

# Working hand in hand



*Following the Chief Executive's 2016 policy address delivered on January 13, three HKIS Policy Panel Chairmen discuss how closer relationships can lead to improvements in the areas of land, building and housing.*

May Chan Rhodes

The government needs to provide policy support to bodies such as the Housing Society so that they can provide affordable, elderly-friendly housing.

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A closer relationship between the government, the private sector and different stakeholders is crucial to ensuring improved housing quality and more efficient use of land, says the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (HKIS) in response to the government's 2016 policy address.

Sr C K Lau, President of the HKIS and Chairman of the HKIS Land Policy Panel, says the policy address pointed in the right direction, but that it would be difficult to realise the policy goals if the government is to "work on its own".

For example, in the government's effort to boost land supply, it has announced a series of measures, including the move to release existing GIC (Government, Institution or Community) lands for commercial or residential use. While such efforts are appreciated, the government should also motivate developers to work on the land in their banks, Lau says. "The government needs to think about how to provide incentives to the private sector in order to get them on the same page. So much more can be achieved when the public and private sectors work hand in hand together."

In another example, the government announced the launch of a pilot scheme wherein the land premium for lease modifications can be waived. Its aim is to encourage landowners to construct footbridges or subways at their own cost in accordance with the pedestrian network planned by the government.

While such a move will reduce the landowners' costs, it does not offer enough incentive to take advantage of the move, which is in the public interest. Lau urged the government to widen the pilot scheme to include all of Hong Kong, and look at the possibility of sharing the costs of the pedestrian network construction with the private sector in order to improve pedestrian traffic.

Sr Vincent Ho, Immediate Past President and Chairman of the HKIS Building Policy Panel, says that the government should also consider ways to enhance the efficiency of the building and construction approval process. He suggested a centralized system for the Lands Department to approve the submission of building plans and master layout plans, and the appointment of senior technical officials to oversee such a mechanism to avoid unnecessary back-and-forth technical enquiries.

"At the moment, most of the manpower of the Lands Department is devoted to lands administration and lease enforcement, and they may not be sufficiently familiar with building and construction matters," Ho says. "The officers tend to ask for a lot of unnecessary or premature details just because they see something unfamiliar on the submissions." In the meantime, the HKIS is keen to work closely with the Lands Department to update them on industry practices to save time for both sides, Ho adds.

While agreeing on the overall direction of the policy address, Ho says that it did not pay enough attention to addressing the issues related to building maintenance. While the policy address recognized the need to regulate the building repair and maintenance industry, it had yet to make the commitment to establishing a regulatory body to ensure service quality and transparency in pricing.

"We need a game-changer to the entire business model in the industry, which is unhealthy and opaque," Ho says. "Think about the many ordinary citizens who do not have the means or information to handle dishonest contractors. They need a platform to share information, to seek help in ending unfair contracts and seek compensation from the contractors."

The need for better regulation is becoming more imminent, as Hong Kong is faced with the challenge of keeping up the condition of ageing buildings – another aspect that has been overlooked by the policy address. “There are a good number of old buildings in our existing housing stock and you cannot simply demolish them all,” Ho says. “You have to think about how to preserve, maintain and enhance them to make sure that the residents have a secure and comfortable living environment. We should have a policy to promote the preservation and enhancement of old buildings, and lengthen their longevity.”

Sr CK Chan, who chairs the Housing Policy Panel at the HKIS, says it is usually a struggle for the organizing committees of old buildings to carry out maintenance work because of chaotic, multiple ownerships. He suggests the government consider lending money to owners to improve their living conditions, and register the expenses with the Lands Registry so that the amount will be charged to respective landlords when there is a change of ownership.

Chan also says the government has yet to follow up with its pledge to improve the average living space of Hong Kong people. “Compared with other cities with a similar GDP level, our living condition is probably among the worst because our average living space is one of the smallest,” Chan says. “The Chief Executive has pledged to improve our living space, but new flats are getting smaller and smaller. This is contrary to the government’s intention.

“These 30-, 40-, 50-storey buildings of tiny flats won’t just go away. They are here to stay for decades. We need a policy that clearly says that we are not going to have smaller and smaller flats flooding the market in the future because this is not how we want Hong Kong people to live.”

On housing policy related to newly built homes, Chan says there is a void in catering to the housing needs of an ageing population, especially when it comes to less affluent elderly people who live on their own. He suggested the government provide policy support to provide affordable, elderly-friendly housing. Referring to current issues in this area, he cited the Housing Society’s development of its elderly homes as an example: the society did not enjoy any land premium discount, and had to sell the units at millions of dollars each as a result.

When asked about the major effects of the 2016 policy address on surveyors, both Chan and Lau say there will be plenty of opportunities for the industry, as the government will need expertise in boosting land supply, building new homes and maintaining the existing buildings.

Ho adds that the “Belt and Road” initiative, as mentioned in the policy address, could provide great opportunities for Hong Kong surveying professionals to work in Mainland China and overseas markets. He urged the government to provide more market information for Hong Kong surveying professionals to remind them to the opportunities linked to Belt and Road, and to help them promote their professional services across the border and overseas.

