

Press Release
For immediate release
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HKIS's SIX Recommendations
to Speed Up the Approval Process of Town Planning Application

The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (hereafter the HKIS) announced the report of a research study on Town Planning Application system in Hong Kong at a Press Conference today. The research study analyzed data from over one thousand and four hundred applications that were submitted to the Town Planning Board (hereafter the TPB) between 2013 and 2015. The percentage of approved submissions was around one-third every year and more than a half of submissions took up to six months or more to proceed. In just 2015, about half of the 470 total submissions were deferred, some were even deferred for four times. This issue slows down the speed of releasing suitable lands to the market and creates negative impact on building more housing units.

President of the HKIS, Sr Thomas Ho, commented, "The current Planning Application System plays an important role in land development. According to "Town Planning Ordinance", the TPB should arrange meeting to consider applications received within two or three months. But in recent years, general planning application can hardly be approved within two to three months which affect the time and process of land and housing supply."

FOUR Reasons of Deferment

To find out the reasons of deferment, the HKIS looked into twenty applications, including ten on sites zoned comprehensive development area (hereafter the CDA), for detailed analysis. The most common reason of deferment found was to allow additional time for applicants to review, to clarify and to prepare responses relating to comments raised by the government.

The research study indicates that the following four reasons also slow down the process of application. First, the Planning Department, acting as TPB Secretariat, has stringent requirement on the verification of the applications including document

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formats and spellings. The time for verification may take up to one month or more. Second, for technical assessments, there is a substantially higher level of details required for applications submitted by the private sector as compared to Government departments' applications. It increases the difficulty of successful application. Third, there are lengthy correspondences to reach consensus for technical issues between the applicants and the Planning Department as well as other departments. Fourth, problems relating to Industrial/ residential interface are hard to handle.

Former President and Land Policy Panel Chairman of the HKIS, Sr Lau Chun-kong is responsible for arranging the research. He commented, "Sites zoned CDA are usually of considerable size and implementation could serve to expedite property supply. According to our case study analysis, compared to general land use, CDA faces more difficulties when developing, including fragmented ownership, complex land uses etc. The planning application of CDA takes more time, and some cases are with no sign of implementation after twenty years or more."

SIX Recommendations

To speed up the approval process of planning applications, the HKIS gave six recommendations on general application arrangements and CDA development (Details listed below). The HKIS hopes the recommendations can help the TPB to facilitate the approval process and relevant applications can get approved within two to three months, for the sake of speeding up the land supply.

For General Application Arrangements :

1. To promulgate a more specific Guidance Note

The TPB secretariat's requirements of application form should be listed out. Unless for reasons stated in the Town Planning Ordinance, TPB Secretariat shall adopt the date of receipt of application as a valid date for the purpose of counting the period for consideration of an application. TPB should also arrange a meeting to review applications within two to three months.

2. To publish relevant practice notes

First, pre-lodgment meeting should be arranged, so that the applicants can speak to the officials face-to-face, instead of keeping shuttle cocking documents and forms.

Second, relevant provisions should be included to state clearly a deadline for

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departmental comments. After the deadline, and following a similar provision in the Buildings Ordinance, the relevant technical issue shall be deemed to have been accepted by Government. Third, Planning Department should be entrusted with greater authority in commenting as to whether technical departments' requests are reasonable and, if appropriate, to recommend overriding such requests in the TPB Paper.

3. To maintain consistency of assessment standard

Following the approach adopted in vetting applications submitted by Government/public sector, broad brush assessments in technical issues should be accepted for the purposes of all town planning applications including those made by the private sector.

For CDA development :

4. To sub-divide the CDA

With due regard to the ownership pattern, large size of CDA should be sub-divided into small portions or considered to be rezoned for other land uses.

5. Co-development with public sector

Inclusion of public sector initiatives, such as implementation through the Urban Renewal Authority, could accelerate the implementation process.

6. To support in the provision of infrastructures by the Government

The Government should take initiative in the provision of infrastructural support, providing facilities such as drainage and sewerage system and road network.

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About the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors

Established in 1984, The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors is the only professional organisation representing the surveying profession in Hong Kong. As of 3 February 2017, the number of members reached 9,776, of which 6,288 were corporate members. The Institute's work includes setting standards for professional services and performance, establishing codes of ethics, determining requirements for admission as professional surveyors, access and award the professional qualification, and advance members' professional knowledge, technical and services standards through continuing professional development.

The Institute has an important consultative role in government policy making and on issues affecting the profession. We have advised the Government on issues such as unauthorised building works, building safety campaign, problems of property management, town planning and development strategies, construction quality and housing problems. We are working on amendments to standard forms of building contract and have issued guidance notes on floor area measurement methods.

For more details, please refer to HKIS website: <http://www.hkis.org.hk>.

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