

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)726/12-13
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Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 11 December 2012, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** : Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC (Chairman)
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon Claudia MO
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN Ka-lok
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan
Hon Christopher CHUNG Shu-kun, BBS, MH, JP
- Members attending** : Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, JP
Hon Charles Peter MOK
- Member absent** : Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
- Public Officers attending** : Items III and IV
Dr KO Wing-man, BBS, JP
Secretary for Food and Health

Mrs Marion LAI CHAN Chi-kuen, JP
Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)

Miss Diane WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health
(Food)2

Ms Ava CHIU Wai-fan, JP
Deputy Director of Food & Environmental Hygiene
(Administration & Development)

Ms CHU Lan-ying, JP
Assistant Director (Operations)3
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Item III

Mr Tony LI Yeuk-yue
Principal Assistant Secretary (Planning & Lands)2
Development Bureau

Ms Christine TSE Kin-ching
Acting Assistant Director of Planning/Board

Ms Olga LAM Wai-ha, JP
Assistant Director (Estate Management)
Lands Department

Mr CHEUNG Tin-cheung
Assistant Director (Existing Buildings)2
Buildings Department

Item IV

Mr Joseph YUNG Cho-leung
Chief Engineer / Land Works
Civil Engineering and Development Department

Item V

Mr Christopher WONG Kwok-bun, JP
Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food)1

Miss Diane WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health
(Food)2

Mr LAU Che-wong
Assistant Director (Operations)1
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Clerk in attendance : Ms Elyssa WONG
Chief Council Secretary (2) 5

Staff in attendance : Mr Jove CHAN
Senior Council Secretary 2 (6)

Ms Priscilla LAU
Council Secretary (2) 5

Ms Michelle LEE
Legislative Assistant (2) 5

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2)262/12-13(01)]

Members noted that the letter dated 20 November 2012 from Ms Claudia MO on regulation of crematorium for animals had been issued since the last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)304/12-13(01) and (02)]

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for 8 January 2013 at 2:30 pm -

- (a) The business environment of public market stalls, including rental adjustment mechanism and air-conditioning charges;
- (b) Usage and promotion of Gardens of Remembrance, scattering cremains at sea and Internet memorial service; and
- (c) Regulation of crematorium for animals.

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3. The Chairman said that as agreed at the last meeting on 13 November 2012, members of the public would be invited to attend the next regular meeting in January 2013 to give views on the rental adjustment mechanism and air-conditioning charges of public market stalls. The Administration had indicated that it would provide an information paper on the rental adjustment mechanism for public market stalls and would listen to the views of deputations and members on issues relating to the air-conditioning charges of public market stalls at the meeting.

4. The Deputy Chairman, Mr Tommy CHEUNG, Mr Vincent FANG and Mr WONG Kwok-hing were of the view that the subject matters of the rentals, air-conditioning charges and business environment of public market stalls were correlated and hence should be discussed together. While the issue of a fair rental adjustment mechanism was important to the market stall tenants, the issue of air-conditioning charges was equally important as air-conditioning charges accounted for a considerable portion of the operating costs of the market stall tenants. The provision of air-conditioning facilities was also considered essential for a pleasant shopping environment. Members agreed that the discussion on public markets should include issues relating to the air-conditioning charges of public market stalls even if the Administration was unable to provide an information paper on the subject.

5. Secretary for Food and Health ("SFH") explained that it would be more appropriate to deal with the issues on the rental adjustment mechanism and air-conditioning charges separately, since not all public markets were provided with air-conditioning facilities. That said, the Administration raised no objection to including the discussion on air-conditioning charges in the agenda item at the next meeting. The Administration did not have any pre-conceived position on how to recover air-conditioning costs from market stall tenants.

6. To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman suggested and members agreed to extend the regular meeting on 8 January 2013 by one hour to end at 5:30 pm.

(Post-meeting note: Due to the large number of deputations attending the meeting for agenda item "The business environment of public market stalls, including rental adjustment mechanism and air-conditioning charges", with the concurrence of the Chairman, the duration of the meeting was further extended by 30 minutes to end at 6:00 pm.)