“It is also a good opportunity for small- and medium-size start-ups, especially with financial support from the government in terms of low-interest loans and seeding funds,” Ho says. “We look forward to more solid details from the government on how it will work with us to capture business opportunities.”

*The article is published courtesy of Classified Post.*

# 攜手共進

行政長官於1月13日發表2016年施政報告後，三名香港測量師學會政策小組主席討論如何透過加強各方關係，改善土地、樓宇及房屋問題。

May Chan Rhodes

香港測量師學會就政府的2016年施政報告稱，加強政府、私營企業及不同持份者之間的關係，對確保改善房屋品質及提高土地使用效率至關重要。

香港測量師學會會長兼土地政策小組主席劉振江測量師表示，施政報告方向正確，但若政府「獨自行事」，政策目標未必能充分實現。

舉例而言，政府在提振土地供應時宣佈了一系列措施，包括將現有的「政府、機構或社區」（GIC）土地用作商業或住宅用途。劉振江表示，這些努力值得讚賞，但政府也應鼓勵開發商發展他們持有的土地。「政府需要思考如何激勵私營公司，讓他們與政府同步。如果公營機構和私營企業攜手協力，他們將取得更顯著的成果。」

再以政府的契約修訂免補地價的先導計劃為例，該政策旨在鼓勵土地擁有人按照政府規劃的行人網絡，自費建造行人天橋或隧道。

此舉雖然會降低土地擁有者的成本，但未必足以鼓勵他們參與，從而公眾受惠於此措施。劉振江敦促政府擴大先導計劃至整個香港，並研究分擔私營企業的行人網絡建設成本的可能性，以改善行人交通。

香港測量師學會上任會長、建築政策小組主席何鉅業測量師表示，政府亦應考慮如何提高樓宇及建造審批程序的效率。他建議地政總署採用集中的系統審批所提交的樓宇規劃及總綱發展

藍圖，並委任高級技術人員監督有關機制，避免不必要的反覆技術諮詢。

「目前地政總署把大部分人力分配於土地管理及契約執行，他們可能不夠熟悉樓宇及建造事宜。」何鉅業稱。「工作人員詢問很多不必要或時機不對的問題，因為他們對所提交的材料內容不熟悉。」何鉅業補充道，香港測量師學會希望與地政總署緊密合作，向他們介紹最新的行業慣例，以節省雙方時間。

何鉅業雖然同意施政報告的總體方向，但認為施政報告對解決樓宇維修相關問題的關注不足。儘管施政報告承認有必要規管樓宇維修及維修行業，卻並未承諾設立監管機構，以確保服務質素及定價的透明度。

何鉅業表示：「行業的營運模式不良且並不透明，我們需要一個能改革行業規則的機構。想想大眾市民缺乏途徑或資訊來應付不誠實的承建商。他們需要一個平台分享資訊，幫助他們終止不公平合約，並追討承建商賠償。」

加強監管已經迫在眉睫，因為香港正面臨維修老化樓宇的挑戰，這是施政報告忽略的另一方面。「現有住宅當中，舊樓數目眾多，不能就此拆除了事。」何鉅業說。「你必須考慮如何保護、維修及強化這些舊樓，確保居民有安全舒適的生活環境。我們應有促進保護及強化舊樓的政策，並延長樓宇的壽命。」

香港測量師學會房屋政策小組主席陳昌傑測量師表示，由於舊樓的業主可能是基層長者，難以進行維修工作。他建議政府考慮協助他們成立業主立案法團，如有需要可提供借貸，並向土地註冊處登記有關費用，以便在業權變更時向相關業主收回費用。

陳昌傑還表示，政府尚未兌現改善香港人平均居住面積的承諾。他說：「與其他本地生產總值相約的城市相比，我們的生活環境可能是最差的，因為我們是人均居住面積最小的城市之一。行政長官承諾改善我們的生活環境，但新樓卻越來越小，有違政府的意圖。」

「這些30層至50層高的微型住宅不會一下子消失，還會存在數十年。我們需要制訂政策，確保未來不讓越來越小的住宅充斥市場，因為我們不希望香港人這樣生活。」

至於有關新建房屋的政策，陳昌傑說現有政策未能完全滿足老化人口的住屋需求，對不太富裕的獨居長者尤其如是。他建議政府推行政策，提供容易負擔的、適合長者的居所。談及這個範疇的問題時，他以房屋協會發展的長者房屋為例，表示房屋協會沒享有任何補地價優惠，只能以數百萬元的價格「出售」這些單位。

當問及2016年施政報告對測量師的主要影響時，陳昌傑及劉振江均表示行業機遇處處，因為政府需要有關促進土地供應、建設新住宅及維修現有樓宇的專業人才。

何鉅業補充說，施政報告中提到的「一帶一路」計劃可為香港測量師帶來在中國內地及海外工作的機會。他敦促政府為香港測量師提供更多市場資訊，讓他們留意與「一帶一路」相關的機會，協助他們在內地及海外提供專業服務。

「特別在政府低息貸款及創始資金的支持下，這是中小型新企業的發展良機。」何鉅業說。「我們期待政府公佈具體細節，說明政府如何與我們一起抓緊商機。」

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