

Speech by the Honourable Henry Tang
Chief Secretary for Administration of the HKSAR
at the HKIA Annual General Meeting 2008
on Tuesday, 16 December 2008

Ronald (Lu), Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening. It is a great pleasure to join you for the Hong Kong Institute of Architects Annual General Meeting.

2. Hong Kong's architecture has consistently reflected the confidence, ambition and aspirations of our people. At the same time, Hong Kong people have been inspired by increasingly modern, high-tech, comfortable and ever more spectacular surroundings.

3. We like to call Hong Kong, Asia's world city – and I believe, with good reason. This evening, I will talk about some of the issues that will shape our development as an international city in the next few years.

4. In particular, I will focus on major development projects, urban renewal and heritage conservation. All this against the backdrop of the worst global financial crisis we have experienced.

5. As the financial crisis spiraled from a sub-prime lending problem in the US to a full-blown global economic meltdown, the Government has consistently reaffirmed its determination to keep infrastructure development on track. By this, I mean timely and well-planned projects that will strengthen our efficiency, improve cross-boundary connectivity and enhance our unique city lifestyle. All these will further solidify the foundation on which our future competitiveness depends.

6. Last week, the Chief Executive estimated that some 55 000 jobs would be created next year by fast-tracking infrastructure projects during the current global economic slump.

7. The ten major projects highlighted by the Chief Executive in his last two Policy Addresses remain at the core of our infrastructure development plans. These include the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the Kai Tak Development, the West Kowloon Cultural District project and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link.

8. In addition, there are a number of other smaller-scale but vitally important initiatives that will enhance our environment and improve our facilities, as well as create jobs, wealth and opportunities for our people.

9. In the 2008-09 Legislative Council session we plan to submit more than 100 projects to the Finance Committee for approval. The total cost of these projects is estimated at over \$100 billion, more than double the amount that was approved last year.

10. As the West Kowloon project is perhaps our single most ambitious and unprecedented undertaking, allow me to detail our progress and our plans.

11. Since the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority was established in October, our priority has been to work out a detailed strategy and timeframe for the preparation of the overall Development Plan. This Plan will lay out the various facilities in relation to each other and identify the land uses including the use of open space.

12. The Development Plan will be completed in several stages to make sure we get it right, and that it reflects the views of the relevant stakeholders as well as the general public.

13. First, we will engage arts and cultural stakeholders as well as the public on the requirements and other general aspects of the Cultural District. Their views are vital to gauging the overall expectations of the project.

14. This will be followed by the preparation and display of three conceptual plans to help us engage the public further and seek out their views before recommending a Development Plan.

15. Once that is finalised it will again be shown to the public to help us refine the details before submitting it to the Town Planning Board for consideration.

16. There will be ample opportunity for the public, stakeholders and professionals to express their views and participate in the preparation of the Development Plan. Our vision is to create a district that integrates, connects, and is cohesive to its surrounding areas and Hong Kong in general. Further, we want this district to be vibrant, have a life on its own, and be able to grow organically. It will be a joint venture by the people of Hong Kong and for the people of Hong Kong and beyond.

17. The architectural designs of the M+ museum, Xiqu or Chinese opera Centre, and the Concert Hall will undergo a competitive process. This is expected to take place in 2010 to 2011. The Authority will also try our best to explore the possibility to open the other arts and cultural facilities to competitive tender in order to showcase our city's expertise in architecture to both a local and international audience.

18. I encourage all our architects to contribute to the design of the Cultural District and to help us engage the public on the Development Plan next year.

19. My next point is urban renewal. We simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye to older areas in our city. And there is plenty of potential for creative solutions here too.

20. The revitalised Woo Cheong Pawn Shop (和昌大押) buildings in the Urban Renewal Authority's Johnston Road project is a good recent example of how to improve our built environment. This will encourage the URA to achieve equally successful results in other areas such as the conservation park in Nga Tsin Wai Village (衙前圍村) and the Blue House and Green House clusters in Wan Chai.

21. More recently, the URA has adopted a conservation-led approach for its Staunton Street/Wing Lee Street redevelopment project in Sheung Wan. This will reduce the development density of the project and contribute to the ambiance of the area.

22. A Review of the Urban Renewal Strategy is under way so that we can continue to respond to the needs of the community, and at the same time protect buildings with historical value.

23. My final point today is heritage conservation.
24. We are fully aware of the need for a holistic approach to conserving our valuable heritage. Preservation is not the end itself. We must breathe life into the preserved buildings.
25. The new heritage conservation policy announced last year is in full swing.
26. First, there is the Heritage Impact Assessment mechanism. Under this mechanism, all new capital works projects that may impact on heritage sites are required to undergo an assessment.
27. We have also launched the “Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme”. Here the Government will provide financial assistance to non-profit-making organisations to carry out adaptive re-use of historic buildings. We have received over 100 applications for the first batch of seven buildings and the assessment is about to be completed.
28. Another initiative is a financial assistance scheme to help and encourage private owners to maintain graded historic buildings under their ownership.

29. Heritage conservation is a long-term commitment that we take very seriously. The former Police Married Quarters Site in Aberdeen Street – the original location of the Central School – has been removed from the List of Sites for Sale by Application. Instead, the revitalisation plan will reflect the history and characteristics of the area along Hollywood Road, including its association with creative industries and education.

30. We are also planning to invite expressions of interest by private operators for the adaptive re-use of Haw Par Mansion for wine-related facilities. This would help to promote the development of Hong Kong's wine industry while also preserving the character of the Mansion and opening it up to the public.

31. I am grateful to the HKIA for assisting with our heritage conservation policy and the Urban Renewal Strategy Review. The Development Bureau has engaged the Architecture Centre on promoting public awareness of our local architecture. The Centre will also conduct a study on international benchmarking of building controls on the adaptive re-use of historic buildings.

32. Ladies and gentlemen, I have outlined some of the areas that are central to the Government's architectural blueprint in the next four years and beyond.

33. We will create more opportunities for our architects by fast-tracking current projects and rolling out new ones that will contribute to our economic resurgence and sustainable development.

34. And we will continue to place more emphasis on preserving and revitalising “Old Hong Kong” to enhance the character of our city for current and future generations to enjoy.

35. We cannot achieve these goals without the professionalism and creativity of our architectures and the dedicated support of the HKIA.

36. Thank you for your contributions and I am sure we can count on our architects to come up with even more inspiring designs in the future.

37. It only remains for me to congratulate the 77 architects who will today receive their certificates under the mutual recognition of qualifications arrangement. In the past five years more than 750 architects from Hong Kong and the Mainland have taken advantage of this arrangement under the CEPA framework. I can assure you that we will continue to strengthen our cross-boundary relations to open up more opportunities for architects on the Mainland.

38. Thank you.