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III. Private columbaria - Outcome of second-round consultation and way forward

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)304/12-13(03) and (04)]

7. SFH briefed members on the legislative proposals for regulating private columbaria based on the outcome of the second public consultation exercise on the proposed licensing scheme for private columbaria ("the Licensing Scheme") and the further research undertaken by the Administration as set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)304/12-13(03)).

8. Members also noted the background brief entitled "Columbarium policy – Proposed licensing scheme for private columbaria" [LC Paper No. CB(2)304/12-13(04)] prepared by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Secretariat.

Licensing Scheme

9. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern on the proposed duration of the licensing period. Pointing out that consumers would normally expect a very long-term deposit of the cremains, he was of the view that the licensing period should be extended from the proposed five years to a longer period so as to provide greater certainty for consumers. Mr WONG Yuk-man echoed Mr WONG Kwok-hing's view.

10. SFH said that the proposed licensing period of five years was already longer than those of other licences issued by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") which were generally one to two years. The renewal requirement of the licence of private columbarium facilities was considered necessary as it would help ensure the service quality of the facilities. SFH further advised that there was no limit to the number of renewals so long as the columbarium facilities met the renewal conditions. For new private columbaria which came into being after the commencement of the Licensing Scheme, the operators would have to operate on self-owned premises. This was to ensure long-term occupation of the premises to safeguard the interest of consumers.

11. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed concern as to whether the operators of the private columbarium facilities were allowed to sell niches for a permanent term which went beyond their licensing period, or they could only provide service agreements for a period not longer than their licensing period. If it was the latter, he was concerned that the renewal arrangement might lead to a price increase every five years. He also expressed concern as to whether a licensed columbarium operator could sell the premises together with the columbarium facilities and the licence. The Deputy Chairman expressed similar concern.

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12. SFH advised that while the terms of agreements in relation to the purchase of niches would be a matter for the contracting parties to decide, the operators of the licensed columbarium facilities would be obliged to inform their customers of the valid licensing period of the facilities. Moreover, operators of new private columbaria which came into being after the commencement of the Licensing Scheme would be required to operate on self-owned premises. If the premises of the facilities were sold and no longer owned by the operator, the operator would be deemed to have failed to meet the licensing conditions.

13. Noting the Administration's proposal to require operators of private columbaria to operate on self-owned premises, the Chairman asked if the operators of existing columbaria operating on leased premises were required to purchase the premises in order to obtain the licence under the Licensing Scheme.

14. SFH responded that for existing columbaria which did not run on self-owned premises, the operators would be required to prove that they had the right to continue to use the premises concerned for at least five years. This was to ensure that the operator had a long-term commitment in providing columbarium services.

15. Noting that the breach of licensing conditions might lead to suspension or cancellation of licence, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen enquired whether the non-compliant columbarium would be required to cease operation or would be prohibited from selling new niches.

16. Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food) advised that if a columbarium was ordered to suspend its operation for a period of time, it would not be allowed to engage in any sale of niches or any other business during the suspension period.

The Private Columbaria Licensing Board ("Licensing Board")

17. Mr WONG Yuk-man expressed concern on the roles and responsibilities of the Licensing Board and FEHD in respect of the Licensing Scheme. Noting that the Licensing Board would be the licensing authority of the Licensing Scheme and FEHD would be the enforcement agency as well as the executive arm and secretariat of the Licensing Board, Mr WONG considered a clear delineation and division of responsibilities between the Licensing Board and FEHD important for the public to lodge or follow up complaints against any breaches of licensing conditions. He urged the Administration to clearly define the respective roles and responsibilities of FEHD and the Licensing Board.

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18. SFH advised that the Licensing Board would be the approving authority for the licensing of private columbarium facilities. It would be responsible for deciding on the merits of applications for a licence, or an exemption or a temporary suspension of liability from the Licensing Scheme. FEHD would be the executive arm and enforcement agency serving the licensing authority. It would assist the Licensing Board in discharging its responsibilities by, say, conducting inspections of private columbarium facilities.

19. Mr WONG Yuk-man expressed grave concern about the members to be appointed to the Licensing Board. Given the potentially enormous financial returns involved in the business of private columbaria, he urged the Administration to exercise extreme care and caution in the selection and appointment of members to the Licensing Board to remove any doubts of using the appointments as recompense for political services.

