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Panel on Development

Meeting on 15 July 2024

Background brief on streamlining development-related administrative procedures within the Government

Purpose

This paper provides background information on streamlining development-related administrative procedures within the Government. It also summarizes the views and concerns expressed by Members on the subject in recent years.

Background

2. There is a persistent demand for more and quicker supply of developable land to respond to society's aspiration for better living environment and economic prosperity of Hong Kong. In view of this, the Administration introduced the Development (Town Planning, Lands and Works) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2022 ("the Bill") into the Legislative Council ("LegCo") for streamlining the statutory procedures of town planning, land resumption, reclamation, roads and railway works, etc. The Bill was passed at the Council meeting of 12 July 2023 and the enacted Ordinance came into operation on 1 September 2023.

3. During the scrutiny of the Bill and on other occasions, LegCo Members have repeatedly suggested that apart from streamlining the development-related statutory procedures, the Administration should also streamline the administrative procedures within the Government, reduce bureaucracy and step up internal coordination in order to expedite the development approval process. According to the Administration, various administrative measures have been rolled out to simplify the development procedures and more relevant measures will be introduced in the future.

Major views and concerns expressed by Members

4. Issues relating to streamlining development-related administrative procedures were discussed at the meetings of Council, the Bills Committee on Development (Town Planning, Lands and Works) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2022 and the Panel on Development (“DEV Panel”) in recent years. The major views and concerns expressed by Members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Streamlining development-related administrative procedures

5. Members made various suggestions on streamlining development-related administrative procedures (e.g. shortening the time required for handling applications of tree removal and inspecting fire service installations of buildings). In addition, they considered that the Administration should further promote digitalization of the development approval process, as well as stipulating and aligning the construction standards with a view to reducing the time and costs for vetting and approval.

6. The Administration advised that a Steering Group on Streamlining Development Control was set up under the Development Bureau (“DEVB”) in 2018 to examine how to best align and rationalize the standards and definitions adopted by the relevant departments under the Bureau’s portfolio in approving development projects, with a number of streamlining measures on various aspects introduced.¹ These streamlining measures could minimize double handling among departments, rationalize the definitions and requirements of the control parameters, and increase transparency and certainty in the approval process. DEVB subsequently expanded the composition and remit of the Steering Group to cover additional departments involved in the development approval process on top of those under DEVB, with a view to reviewing more comprehensively the processes involving different aspects and rationalizing the development-related requirements imposed by various departments. To further streamline the administrative procedures, DEVB was reviewing several key development-related topics,² and had made specific recommendations on those topics progressively starting from the middle of 2023.

¹ These aspects include building height restriction, landscape requirement, design and disposition clause under lease, site coverage restriction and gross floor area/plot ratio restriction.

² These topics include streamlining the approval of general building plans, the procedures concerning felling and compensatory planting of trees, gross floor area concession arrangement for car parks, approval guidelines concerning developments in the wetland buffer area, as well as self-certification and independent checking arrangements.

7. The Administration also indicated that the Electronic Submission Hub (“ESH”), a digital platform for receiving and processing of building plans, documents and applications, was being implemented by the Buildings Department in three stages.³ Moreover, the use of Building Information Modelling (“BIM”)⁴ was planned to be extended to all public works projects within 2024 and proposed to be mandatorily adopted by the private sector for preparation and submission of building plans by 2029.

Facilitating the implementation of projects

8. Members urged government officials to be more proactive in assuming the role as a “promoter” and “facilitator” in order to facilitate the implementation of development projects. There was also a suggestion of expanding the coordinating function of the Development Projects Facilitation Office (“DPFO”) under DEVB to follow up and coordinate different types of projects. Moreover, Members considered that the Administration should set time limits or performance pledges, etc. for vetting and approving applications, and if an application was rejected, the department concerned should give reasons and provide practical solutions as appropriate for the applicant to make improvements and corresponding arrangements.

9. The Administration advised that since its establishment in December 2020, DPFO had dedicated to, among others, coordinating the work of departments to expedite the vetting and approval of large-scale private residential and commercial developments. Moreover, dedicated units had been set up under the Lands Department and the Buildings Department to handle large-scale residential developments more speedily. A circular to encourage government bureaux and departments to adopt a “facilitator” mindset when handling development-related work was also being prepared, which was expected to be promulgated in the third quarter of 2024.

Authorizing recognized professionals to independently conduct professional certification in lieu of administrative approval

10. Members suggested that the Administration should authorize recognized professionals other than those in government departments to independently

³ Stages 1 and 2 of ESH were implemented in 2022 and 2023 respectively. Completion of Stage 3 was originally scheduled for the second quarter of 2025, but the Administration will advance the launch of some key features to the second quarter of 2024, with the hope that ESH will accept the submission of all building plans.

⁴ BIM is the process of generating and managing building data during its planning, design, construction and operation stage. The process uses multi-dimensional building modelling software and unified data structure to enhance team collaboration and increase productivity.

conduct professional certification in lieu of administrative approval on more works procedures to enhance the efficiency of vetting and approval.

11. The Administration indicated that DEVB would lead the relevant government departments to explore the option of authorizing recognized professionals to conduct self-certification in some lower-risk situations. The circular mentioned in paragraph 9 above to be issued by DEVB would also require government departments to review whether there was room for handing over their approval work to recognized professionals for self-certification.

Council questions and motion

12. Members raised questions relating to the streamlining of development-related statutory and administrative procedures at various Council meetings between November 2020 and May 2024. A motion on “Reviewing the works approval process and aligning construction standards, and leveraging innovative technologies to reduce construction costs and time” was passed at the Council meeting of 21 February 2024. The relevant hyperlinks are provided in the **Appendix**.

Latest development

13. At the DEV Panel meeting to be held on 15 July 2024, the Administration will brief the Panel on the progress made by the Government in streamlining development-related administrative procedures, which includes the relevant approval procedures and standards, the self-certification and independent checking arrangements, as well as the work of DPFO.

Relevant papers

14. A list of relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Divisions
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 July 2024

Appendix

Streamlining development-related administrative procedures within the Government

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Development	22 March 2022	Agenda item III: Legislative proposals to streamline development-related statutory processes Minutes of meeting by videoconferencing
	25 October 2022	Agenda item III: Briefing by the Secretary for Development on the Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address Minutes of policy briefing-cum-meeting
Bills Committee on Development (Town Planning, Lands and Works) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2022	5 July 2023*	Report of the Bills Committee
Panel on Development	31 October 2023	Agenda item I: Briefing by the Secretary for Development on the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address Minutes of policy briefing

* Issue date of the paper

Council meeting	Paper
18 November 2020	Question No. 6 : Vetting and approval procedures for development projects
23 June 2021	Question No. 17 : Public housing projects

Council meeting	Paper
22 June 2022	Question No. 14 : Streamlining development-related statutory processes
21 February 2024	Member's motion : Reviewing the works approval process and aligning construction standards, and leveraging innovative technologies to reduce construction costs and time
22 May 2024	Question No. 21 : Costs of various projects of Northern Metropolis