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**Panel on Planning, Lands and Works
and Panel on Housing**

**Minutes of joint meeting
held on Friday, 5 July 2002 at 10:00 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Members of Panel on Planning, Lands and Works

- Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP (Chairman)
- * Hon LAU Ping-cheung (Deputy Chairman)
- Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
- * Hon James TO Kun-sun
- Hon WONG Yung-kan
- Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBS, JP
- Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP
- Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
- * Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
- * Hon WONG Sing-chi
- * Hon IP Kwok-him, JP

Members of Panel on Housing

- Hon Albert HO Chun-yan (Chairman)
- Hon CHAN Kam-lam (Deputy Chairman)
- Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
- Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
- Hon NG Leung-sing, JP
- Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
- Hon SZETO Wah
- Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee

Members absent : Member of Panel on Planning, Lands and Works

* Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP

Members of Panel on Housing

Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP

Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP

Hon SIN Chung-kai

Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP

Hon Howard YOUNG, JP

Dr Hon YEUNG Sum

Dr Hon LO Wing-lok

(*Also members of the Panel on Housing)

Public officers attending : Mr Michael SUEN, GBS, JP
Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands

Mr John TSANG, JP

Permanent Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands
(Planning and Lands)

Mr C M LEUNG, JP

Permanent Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands
(Housing)

Clerk in attendance : Miss Salumi CHAN
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)5

Staff in attendance : Ms Pauline NG
Assistant Secretary General 1

Mrs Queenie YU

Senior Assistant Secretary (1)6

I. Election of Chairman

Dr TANG Siu-tong was elected Chairman of the joint meeting.

II. Briefing by the Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands

2. The Chairman advised that the purpose of the joint meeting of the Panel on Planning, Lands and Works and Panel on Housing was for the newly appointed Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands to brief the two Panels on his work plan.

Briefing by the Secretary

3. The Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands (SHPL) briefed members that the main objective underlying the Government's housing policy remained to provide "Better Housing for All" to the Hong Kong community, and to ensure that public resources would be efficiently allocated to cater for families in genuine need. In delivering public housing programmes, the Government would ensure the stability of the private residential property market by avoiding any overlap with the subsidized home ownership market, and by a clear and transparent system of land sale and allocation.

4. SHPL advised that the Committee on the Review of the Institutional Framework for Public Housing (RIFPH Committee) chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) had published its report on 20 June 2002 and put up 20 recommendations to address the problems of the present institutional framework for the delivery of public housing programmes. The Administration was taking follow-up actions on the recommendations of the report. One of the recommendations implemented was the merger of the Housing Bureau and the Housing Department into a new housing organization. The organization would work to SHPL through the Permanent Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands (Housing) (PS/HPL(Housing)). With effect from 1 July 2002, PS/HPL(Housing) had also been designated as the Director for Housing.

5. On the planning front, SHPL advised that the Administration had formulated the blueprint for the development of the waterfront areas on both sides of the Victoria Harbour, and planned to implement a number of relevant projects, including South East Kowloon Development, West Kowloon Reclamation, Central and Wan Chai Reclamation, and the construction of waterfront promenades compatible to international standards on both sides of the Harbour. The long-term land use planning study for Hong Kong would also examine how to enhance closer links with Mainland China, in particular the Pearl River Delta.

6. On land policy, SHPL said that it had been the Government's aim to provide an adequate supply of land to meet market demand and to facilitate infrastructural developments. Each year, the Government announced the Land Sale and Development Programme providing details of sites to be sold or available for sale in the coming year and the amount of land for housing and non-housing development available in the following four financial years. The Government would continue to provide an adequate supply of land to meet market demand through the established open and fair mechanism. It would also monitor closely the development of the property market and review the arrangements for land sale from time to time to ensure that our land policy was compatible with the needs of the community.

7. On building safety and maintenance, SHPL advised that the Administration was taking steps to implement the proposals in the "Comprehensive Strategy for Building Safety and Timely Maintenance" announced in April 2001. The Building Safety Loan Scheme had been well received by the public since its introduction in July 2001. Moreover, the Pilot Coordinated Maintenance of Buildings Scheme had proceeded to its second stage. Under the Pilot Scheme, six government departments made concerted efforts to coordinate necessary repair works for target buildings and provided a "one-stop-shop" service to the owners concerned. At the same time, the Government had stepped up enforcement action against unauthorized building works to ensure public safety. To further rationalize the building control regime and bring about more effective enforcement, the Administration intended to introduce amendments to the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123). The Panel on Planning, Lands and Works had been briefed on the proposed amendments on 14 June 2002.

8. As regards urban renewal, SHPL advised that the Urban Renewal Authority (URA)'s first 5-year Corporate Plan (CP) and first annual Business Plan had been approved by the Financial Secretary. The approved CP comprised a total of 42 projects, including the 25 uncompleted projects of the former Land Development Corporation. In June 2002, the Finance Committee had approved a commitment of \$10 billion for capital injection into URA by phases in the coming five years for implementing the urban renewal programme. The Administration would monitor closely the progress of the implementation of the urban renewal programme and provide assistance to URA where necessary.

9. SHPL further advised that as a Principal Official under the Accountability System implemented since 1 July 2002, he was accountable to the Legislative Council (LegCo) in accordance with Article 64 of the Basic Law. He would maintain a proactive approach to exchange views and enhance mutual cooperation with Members in order to ensure the successful implementation of the policies under his purview.