20. SFH responded that the Government had a well-established mechanism for preventing and handling potential conflicts of interests concerning members serving on statutory bodies. Mr WONG Yuk-man commented that no mechanism could uncover the hidden interests of a person. He urged the Administration to adopt a new mindset and a new approach in the appointment of members to the Licensing Board.

Exemption from the Licensing Scheme

21. Noting that private columbaria which had been in existence before a cut-off date might be exempted from the Licensing Scheme, Dr Kenneth CHAN expressed grave concern about the setting of the cut-off date. In his view, the exemption arrangement might create loopholes for the unauthorized columbaria to exploit and continue to sell niches. Dr Joseph LEE echoed Dr CHAN's view. Dr LEE said that without a clear definition of "long-existing private columbaria", certain columbaria might claim that they would be exempted from the Licensing Scheme and would continue to expand and sell new niches.

22. SFH advised that unauthorized columbaria that had proliferated in recent years to take advantage of the shortage of niches were unlikely to be exempted from the Licensing Scheme. While the Administration had not yet decided on the definition of "long-existing private columbaria", the scale of operation of a columbarium would not be an eligibility criterion for exemption. The Administration's initial thinking of "long-existing private columbaria" would be those columbaria that had been in existence well before those established for opportunistic reasons only. That said, SFH stressed that the benchmark for "long-existing columbaria" would be clearly defined in the legislation. The Administration would listen to the views of the public and members before deciding on where to draw the line.

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23. Ms Claudia MO enquired whether the Administration would use 1997 as a benchmark to define "long-existing columbaria". SFH responded that although the Administration had yet to decide on the definition of "long-existing columbaria", there was a preliminary view that the cut-off date should be set at some 10 years ago. As such, the number of columbaria eligible for exemption would be substantially reduced.

24. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen expressed concern that certain religious institutions, which were in existence for decades, had only started the columbarium business in recent years. He enquired whether this type of columbaria would be regarded as long-existing. He further asked whether the Administration had collected information on the establishment date of columbaria in Part B of the Information on Private Columbaria ("the Information") published by the Development Bureau.

25. SFH said that the Administration had collected information on most of the private columbaria as detailed in Part B of the Information. Upon the introduction of the proposed legislation, the Administration would have the authority to verify the information with the operators of the columbaria.

26. Dr Priscilla LEUNG said that the private columbaria in Hung Hom had caused serious nuisance to neighbouring residents. Noting that the definition of private columbaria was proposed to exclude the keeping of cremains of deceased family members, she expressed grave concern about the possible abuse in respect of this proposed definition. Some operators might claim that the cremains kept in the premises belonged to their family members but they were actually running a business. Dr LEUNG urged the Administration to consult extensively the residents in the relevant districts, the District Councils ("DCs") concerned and Members of the relevant geographical constituencies.

27. Dr Helena WONG expressed support for increasing the supply of public niches and the Administration's legislative proposal, particularly the Licensing Scheme. She, however, expressed concern about the exemption arrangement for long-existing columbaria and undertakers of burials. Dr WONG said that there were 61 licensed undertakers of burials in Hung Hom, accounting for 80% of undertakers in Kowloon. These undertakers, together with the unauthorized columbaria in the district, had caused serious nuisance to neighbouring residents, but no effective measures had been taken to minimize the nuisance. Dr WONG also noted with grave concern about the provision of temporary storage of cremains in the licensed premises of the undertakers of burials. Pointing out the inadequate supply of public niches in the territory, Dr WONG was afraid that what was meant for temporary storage might become a facility for long-term occupation.

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28. SFH stressed that in formulating the proposals for the regulation of private columbaria, due regard had been given to all relevant factors, including the views and concerns of neighbouring residents. SFH also pointed to the need for the undertakers of burials to provide temporary storage of cremains as part of their service for the bereaved families. He assured members that there would be restrictions as part of the licensing conditions imposed on the undertakers of burials in respect of the provision of temporary storage of cremains to minimize nuisance caused to neighbouring residents.

Assistance provided to affected consumers

29. Mr WONG Kwok-hing sought information on the measures to be put in place to accommodate the cremains deposited with those private columbaria which had failed to meet the regulatory requirements. The Deputy Chairman and Dr Priscilla LEUNG raised a similar question. They also expressed concern that the Licensing Scheme might create a large number of victims who had spent a considerable sum of money to purchase niches from those unauthorized private columbaria. They urged the Administration to provide assistance to those affected consumers. Dr Kenneth CHAN and Dr Joseph LEE shared this view. Dr LEUNG further called on the Administration to increase the supply of public niches in the long run.

