房屋問題向來是個爭議不斷的難題。鄔滿海兢兢業業四十餘載，一心要為數百萬本港市民改善居住環境。

鄔滿海是香港房屋協會現任主席。「房屋問題已延續數十年之久。這個時代獨有的社會、經濟及政治因素，導致各種問題以不同面目屢屢出現。」

「在公營機構任職多年，我遇到過不少問題，卻從不感到厭倦，只因每天都面對新問題。」

「我堅信，一個人無論做甚麼，都應該全情投入、全力以赴。公共及資助房屋是影響近半香港市民的事，每當想到這點，自然會全心全意投入其中，不敢鬆懈半分。」

鄔滿海在香港理工學院（香港理工大學的前身）完成測量課程後，於1967年進入公營機構。職業生涯的前十年，他任職於差餉物業估價署，其後轉職至房屋署，供職長達26年，及後官至房屋署副署長，負責推行「居者有其屋計劃」等重大政策。

鄔滿海表示，在擔任公職之初，他並沒甚麼雄心壯志，全憑好學不倦和團隊合作的精神，才能夠由一名普通執業測量師晉升為制訂本港房屋政策的其中一位主政官員。

他在公營機構中獲益良多，認識到工作不只是處理某幢樓宇、某個屋 或者某個地區的問題，而是要因應本港的長遠發展方向，與各持份者攜手合作，滿足市民的住屋需求。

「與其去證明自己比人強，不如學習如何與團隊成員通力合作，為共同目標努力。」

「如果事事都要自己取勝，你便會發覺願意與你合作的人越來越少。相反，如果將精力集中於大家的共同點，盡力爭取『雙贏』局面，便會有更多人願意與你朝著共同目標並肩奮鬥。」

鄔滿海表示，除此之外，亦要懂得理解與欣賞團隊成員的抱負，切勿只顧自己的目標。換言之，在制訂方案時，必須與規劃師、建築師、工程師、房屋事務經理等不同專業人士及其他持份者溝通，了解他們對於有關項目的想法，考慮他們的意見。



鄔滿海憑著這份心態管理過無數項目、制訂政策、作出決策。在出現危機及爭議的關頭，他更加堅持這份心態。對他而言，職業生涯中最難以忘懷的是1997年至2003年期間實行的「八萬五建屋計劃」。

在香港回歸後，首任特首董建華隨即發表1997年施政報告，宣佈每年興建85,000個住房單位，以解決住房短缺以及家庭收入增長追不上樓價飛漲的問題。

然而，1998年的亞洲金融危機，以至後來的資訊科技股爆破及沙士等事件令樓市急速下調，「八萬五」政策急急煞停。1997年至2003年間，樓價暴跌六成半，政府不得已擱置「八萬五」計劃，並推出一系列樓市刺激措施，幫助樓市復甦。

「當時的情況竟然導致政策徹底轉向，無疑是我在職場生涯中最難忘的一頁。」

「當時無暇作詳細評估，當務之急是切實評估面前的危機，以及如何將損失減到最低。已經劃撥作發展的房屋用地、已經簽署的建築合約、已經打好的地基、已經開始的工程，總不能在一夜之間叫停。我們需要與所有相關方面磋商解決辦法。」

鄔滿海認為，聆聽他人的想法是十分重要的。他和一眾專業人士、團隊成員及持份者合作，耐心聆聽他們的關注和意見，從中不斷充實自己。

「成功的典範需要學習，失敗的教訓亦當汲取。每一次失敗總會其原因，這些原因也是寶貴的一課。」

當被問及他的管理哲學，鄔滿海表示，為下屬樹立榜樣十分重要。舉例而言，如果要求每人都準時上班，首先自己就該守時。

「以身作則是關鍵。行動勝於空談。」

鄔滿海在政府退休前出任屋宇署署長，之後先是在房協擔任副主席，並於2012年當選房協主席。

鄔滿海認為，香港未來的房屋問題主要在於人口老化和家庭細小化。現有的部份住宅樓宇對長者而言並不方便，不適合獨居長者居住。

鄔滿海表示，目前本港部分樓宇缺乏「長者友善」及「無障礙」的設計（例如為行動不便人士設置牆面扶手，方便日常活動）及適合長者的康樂設施，亦沒有保健和復康綜合服務配套。

此外，小家庭越來越普遍，年輕一代渴望置業，令住宅及相關設施的土地需求十分殷切。同時，社會亦日益重視環保及可持續發展。

「我們面臨的挑戰是如何平衡各方意見，尋求共識。這就是我熱衷公職的原因：我們的工作不是為了達成業績目標或把握市場機遇，而是與社會各界共同開拓未來。」

本文由 Classified Post 撰文