

Processing of Small House Applications

Purpose

This note aims to explain the procedures for processing small house applications by the Lands Department (Lands D) and the measures taken to expedite the processing procedures.

Background

2. At the Case Conference held on 1 March 2002 attended by LegCo Members and Tai Po District Council Members, concerns were raised regarding the long processing time for small house applications in Tai Po district. At the meeting, the Administration told LegCo Members that except for the very complex cases, a non-straightforward small house grant can be executed within eight years from the date of submission of application. The Administration is asked to provide more details on the time taken by Lands D to approve a small house grant.

Procedures for processing small house applications

3. Due to the large number of small house applications, there is an average of a three-year waiting time before a submitted application can be worked on by Lands D. However, once an application is being worked on, Lands D has pledged that processing of a straightforward case can normally be completed within 34 weeks (i.e. about 8½ month).

4. A detailed breakdown of the procedures and time involved in processing small house applications are as follows:

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Straightforward cases (in month)</i>	<i>Non-straightforward cases (in months)</i>
1 Receipt of application		
2 Waiting time	36	36

3	Arrange interviews with applicant; statutory declaration	1	1
4	Check eligibility and land status	0.5 (two weeks)	9 - 12 (Time allowed for applicant to resolve land title or division problems.)
5	Conduct site visits to ascertain suitability of the site	0.75 (three weeks)	1
6	Prepare site plan and post notices	1	1
7	Handle objection	-	3 - 9 (Applicant to resolve objections.)
8	Consult relevant Government departments, including Planning Department, Fire Services Department, Geotechnical Engineering Office, Water Supplies Department, Environmental Protection Department, and Drainage Services Department. Consultation usually conducted in parallel to one another	0.75 (three weeks)	30

9	Submission to District Lands Office Conference/Chief Land Executive for approval	0.5 (two weeks)	1
10	Offer and acceptance of basic terms	1	1
11	Preparation of grant documents and grant plan	2	3
12	Execution of small house grant documents	1	1
	Total time:	44.5 months (or 3.7 years)	96 months (or 8 years) (Assuming a worst case scenario.)

5. The processing time for some activities (steps 4, 7 and 8 above) depends very much on the progress of action taken by the applicant and his authorised person/consultant; and on the complexity of the problem. The Administration is confident that even for the non-straightforward cases, processing and approval of such cases can be completed within eight years. Only in exceptionally complex cases, the processing and approval time may exceed eight years.

Measures to expedite the processing time

6. Lands D has been exploring ways to streamline processing of small house applications. It has adopted a “workshop” approach in some districts (Tai Po and North District) to process applications by batches according to their complexity and locality. Under this arrangement, a pool of officers in the respective District Lands Office conduct dedicated sessions in the form of a workshop to process the applications. Such “workshop approach” has helped enhance efficiency and reduce the processing time. The Department is also exploring means to re-structure the small house processing teams in the District Lands Offices to improve efficiency further.

7. Recently, the Department has proposed a Village Layout Plan Scheme. Under this Scheme, the District Lands Office will work together with the villagers concerned to draw up a village layout plan to guide future development of the village concerned. The proposed approach will help identify land with site constraints early; and to ensure that village facilities such as emergency vehicular access, footpath or refuse collection points can be planned properly for the benefit of the villagers. This in turn will facilitate processing of the small house applications. Implementation of the proposed Village Layout Plan Scheme will require agreement of the villages concerned. The Administration is conducting further consultation with Heung Yee Kuk on the proposed Scheme.

Planning and Lands Bureau
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