

LCQ15: Improving average living floor area per person

Following is a question by the Hon Jimmy Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (June 20):

Question:

In 2016, the median floor area of accommodation of domestic households was about 430 square feet (sq ft) and the median per capita floor area of accommodation was about 161 sq ft, with more than 90 per cent of households in the territory living in accommodation of less than 753 sq ft. In addition, among the approximately 2.508 million accommodations in Hong Kong, 8.1 per cent of them had a floor area less than 215 sq ft, while 4.9 per cent of them were private permanent housing. There are comments that such data shows that the accommodation area of Hong Kong people is becoming smaller, which runs counter to the vision emphasised by the Government to improve the per capita floor area of accommodation. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows, in respect of the private residential flats to be completed in each of the coming five years, the following information on those flats with a usable area (a) below 161 sq ft, (b) ranging from 161 sq ft to less than 431 sq ft and (c) ranging from 431 sq ft to 752 sq ft respectively:

(i) the total number of flats and its percentage in the annual flat production,

(ii) a breakdown of the number of flats by District Council district, and

(iii) the estimated average per-square-foot price;

(2) as the Chief Executive has proposed in the Policy Address delivered in October 2017 the vision of developing Hong Kong into a liveable city, whether the authorities will consider formulating a standard of per capita floor area of accommodation for private residential flats; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether the authorities will consider, by drawing reference to the experience of countries such as the United States, Canada, Japan and Korea, formulating "minimum living standards" to stipulate the minimum standards on aspects such as the (i) safety and basic facilities of accommodation, (ii) number of residents and (iii) areas of bedroom and kitchen, as a benchmark for living quality; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as the per-square-foot prices of private residential properties have hit record high time and again in recent years, the flats built by private developers have become increasingly smaller to cater for the continuous decline in affordability among prospective buyers, whether the authorities

will consider including a provision of "minimum flat area" or "maximum number of flats" in residential land leases, with a view to reversing the trend of a continuous decrease in the area of newly completed residential flats; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; of the authorities' measures to strike a reasonable balance between per capita floor area of accommodation and housing production?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with relevant bureau and departments, my reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Jimmy Ng is as follows:

(1) According to the "Hong Kong Property Review 2018" published by the Rating and Valuation Department, the forecast number of private units to be completed in 2018 and 2019 are 18 130 and 20 371 respectively. A breakdown on the number of units with saleable area (1) less than 40 square metres (sq m) (about 431 square feet (sq ft)) and (2) between 40 and 69.9 sq m (about 431 to 752 sq ft) by District Councils, their aggregate total and percentage of the annual forecast completion are at Annex. The above-mentioned report does not provide further breakdown on the forecast completions of private units with saleable area less than 40 sq m, nor does it provide forecast completions of private units in and after year 2020, hence the Government cannot provide such information. As regards the forecast price of the private flats, it is determined by the market and the Government is not in a position to, and will not, estimate it.

(2) – (4) Hong Kong is a highly dense and compact city with high concentration of population. The advantages include convenience and greater economies of scale for city and infrastructure development. High-density development will however also affect our liveability, living space and average living floor area per person.

We agree that there is room for enhancing the liveability and improving the living space in Hong Kong. These are indeed the vision and long-term goals of Hong Kong as advocated in the "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" study. Nevertheless, setting specific living space standards alone by the Government cannot improve our living space. A more important and fundamental approach is to increase land supply in a sustained manner.

In this regard, the Government will continue to adopt a multi-pronged strategy on land and housing supply. The Task Force on Land Supply (Task Force) is conducting a five-month public engagement (PE) to invite views from all sectors in the community on the 18 land supply options. The Task Force has particularly pointed out in its PE booklet that the average living floor area per person in Hong Kong is lower than that of other nearby advanced economies such as Tokyo and Singapore, and has highlighted the importance of establishing a land reserve to improve liveability.

As mentioned in Hon Ng's question, we need to strike a reasonable

balance between housing production and average living floor area per person, as both the increase in housing production to address needs for accommodation and the increase in average living floor area per person to improve living standard would require additional land. In view of the imbalance in supply and demand for land and housing, and given the fact that property prices are soaring continuously, our current priority is accorded to increasing housing production to meet the basic accommodation needs of the people. Besides, as a pluralist society, there are diverse aspirations in respect of flat size. In the longer run, we consider that when the land shortage situation is alleviated, the society will be in a better position to explore whether a standard on average living floor area per person should be set.