

Public consultation on proposed amendments to Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630)

The Government today (May 2) launched a public consultation on the proposed amendments to the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630). Members of the public are welcome to offer their views.

Coming into effect on June 30, 2017, the Ordinance has established a licensing regime in order to regulate private columbaria, ensure their compliance with statutory and government requirements, enhance protection of consumer interests, and foster adoption of a sustainable mode of operation by the industry. Matters relating to the operation of private columbaria that have been in operation and with ashes interred in their niches before the Government's initial announcement of its proposal to establish a licensing regime (i.e. pre-cut-off columbaria) are handled through a pragmatic and sensitive approach. The Government has reviewed the Ordinance in the light of operational experiences. It proposes to amend certain provisions of the Ordinance and enhance the implementation details to achieve more effective execution of the regulatory regime on private columbaria.

Major proposed amendments under consultation include:

1. Offering the option of applying for exemption to pre-cut-off columbaria that fulfils the relevant eligibility requirements and conditions, so that if their licence applications are eventually refused, they may continue to operate at their current confined scale if they opt to apply and are subsequently granted with an exemption, thereby averting massive displacement of interred ashes and minimising losses of the purchasers of niches;
2. Increasing the penalty for non-compliance with enforcement notices to enhance deterrence against violations;
3. Introducing a new offence to criminalise certain violations, including the sale of interment rights exceeding the ash interment capacity, the sale or leasing of unapproved niches, and the sale of interment rights when authorisation to sell interment rights has been revoked or suspended;
4. Specifying the conditions to be met for the Private Columbaria Appeal Board to consider new evidence submitted by appellants; and
5. Stipulating that the Ordinance is not applicable to registered masons meeting specified conditions.

The Government spokesman said, "The Government handles pre-cut-off columbaria with a pragmatic and sensitive approach, with a view to rectifying violations that existed before the establishment of the licensing regime, while avoiding the social disruption arising from massive displacement of

interred ashes or the inability to inter ashes in the niches purchased in advance by deceased persons upon the closing down of such private columbaria. To balance the general public's interest, the legislative review also fully takes into account the impact of pre-cut-off columbaria on the nearby traffic, the environment and the neighbourhood in general, as well as existing town planning procedures. The Government briefed the Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on the direction of the legislative amendment proposals in February 2024. The public consultation is to invite views from different sectors of society to enhance the regulatory regime on private columbaria."

The consultation paper has been uploaded to the website of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (www.fehd.gov.hk/english/public_consultation/pco2024.html). A Feedback Form is provided in the annex of the consultation paper. Members of the public may send their views by post (addressed to Private Columbaria Affairs Office of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, P.O. Box 80011, Cheung Sha Wan Post Office), fax (2827 2908), or email (pco_review@fehd.gov.hk) from today till June 2, 2024.

Tuen Mun Hospital missing patient found

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesman for Tuen Mun Hospital made the following update today (May 2) regarding a patient leaving the hospital without notification earlier:

The 14-year-old female patient who left the hospital without notification yesterday (May 1) has been located by the Police this morning and was back to the hospital in stable condition.

Nominations for Best Landscape Award for Private Property Development 2024 to close on May 17

Nominations for the Best Landscape Award for Private Property Development 2024 organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department

(LCSD) remain open until May 17. Interested developer, management company, design company, owners' organisation, landscape or horticultural company of the property should grasp the opportunity to submit nomination with prior consent from the owners' representative group of the property concerned. Application is free of charge.

The award aims to commend private property developments that excel in landscape design and horticultural maintenance. It also aims to bring about sustained environmental improvements in private property developments and encourage private bodies to incorporate more quality green elements into the planning and management of horticultural projects for the benefit of such developments.

The award is presented in five categories. Each category is divided into three groups according to the age of the property. For details, please refer to the LCSD webpage www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/green/property/index.html. The prospectus and nomination form can be downloaded from the webpage.

Completed nomination forms together with all necessary documents must reach the Secretariat of the Best Landscape Award for Private Property Development 2024 on or before May 17 through the following ways:

*By email: gcs@lcsd.gov.hk (no later than 5pm on the last day for submission)

*By post: 11/F, Leisure and Cultural Services Headquarters, 1-3 Pai Tau Street, Sha Tin (the date of postmark will be taken as the date of receipt)

*In person: 11/F, Leisure and Cultural Services Headquarters, 1-3 Pai Tau Street, Sha Tin (no later than 5pm on the last day for submission)

For enquiries, please call 2601 8026.

The Best Landscape Award for Private Property Development 2024 is organised by the LCSD and co-organised by the Home Affairs Department, the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects, the Institute of Horticulture (Hong Kong), the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors, the Professional Green Building Council and the Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies.

HKMA's Response to US Fed's Interest Rate Decision

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Federal Open Market Committee of the United States Federal Reserve (the Fed) announced early today (Hong Kong time) after its two-day meeting that it had decided to keep the target range for the federal funds rate

unchanged at 5.25-5.5 per cent.

The Fed's future interest rate decisions will be dependent on incoming data, the evolving outlook and the balance of risks. It has not yet gained enough confidence about the US inflation trajectory to start cutting interest rates. The high interest rate environment may last for some time.

The financial and monetary markets of Hong Kong continue to operate in a smooth and orderly manner. The Hong Kong dollar exchange rate remains stable, and the Hong Kong dollar interbank rates might remain high for some time. The public should carefully assess and manage the relevant risks when making property purchase, mortgage or other borrowing decisions. The HKMA will continue to closely monitor market developments and maintain monetary and financial stability.

Red flags hoisted at several beaches

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (May 2) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach, Shek O Beach and Big Wave Bay Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island; Hung Shing Yeh Beach and Pui O Beach in Islands District; and Silverstrand Beach in Sai Kung District. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at these beaches.