30. SFH advised that a number of private columbaria might be unable to satisfy the licensing conditions and they would cease operations upon the commencement of the Licensing Scheme. Since the affected families might need time to arrange for long-term interment of cremains in niches in public or other private columbaria, there might be a need for the Government to provide temporary storage for those displaced cremains. SFH, however, stressed that the storage service for the displaced cremains, if provided by the Government, would be temporary in nature and would not be used for the purpose of long-term occupation. At stake here was the question of fairness to those queuing up for public niches as well as the need to avoid encouraging the development of unauthorized columbaria.

31. Mr WONG Kwok-hing suggested that as the private columbaria in Part B of the Information would be unlikely to meet the licensing requirements under the proposed Licensing Scheme, they should not be allowed to continue to sell their unoccupied niches to enhance protection for the public. Ms Claudia MO, Dr Kenneth CHAN and Dr Joseph LEE urged the Administration to strengthen publicity and educate the public to exercise caution when choosing private columbaria. Ms MO further suggested that the Administration should enhance the use of television and

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radio announcements in the public interest ("APIs") to reach out to the public.

32. SFH advised that the Administration had adopted various means such as APIs to promote awareness in the community that the columbaria listed in Part B of the Information were not compliant with the land lease and / or town planning requirements. The Administration would continue to step up its efforts in enhancing publicity and public education in this regard.

Enforcement actions

33. Dr Joseph LEE and Dr Kenneth CHAN expressed concern about the nuisance caused by some private columbaria. They considered the enforcement actions taken by the Administration inadequate and urged the Administration to step up its enforcement efforts to enhance protection for neighbouring residents. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen expressed a similar view. He pointed out that the problem of nuisance had persisted for years in some districts and some unauthorized columbaria continued to expand their scale of operation and sell new niches despite non-compliance with the regulatory requirements.

34. The Chairman was of the view that the Administration should take vigorous enforcement actions against such private columbaria. For example, the Lands Department should seek to enforce the user restrictions in the land leases, and the Home Affairs Department should provide assistance to owners' corporations to enforce the deeds of mutual covenant. The Administration should impress the public that it was determined to solve the problem.

35. SFH stressed that the Administration attached importance to enhancing the protection of consumer interests and minimizing the nuisance caused to neighbouring residents. The Government departments concerned had stepped up enforcement efforts against the unauthorized columbaria, exercising powers under their respective Ordinances and mandate. The Administration would take heed of members' views and suggestions to address the concerns raised at the meeting.

Public consultation

36. Dr Kenneth CHAN expressed concern about the Administration's handling of public submissions, in particular those with similar contents but signed by different individuals. He noted from the Administration's paper that the Administration had received around 150 submissions during the consultation exercise although he was given to understand that some

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residents' groups had made more than a thousand submissions to the Administration during the consultation exercise. He suggested inviting the public to give views on the matter again. Mr WONG Yuk-man held a contrary view that it was not necessary to conduct another round of public consultation as the Administration had already conducted two rounds of public consultation and the relevant Government officials should be well aware of the concerns and views of the public and stakeholders.

37. The Chairman expressed concern that the Administration had appeared to be more inclined to the concerns of the trade rather than the consumers. Dr Helena WONG shared the view of the Chairman and added that the Administration's paper had provided a more detailed discussion on the proposed exemption from the Licensing Scheme but it tended not to highlight the opposing views in regard to the exemption. She cast doubt as to whether the Administration had taken a neutral stance in the subject.

Legislative process and timetable

38. Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Mr WONG Yuk-man expressed support for the Administration's proposal to introduce the relevant bill in the fourth quarter of 2013. The Chairman enquired if the Administration could introduce the bill earlier. SFH advised that although the Administration had planned to introduce the bill in the fourth quarter of 2013, the Administration would endeavour to introduce it as early as possible.

39. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered the conduct of a business impact assessment of the Licensing Scheme very important. He suggested that the Administration should engage the Efficiency Unit ("EU") to conduct or supervise the conduct of the business impact assessment, as EU had an outstanding track record of conducting similar assessments. He also requested the Administration to consult the trade extensively in order to speed up the legislative process.

