

LCQ12: Resite of Choi Yuen Tsuen

\*\*\*\*\*

Following is a question by the Hon Abraham Shek Lai-him and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Yau Shing-mu, at the Legislative Council meeting today (May 26):

Question:

Some villagers of Choi Yuen Tsuen (CYT) in Shek Kong have relayed to me that because of the works of the Hong Kong Section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, they have to move out of the village but they hope to resite the whole village. They have pointed out that apart from identifying sites for resiting, another major problem connected with the resiting of CYT is the huge expenses involved, such as the expenses on construction materials, engineering, surveying and construction, etc., as well as professional technical support. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) apart from the special ex-gratia rehousing package approved by the Finance Committee of this Council and the allowance granted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department under the agricultural resite policy, whether other resources are available to assist CYT villagers in resiting the village; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) regarding the support offered to CYT villagers for resiting the whole village, whether the authorities will provide them with professional technical support, including support in such areas such as engineering, surveying and construction, etc.; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) of the commitments of the authorities in providing the

infrastructural facilities involved in resiting CYT, such as water and electricity supply, public lighting systems, public roads and other public facilities?

Reply:

President,

Most of the CYT households affected by land resumption for the Hong Kong section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) live in squatters or structures converted from squatters erected on private agricultural land. They are temporary in nature under the existing policy. The Administration has offered a special ex-gratia rehousing package (the Package) to CYT villagers and other parties affected by the land resumption and clearance related to the Hong Kong section of the XRL. The Package together with the compensation and rehousing arrangements available under the existing policy will provide suitable and flexible assistance to villagers affected. Depending on whether the relevant eligibility criteria are met, villagers who live by farming may choose to continue farming and erect structure for domestic purpose on agricultural land. Other villagers may choose to purchase Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats without being subject to Comprehensive Means Test, or to rent or purchase low-density private accommodations in the rural area using the ex-gratia cash allowance offered. Eligible villagers will be offered Public Rental Housing (PRH) units with priority.

The agricultural resite policy does not provide any arrangement for resiting a village. Rather it assists genuine farmers affected by land clearance so that they may continue to earn their living by farming elsewhere. A genuine farmer verified by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) may apply for a short term waiver so that he or she can erect on private agricultural land a temporary domestic structure with a maximum area of

400 square feet and a maximum height of 17 feet. The purpose is to facilitate farmers to take care of their farmland. Applicants should provide sufficient information to enable AFCD to verify their farmer status. Applicants who have non-agricultural occupation or participate in holiday/leisure farming are not considered as genuine farmers.

My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(a) We believe that the Package and the compensation and rehousing arrangements available under the existing policy have provided villagers affected with sufficient assistance to meet their rehousing needs:

(i) the population of the CYT is about 450. Villagers have submitted about 190 applications for the Special Assistance under the Package. All the applications have been processed. The ex-gratia cash allowance granted in all the approved cases adds up to about \$72 million. More than half of the applicants were offered an ex-gratia cash allowance of \$500,000 or above. About 40 applications for purchasing HOS units were approved;

(ii) ex-gratia compensation for resuming private land owned by villagers residing in CYT amounts to about \$160 million;

(iii) the Administration will assess and release ex-gratia cash allowance in respect of agricultural vegetation (including fruit trees and crops, etc) or permanent improvements to farms (such as water tanks or catch pits, etc) in accordance with prevailing ex-gratia compensation policy; and

(iv) we will assist villagers ineligible for the Special Assistance with housing need by rehousing them to PRH or Interim Housing if they meet the relevant criteria.

(b) We are aware that some villagers wish to continue to reside in clusters and to earn their living by farming after leaving CYT. While the existing agricultural resite policy allows villagers to live in clusters, individual applicants must meet the relevant eligibility criteria, including the genuine farmer status, committing to farming in the future and submitting feasible farming plans. If several applicants individually satisfy the eligibility criteria of agricultural resite policy, they are allowed to farm and live in vicinity. However, this is not a village resite arrangement. We are pleased to learn that Heung Yee Kuk is assisting villagers to find alternative farmland and providing professional advice to them.

(c) Villagers in the rural area may make their requests in respect of infrastructural facilities in accordance with the existing policies or mechanisms. The relevant departments or institutions will process their applications in line with established procedures. The Administration has been urging villagers for early submission of agricultural resite applications, so that the Administration would understand their needs for infrastructural facilities. We will process their applications speedily to tie in with the timetable that CYT villagers should vacate the site in mid-October.

Ends/Wednesday, May 26, 2010

Issued at HKT 17:06

NNNN