

Chapter VII : Planning and Lands

7.1 At the Chairman's invitation, the Secretary for Planning and Lands (SPL), Mr John TSANG, briefed members on the four priority areas of the Planning and Lands Bureau (PLB) in 2002-03 (Appendix V-6).

Urban renewal

7.2 Mr LAU Ping-cheung enquired whether provisions had been included in the 2002-03 Estimates for implementing the urban renewal projects to be undertaken by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) in the coming five years. The Deputy Secretary for Planning and Lands (Urban Renewal & Building) (DS(PL)URB) advised that URA had submitted its first draft 5-year corporate plan and first draft annual business plan to the Financial Secretary (FS) for approval. After the approval of the two plans, the Government would consider the need for and form of financial support to URA to facilitate its implementation of the projects. For planning purpose, a sum had been reserved under the Capital Investment Fund for 2002-03.

7.3 In response to Mr LAU Ping-cheung's further question, DS(PL)URB explained that apart from direct injection of funds into URA, the Government would also consider other options, such as waiver of land premia for urban renewal sites. Mr Fred LI enquired whether the waiver would apply to all urban renewal projects, including the 25 uncompleted projects of the former Land Development Corporation (LDC), or only apply on a case-by-case basis. DS(PL)URB said that the waiver mentioned by the Chief Executive in his 1999 Policy Address was one of the financial arrangements being considered by the Government to enhance the viability of urban renewal projects. The Government's initial thinking was to apply the same treatment to all new projects. However, the waiver might not apply to the former LDC projects where the land premia issue had already been agreed upon. She assured members that the Government would consider in detail the mode of financing for URA after FS had approved the first corporate plan and first annual business plan of URA.

7.4 In view of the abundant resources available in the Housing Society (HS), Mr James TO suggested the amalgamation of URA and HS to facilitate the effective utilization of resources and early implementation of urban renewal projects. In response, SPL pointed out that the Government was encouraging URA and HS to cooperate at the strategic level. SPL agreed to take Mr TO's

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suggestion into account.

Allocation of sites for housing development

7.5 Referring to the new mechanism for the allocation of sites for housing development, Ms Emily LAU expressed her grave concern that the Government might reserve the "high quality" sites for private housing development and leave those of less favourable locations for public housing. She enquired about the criteria for land allocation under the new mechanism, and whether a balance among the interests of various sectors of the community would be maintained.

7.6 SPL clarified that the Government's land supply policy was driven by market demand. To formalize the existing arrangements for the allocation of sites for housing development, a mechanism was established under which a number of factors would be taken into account in deciding the allocation, such as the wish of some residents affected by urban renewal projects to be rehoused in the same district, and to provide a good mix of public and private housing, etc. An existing committee comprising representatives of PLB, Housing Bureau, Housing Department, Lands Department and Planning Department would make recommendations for the consideration of the Chief Secretary for Administration. SPL also assured members that the Administration would strike a balance among the interests of various sectors of the community with a view to achieving the best economic and social benefit, and that there was no policy to set up "ghettoes" in the community.

7.7 In view of the significant impact of the mechanism on the community, Ms Emily LAU considered that the Administration should handle the issue prudently and conduct a public consultation exercise. SPL stressed that the mechanism was only established to formalize the existing arrangements. Ms LAU reiterated her concern and strongly urged the Administration to consult the public on the issue.

7.8 Mr Abraham SHEK appreciated the Government's efforts in maintaining stability of the property market by ensuring an adequate supply of land to meet the long-term needs of the community. He enquired how far the housing development policies of public organizations, such as Mass Transit

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Railway Corporation and Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation, would tie in with Government's overall policy. In response, SPL pointed out that these organizations, like private developers, would need to respond to the market demand and plan their development projects in the same way as other private developers.

Planning and design for new reclaimed land

7.9 Referring to the five winning proposals in the Concept Plan Competition for the West Kowloon Reclamation (WKC) area, Ir Dr Raymond HO was concerned whether the Administration would adopt the proposal awarded the first prize or an integration of the five proposals to produce a detailed masterplan for the area. SPL replied that the prime objective of the Government was to develop a world class cluster of facilities that would contain vibrant arts and cultural developments for the area. While the masterplan would probably be based on one of the winning concepts, selected features of the remaining winners could also be incorporated into the design.