Future development of private columbaria

40. Mr Christopher CHUNG expressed grave concern about the undesirable impact caused by the operation of private columbaria in industrial districts. Citing a plan of a private commercial group to convert its warehouse in Chai Wan into a private columbarium to offer more than 50 000 niches as an example, Mr CHUNG expressed worry about the traffic problem and other environmental nuisance caused to neighbouring residents. He urged the Administration to tighten up the licensing requirements in respect of the traffic impact on the neighbourhood caused by the development of private columbaria.

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41. SFH responded that all applications for licence should be supported by traffic impact assessment studies ("TIAs"). Applicants were required to submit a management plan for the columbarium covering, among others, vehicular and passenger traffic assessments, appropriate traffic management schemes during peak and normal grave sweeping days and other measures to mitigate nuisance caused to the neighbourhood. SFH further elaborated that even for public columbaria run by FEHD, there were rules regulating visits to the facilities such as the time permitted for the visits, and incense and joss paper burning and behaviour. Mr CHUNG considered such restrictions ineffective in controlling the traffic and mitigating the nuisance caused to neighbouring residents.

42. Mr Christopher CHUNG also expressed grave concern about the supply of burial and columbarium facilities in the coming years to meet the rising demand from the ageing population. He stressed the need for the Administration to formulate a plan to identify suitable sites for building more funeral-related facilities such as cemeteries, columbarium and crematorium facilities. He also urged the Administration to step up efforts in promoting wider use of environmentally friendly and sustainable means of the disposal of the dead.

43. SFH said that he shared the views of Mr CHUNG. Indeed, the Administration had planned to brief members in January 2013 on its efforts in promoting green burial. Notwithstanding this, there was a need to meet the demand for traditional burial facilities. The Administration would continue to forge ahead with its plans for building additional columbarium facilities, subject to constraints such as technical feasibility, space, transport infrastructure support and the views of neighbouring residents.

IV. Public columbaria - Supply of public niches, including the proposed columbarium, crematorium cum funeral parlour at the Sandy Ridge Cemetery

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)304/12-13(05)and (06)]

44. Members noted following papers on the subject under discussion –
- (a) Administration's paper entitled "Public columbaria – Supply of public niches, including the proposed columbarium, crematorium cum funeral parlour at the Sandy Ridge Cemetery" [LC Paper No. CB(2)304/12-13(05)] ; and
 - (b) background brief entitled "Supply of public niches" [LC Paper No. CB(2)304/12-13(06)] prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

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Supply of public niches

45. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed support for the Administration's proposal to develop a cluster of funeral parlour, crematorium and columbarium facilities at Sandy Ridge to provide one-stop service for the public. He also urged the Administration to increase the supply of the public columbarium facilities as quickly as possible. Since the Administration had solicited support on the Sandy Ridge proposal from the concerned district, Mr WONG enquired whether the supply of niches at Sandy Ridge could be doubled to use the available land more effectively.

46. SFH advised that the Administration would endeavour to maximize the development potential of the site. Given that the site would ultimately provide at least 200 000 niches, the Administration was not inclined at this stage to further increase the scope of development by a significant margin owing to the constraint of the traffic infrastructure support. It should also be noted that the supply of niches at Sandy Ridge would be provided in phases subject to demand and its impact on the environment and nearby traffic.

47. Dr Kenneth CHAN was concerned that the 120 000 new public niches to be provided by 2016 would not be enough to meet the demand. In his view, the Steering Committee on Population Policy, which was chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, should review the supply of public funeral and burial facilities in the light of demographic changes in the coming years. The Government should also take the lead to provide such facilities and services for the public.

48. SFH advised that to meet the annual and accumulated demand for public niches, the Administration had already set out a plan for providing around 120 000 public niches by 2016. The Administration would also regulate private columbarium facilities in order to provide the public with more choices of niches. Last but not the least, the Administration would endeavour to foster a change in mindset and culture by encouraging wider acceptance of more sustainable forms of green burial such as scattering remains at sea and in Gardens of Remembrance.

