

Legislative Council Panel on Housing
Assistance to Elderly Property Owner-occupiers in Dilapidated Buildings

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the preliminary thinking of the Housing Department in alleviating the problems faced by elderly property owner-occupiers in dilapidated buildings.

Background

2. From December 2003 to January 2004, the Society for Community Organisation (SoCO) conducted a survey on elderly property owners living in old districts. Findings of this survey revealed the following problems faced by elderly property owner-occupiers in varying degree :

- (a) Inadequate management services and regular maintenance works in aged buildings without owners' corporations lead to problems such as concrete spalling, drain blockage, water seepage as well as problems associated with public hygiene and order;
- (b) Old buildings without lifts make getting-about of elders difficult;
- (c) Due to dilapidation of buildings, property owners have to bear high maintenance costs and possibly the cost of demolishing illegal structures; and
- (d) Payment of rates, government rents and maintenance cost pose a heavy financial burden on elderly owner-occupiers who have limited income and assets.

3. Owing to their property ownership, elderly property owners are ineligible for public rental housing. In this connection, SoCO has proposed to the Legislative Council that the Government should help elderly property owner-occupiers by allowing them access to public rental housing and providing financial assistance in paying rates, government rents as well as maintenance costs of the property.

Requirement of no domestic property ownership for Waiting List Applicants

4. The public rental housing programme is designed to help low-income families meet their housing needs. In line with this principle and to ensure that scarce housing resources are focused on those in genuine need, property owners are not eligible for public housing as they are able to meet their own housing need. Nevertheless, in view of the recent economic downturn and in consideration of special circumstances of applicants for public rental housing, the Housing Authority has implemented the following adjustments to the “no property ownership” restriction :

- (a) In recent years, some property owners had to sell their property to overcome their financial problems. In 2001, the Housing Authority relaxed the requirement that Waiting List applicants should not own any domestic property 24 months prior to application for public rental housing, allowing property owners to apply for public rental housing immediately after disposing of their property, subject to their meeting the prevailing income and assets limits; and
- (b) Some property owners holding partial ownership in the property are unable to dispose of the property at their full discretion or live in their property for various reasons. To cater for these special circumstances, in March 2001 the Housing Authority allowed the Housing Department to exercise discretion in waiving the “no property ownership” restriction when considering the applications of such property owners.

5. The “no property ownership” restriction is necessary to ensure a rational allocation of public housing resources. With the adjustments mentioned above, there should be sufficient flexibility to cater for special circumstances of individual applicants. Elderly property owners can apply for public rental housing immediately after disposing of their property which no longer serves their needs. Should they encounter accommodation problems after sale of their property, they may apply for immediate allocation of public housing under Compassionate Rehousing.

Preliminary thinking in providing assistance to elderly property owner-occupiers in dilapidated buildings

6. Some elderly property owner-occupiers in dilapidated buildings are faced with various daily living problems, for instance frail elders living in buildings without lifts may have difficulties in getting about. They may not be able to move to other suitable accommodation expeditiously. To help tackle their problems, the Housing Department and the Social Welfare Department are actively exploring the feasibility of allowing these elderly property owners to move into the Housing for Senior Citizens as a transitional arrangement.

7. The preliminary thinking is that elderly property owners in genuine need may be granted temporary residence in the Housing for Senior Citizens of the Housing Authority or the Housing Society on the recommendations of the Social Welfare Department under Compassionate Rehousing. Elderly property owners will be allowed to stay for a year, during this period they can dispose of their property and handle other related matters so that they will subsequently meet the eligibility criteria for applying public rental housing. If they are still unable to meet those criteria while still beset with problems of daily living after a year, the Housing Department may consider to exercise discretion to extend their stay in the Housing for Senior Citizens. We will seek advice of the Housing Authority on the implementation of this proposal and detailed arrangements shortly.

Other support services for elders

8. There are a range of support services offered by the Social Welfare Department and other non-governmental organizations to help alleviate problems encountered by elders who choose not to live in the Housing for Senior Citizens under the proposed arrangement. These services include :

- (a) domestic help services to meet the basic needs in daily life;
- (b) non-emergency ambulance transfer service to provide transportation for elders who need to attend rehabilitation programme; and

- (c) community nursing care and care-and-attention homes for elders in need of comprehensive residential care services.

9. Elders with financial difficulties may also apply for various allowances under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme to meet their living and housing expenses (including rates and government rents) so as to alleviate their financial burden.

Conclusion

10. The Government is committed to providing suitable housing for elders in need. We will continue to work out the details of implementing the proposed arrangement of offering temporary residence for elderly property owners in Housing for Senior Citizens on compassionate grounds, with a view to enabling elders, who are not eligible for public rental housing, to cope with problems of daily living in a suitable environment.

Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau
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