7.10 Mr Albert CHAN commended the remarkable design of the proposal awarded the first prize. In view of the prominent locations of WKC, South East Kowloon Development (SEKD) and Central Reclamation areas, Mr CHAN considered that the design for the three areas should be compatible with each other. He however considered the initial planning proposals for SEKD and Central Reclamation areas unsatisfactory and not innovative. He asked whether open competitions would be conducted for the design of the two areas.

7.11 In response, SPL advised that the Town Planning Board had decided at its meeting on 22 March 2002 to designate two pieces of land near the waterfront areas in SEKD as Comprehensive Development Areas. The Administration was considering employing innovative designs for the waterfront areas in SEKD and the Tamar Basin Reclamation Site in the Central District. As regards the possibility of redesigning the whole of the SEKD area, SPL pointed out that the design for the development area had been under discussion for years. Moreover, work on the public housing estates in the northern part of SEKD and the installation of underground facilities had already commenced. The Administration was also advancing the programme for a cruise harbour for the area in the south tip.

Title Registration System

7.12 Referring to the Administration's plan to introduce a bill on the Title Registration System (the System) into Legislative Council (LegCo) in the first half of the next legislative session, Mr Albert HO noted that about 18 months would be required after the passage of the bill for the preparatory work for implementing the System. To facilitate the early implementation of the System, Mr HO saw the need to expedite the whole process. He suggested the Administration to proceed with the drafting of the bill and the preparatory work in parallel.

7.13 SPL pointed out that the System involved many complex issues and a consensus had yet to be reached on the issues by the parties concerned. It was expected that considerable time would be required by LegCo to scrutinize the bill. DS(PL)URB added that the necessary preparatory work for implementing the System could only be commenced after the passage of the bill when the operational details were finalized. Nevertheless, the Administration would endeavour to shorten the 18-month period and complete the preparatory work as early as practicable.

7.14 In reply to Mr Albert HO's enquiry on the details of the Indemnity Provisions of the System, DS(PL)URB said that the Administration was considering the setting of an upper limit for each claim and the details had yet to be worked out. In view of the controversial issues involved, Mr HO suggested the Administration to consider implementing the System by phases and to make reference to relevant overseas experience. DS(PL)URB advised that the Administration planned to operate the System, after the passage of the bill, in parallel with the existing deeds registration system. There was no plan at this stage to implement the System by phases. She however assured members that the relevant Panel would be consulted on the proposed System before the end of the current legislative session.

Small house grant applications

7.15 Referring to the anticipated reduction in the number of approved small house grant applications from 1 300 in 1999 to 1 000 in 2002, Dr TANG Siu-tong was concerned whether the downward adjustment was due to the

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reduction in manpower resources and whether the Administration would put in place measures to expedite the processing of such applications.

7.16 The Director of Lands replied that the Administration had no plan to reduce the number of staff involved in the processing of small house grant applications, which had remained the same for some years. The anticipated reduction in the number of approved applications in 2002 was mainly due to the fact that as the New Territories became more developed, less lands were available for small house development. To help resolve the problem, the Lands Department had proposed a village layout plan scheme for consultation with Heung Yee Kuk and the Rural Committees. The proposed scheme aimed to identify in the villages concerned possible sites for small house development. The support of Heung Yee Kuk and the Rural Committees was required to take the scheme forward.

Conversion of industrial buildings for other uses

7.17 Referring to the Town Planning Board's recent agreement to allow "Education Institution" and "Place of Public Entertainment" in "Industrial" zones, Mr TAM Yiu-chung noted that the conversion of industrial buildings for these uses had become possible. Responding to Mr TAM's enquiry on the progress made so far, SPL said that positive response had been received from the market. The Administration would monitor the market demand and make appropriate measures to facilitate the conversion.

Building facilities for the elderly

7.18 Responding to Miss CHAN Yuen-han's enquiry on the consultancy study on the provision of facilities in buildings for the elderly, the Director of Buildings (DB) advised that the study, which would commence in August 2002, was scheduled for completion in May 2003. The Administration would then consult LegCo and the professional bodies on the findings of the study and consider the need to make amendments to the provisions in the relevant building regulations and code of practice.