49. Dr Helena WONG echoed the view of Dr Kenneth Chan that the supply of 120 000 public niches by 2016 would still be inadequate to meet the accumulated demand for niches. She urged the Administration to continue to identify suitable sites for building more public columbaria. She also sought information from the Administration on a detailed timetable for the supply of public niches in the coming years.

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50. SFH advised that the Administration had been adopting all feasible measures to increase the supply of public niches. Pursuant to a district-based columbarium development scheme, the Administration had identified 24 potential sites in the 18 districts for columbarium development. The Administration was forging ahead with the technical feasibility studies of the relevant sites and proactively engaging the relevant DCs. It should be noted that land of a size suitable for development of public columbarium facilities comparable in scale to that of Sandy Ridge was scarce. Even if such land sites did exist, the Administration would have to come to terms with possible concerns which were bound to arise for developments of a such scale from neighbouring residents. In taking forward various sites for columbarium development, the Administration would endeavour to properly address the concerns of neighbouring residents and the concerned DCs. Subject to the support of the concerned DCs and LegCo, it was estimated that the supply of public niches could be increased to hundreds of thousands in the medium to long run.

51. As fewer people would adopt traditional burial at cemeteries nowadays, Dr Helena WONG suggested that consideration could be given to re-planning the use of land at cemeteries for building more columbaria; introduction of time-limited lease of public niches; and introduction of an incentive scheme for the return of public niches for further use. Dr WONG urged the Administration to consider setting up a committee engaging the public, LegCo Members, DC members and other stakeholders to monitor the supply of columbarium facilities as well as the allocation of new niches.

52. SFH advised that owing to the shortage of land, the Administration had no plan to identify new sites for building new cemeteries or burial grounds. Instead, the Administration would explore all feasible options to increase the supply of public niches including recovering the land no longer serving the purpose of burial grounds.

53. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen suggested reducing the size of urns and niches with a view to optimizing the use of land and increasing the supply of public niches. SFH agreed to explore the feasibility of this suggestion. He, however, cautioned that due regard had to be given to the added impact on traffic, noise and environment that might be brought about by the corresponding increase in the number of niches available in any given site.

Allocation of public niches

54. In response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's enquiry about the allocation mechanism for public niches, Assistant Director (Operation)3 / Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("AD(O)3/FEHD") explained that new

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public niches under the management of FEHD were allotted to applicants according to their computer-assigned priority numbers, while used public niches in the existing eight public columbaria were allotted to applicants on the waiting lists of the corresponding columbaria. There was no waiting list for allotment of new public niches. Niches managed by other public bodies or religious groups might adopt other allocation methods to allocate niches to their applicants. SFH advised that given the large annual and accumulated demand for public niches, it was considered appropriate and fair to allocate new public niches to applicants based on computer-assigned priority numbers.

Admin.

55. Mr WONG Kwok-hing did not subscribe to the Administration's view. He considered it unfair to allocate new public niches to applicants according to their computer-assigned priority numbers, in particular for those who had been on the waiting list for a very long time. He requested the Administration to provide after the meeting a written response on the allocation mechanism for public niches and the rationale for adopting such mechanism.

Conclusion

56. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that all members present were in support of the proposal to develop columbarium and related facilities at Sandy Ridge. Members noted that the proposal would be submitted to the Public Works Subcommittee at its meeting on 9 January 2013.

V. E-Applications for licences

[LC Paper No. CB(2)304/12-13(07)]

57. Members noted the Administration's paper entitled "Electronic submission of applications relating to food business/trade licences and permits" [LC Paper No. CB(2)304/12-13(07)].

58. Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed support for the introduction of electronic applications for licences. They urged the Administration to enhance the promotion of this new arrangement to the trade. While Mr CHEUNG requested the Administration to provide assistance such as an enquiry service to the trade with a view to facilitating the efficient submission of applications, Mr WONG urged the Administration to continue to accept licence applications submitted in paper form to provide more choices for the trade.

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59. Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food)1 ("DSFH(F)1") advised that the Administration had consulted the trade on the introduction of this new arrangement, which aimed to provide the trade with the choice of submitting licence/permit applications through electronic means, in addition to submitting applications in paper form. In the Administration's view, this new arrangement could speed up the workflow and enhance communication with applicants as well as among government departments.

VI. Any other business

60. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:40 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 March 2013