Discussion

Housing policy

10. Mr Albert CHAN Wai-yip sought clarification from SHPL on the recent press report on his statement that the Government's target of achieving an overall home ownership rate of 70% would be abandoned. SHPL clarified that the statement was only his personal view expressed during an interview with the media. He assured Members that any proposal to change the existing policy would need to go through the established government procedures, including consultation with LegCo Members.

11. Mr Albert HO Chun-yan was concerned that if the Government was to abandon its target of achieving an overall home ownership rate of 70%, it might also abandon its target of providing 50 000 housing assistance opportunities a year in the public sector. In response, SHPL assured Members that the Government had no such plan at the present stage.

12. In view of the decrease in the supply of flats under the Home Ownership Scheme, Ir Dr Raymond HO Chung-tai asked whether there would be any change in the ratio for public and private housing for the new towns. SHPL said that the ratio would depend on the Government's overall direction on housing policy and the market demand. The Government would continue to provide home assistance loans to enable more eligible families to benefit from housing subsidy and to allow them a wider choice of housing.

13. Referring to the Chief Executive's undertaking that "the concerns and priorities of Hong Kong people would be the Government's concerns and priorities", Mr LEE Cheuk-yan pointed out that in view of the economic downturn and cumulative deflation in recent years, public housing tenants had been asking for rent reduction. He was concerned whether SHPL had the determination to assist public housing tenants, who were mainly the low-income groups, in this regard. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung shared Mr LEE's concern. SHPL appreciated the concern of the tenants and Members. He pointed out that as the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) was conducting a review on the matter, he would study the finding once available and consider the way forward. Referring to the recent rumour that HA would recommend in its report that the Housing Ordinance (Cap.283) should be amended to enable further rent increase for public housing estates, Mr LEUNG sought SHPL's view on the matter. SHPL reiterated that he had not received any recommendations from the HA yet. He would study HA's recommendations, if any, after the review had been completed.

Review of the Institutional Framework for Public Housing

14. Mr IP Kwok-him enquired about the follow-up actions to be taken by the Administration to implement the recommendations in the report of the RIFPH Committee and the implementation schedule, in particular the recommendations pertaining to HA. SHPL said that as stated in the report, the manner and speed with which the transition in respect of HA was accomplished would be matters for the Principal Official (i.e. SHPL) to determine, as would the legislative changes required. On the recommendation that the Principal Official should be appointed Chairman of HA ex officio, SHPL said that he would consult Members and the parties concerned on the necessary legislative amendments as soon as possible. His preliminary view was to implement the recommendation before the end of 2002. As regards the recommendation for the executive duties of HA to be reduced and for HA to acquire a wider advisory remit, SHPL said that he would adopt an open mind and consult Members and the parties concerned before deciding on the way forward. There was no concrete timetable at the moment, as it would take time to examine and deliberate how best to implement the recommendation.

15. Mr CHAN Kam-lam did not see the need for a Principal Official to be appointed chairman of an advisory body. As this was not a common approach, Mr Fred LI Wah-ming was concerned whether it was the Government's attempt to exert full control on HA. Mr Frederick FUNG Kin-kee considered it more appropriate for a non-Government official to be appointed Chairman of HA. SHPL might attend meetings of HA to exchange views with HA. In response, SHPL advised that at the present stage when HA remained a statutory body, it was appropriate for him to be appointed Chairman of HA. If it were finally decided that HA would be transformed into an advisory body, he would examine carefully whether it was still appropriate for him to take up the chairmanship. SHPL reassured Members that he was fully aware of the views expressed by various parties on the issue. He reiterated that he would adopt an open mind and consult Members and the parties concerned before deciding on the way forward.

16. To enhance the representativeness of HA, Mr Frederick FUNG suggested that a member of each of the 18 District Councils and a certain number of members of the LegCo Panel on Housing be appointed as members of HA. SHPL agreed to consider Mr FUNG's suggestion.

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Clothes-drying racks of Harmony-type public housing units

17. Mr Albert CHAN pointed out that the installation of clothes-drying racks outside kitchen windows in Harmony-type public housing units had caused a lot of problems, e.g. making the clothes on the racks smoky. To address the problems caused by this poor design, some of the tenants had installed aluminum drying racks outside their living room windows. However, they were required by the Housing

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Department to remove the unauthorized drying racks, failing which their rental contracts would be terminated. To allay the grave concern of the tenants, who were elderly people and housewives at large, Mr CHAN requested SHPL to accord priority to resolve the issue. PS/HPL(H) pointed out that unauthorized drying racks would not only pose safety hazard to pedestrians, but would also project an unattractive outlook of the housing estates as a whole. Nevertheless, he fully appreciated the tenants' concern and undertook to conduct a site inspection with a view to resolving the issue. SHPL said that he would keep in view the development of the issue.

Conversion of old industrial areas into commercial areas

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18. Mr CHAN Kam-lam pointed out that while the conversion of old industrial areas into commercial areas was allowed through re-zoning of land uses, the Government should put in place concrete measures to facilitate such conversion, say, in respect of payments of land premium and provision of sufficient car-parking facilities. Mr James TO however had reservation on the appropriateness for the Government to encourage such conversion. He suggested the Administration to consider the issue in detail. SHPL said that the Administration would take account of Members' views in considering the issue.

III. Any other business

19. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:55 am.