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Clearance of illegal rooftop structures

7.19 Mr Frederick FUNG pointed out that under the current policy, occupants of illegal rooftop structures who were eligible for rehousing upon clearance were offered public rental housing units, interim housing units in the New Territories (for those who had moved into illegal rooftop structures after 1 June 1982), or an additional option to receive cash allowance in lieu of rehousing. To reduce the expenditure on cash allowance, Mr FUNG suggested the Administration to review the threshold of "1 June 1982" to the effect that more occupants would be eligible for rehousing to public rental housing units. In response, DB pointed out that the rehousing policy was under the purview of the Housing Authority. The Buildings Department, Housing Department and social workers would provide assistance to affected occupants in resolving any problems arising from clearance operations.

Development of local community economy

7.20 Referring to the promotion of the development of the local community economy mentioned in FS's Budget Speech, Mr TAM Yiu-chung asked whether PLB had any plans to tie in with the development. SPL replied that various sites had been made available for short term tenancy, such as the sites in Hung Hom and Kai Tak areas. PLB had also taken the initiative to keep the Tourism Commission informed of the suitable sites for the development of the tourist industry.

Honoraria for non-official members of Government boards and committees

7.21 Referring to Subhead 110 (Honoraria for members of committees) under Head 56 (Government Secretariat: Planning and Lands Bureau and Works Bureau), Mr IP Kwok-him noted that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Town Planning Appeal Board (TPAB) were given an annual retainer and remunerated at \$4,440 per appeal sitting and at \$8,870 per written decision, while members of TPAB were only remunerated at \$735 per attendance. As regards the Appeal Tribunal (Buildings) (AT(B)), the Chairman and members were remunerated respectively at \$790 and \$720 per hour of service. Given the similar nature of work of these two appeal board and tribunal, Mr IP expressed concern about the difference in the basis for calculating the honoraria for the

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Chairman, Deputy Chairman and members concerned.

7.22 The Deputy Secretary for the Treasury (DS(Tsy)) advised that the Finance Committee (FC) had approved in 1980 the broad principles governing the remuneration of non-official members serving on boards and committees set up by the Government. The Secretary for the Treasury (S for Tsy) had been delegated the authority by FC to approve remuneration subject to a ceiling. This ceiling was regularly revised with reference to the movement of the Consumer Price Index (C). For cases where higher rates of remuneration were proposed to recognize the professional experience and expertise of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and members, the approval of FC was required on a case-by-case basis unless the level of remuneration was governed by specific provisions in the relevant legislation. To facilitate bureaux and departments in considering and proposing an appropriate rate of remuneration and to ensure greater consistency, S for Tsy had issued in July 2000 the guidelines on "Remuneration of Non-official Members of Boards and Committees". The Finance Bureau had also posted on its webpages in the Internet all the approved rates for easy reference of departments and bureaux.

7.23 DS(PL)URB advised that given the level of legal experience and expertise called for and the workload involved in considering appeal cases and writing up the decisions of TPAB, FC had approved in 1991 that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of TPAB be given an annual retainer and be remunerated for each sitting and each written decision. As regards AT(B), it was provided in the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) that the Chairman and any member of AT(B) should be paid such remuneration at such rate as the Chief Executive might determine. In determining the honoraria for the Chairman and members of AT(B), PLB had made reference to the guidelines issued by S for Tsy and the approved remuneration rates applied to other boards and committees performing similar functions.

7.24 To ensure consistency in the granting of honoraria to non-official members of Government boards and committees, Mr IP Kwok-him suggested the Administration to conduct a review for the purpose. DS(Tsy) responded that as previously explained to the LegCo Subcommittee on Payment of Honoraria to Government Boards and Committees in 2000, there were several hundred boards and committees carrying out varied functions and duties. As the nature of the

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work of the non-officials and the demand on their time varied considerably, it was more appropriate for Controlling Officers to review as and when necessary whether non-official members serving on boards and committees under their purview should be remunerated and the rates of remuneration.

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