

LCQ18: Places for religious activities in Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Benson Luk and a written reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

According to the Hong Kong Fact Sheets issued by the Government in October 2024, more than three million people in Hong Kong adhere to a religion. It is learnt that, from time to time, various religious bodies have a demand for places to conduct religious activities. However, in recent years, some religious bodies have encountered difficulties with the approval processes and procedures when applying for the construction of permanent places for religious activities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of applications received from religious bodies of different religions for the construction of permanent places for religious activities in the past five years; among such applications, the respective numbers of those that have been approved, those that are pending approval and those that have been rejected, as well as the reasons for the rejection of those applications (set out in a table);

(2) whether the Government currently has established approval mechanisms in place, including a dedicated land allocation system for religious purposes and a special land premium system for the conversion of land designated for non-religious uses into places for religious activities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that and whether the Government will consider introducing specific and relevant mechanisms in the future;

(3) whether the Government will provide assistance or financial support to religious bodies for the construction of permanent religious places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether the Government will provide funding schemes to religious bodies for the construction of religious places, expedite the vetting and approval of applications in this regard, and assist religious bodies in carrying out renovation or enhancement works for new or existing religious places, so as to promote tourism activities and enable more members of the public to visit and tour such places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Development Bureau (DEVB), I give the

consolidated reply to the Hon Benson Luk's question on behalf of the Government as follows:

Hong Kong is an open and inclusive city in which religious freedom is the fundamental rights enjoyed by Hong Kong residents as protected by the Basic Law and other relevant legislation. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has been maintaining close liaison with religious groups and attends events organised by them with a view to promoting the communications with them and understanding their needs.

The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) is responsible for liaising with local religious groups and plays a co-ordinating role in local religious affairs. While adhering to the principle of non-intervention of the freedom of religion and religious groups' internal affairs, HYAB listens to the views of respective religious groups and, where necessary, renders assistance to them through appropriate channels.

According to the DEVB, while sites are currently not reserved specifically for religious purposes in the course of land use planning, "Religious Institution" is always permitted under a number of statutory planning uses, including "Government, Institution or Community" and "Commercial" zones. Religious groups may acquire or lease from the market private land or premises for religious use according to their needs. So long as the religious use is compatible with the specified uses under the relevant approved Outline Zoning Plans and land leases, the relevant land or premises may be used for religious purposes without the need for any applications or approval. For example, for a commercial building situated in "Commercial" zone with the permitted use under lease as commercial use, religious use is a permitted use. In fact, a number of churches or places of worship are situated in commercial buildings. If a site is within a "Residential" zone, the proponent only needs to submit a simple planning application to the Town Planning Board (TPB). If the land or premises is restricted to residential use under lease, applications may be made to the Lands Department (LandsD) for lease modification. When processing the relevant applications, the TPB and the LandsD will take into account the views from the relevant bureau(x)/department(s), including the HYAB.

Also, under the current land policy, if religious groups wish to develop religious facilities on Government land, they may apply to the Government by way of private treaty grant (PTG). When processing the relevant land grant applications, the LandsD would consult the relevant bureau(x)/department(s) with regard to the actual circumstances of the case, and seek the HYAB's policy support. If the HYAB's policy support can be secured for the project, there will be concessionary premium arrangement for the respective religious facilities. The HYAB does not provide any other financial support to religious groups for acquiring permanent religious facilities at present.

As regards applications from religious groups to develop permanent religious facilities as mentioned in the question, the LandsD received a total of four PTG applications related to religious use in the past five years or so (three of which are solely for religious use, and the other

application covers other facilities). So far, two applications have been withdrawn by the applicants while the remaining two are under processing. Separately, in the past five years the LandsD also approved two applications, both of which were received prior to 2021. The relevant information is set out in the table below:

Year	Number of Applications Received	Number of Applications Approved*	Number of Applications Withdrawn
2021	1	1	0
2022	2	0	0
2023	0	0	0
2024	1	1	2
2025 (as of March 2025)	0	0	0

Note: The Government does not separately compile statistics on the number of lease modifications or planning applications which are solely for religious use.

*The applications approved in a year do not necessarily correspond to the applications received in the same year.

The relevant bureau(x)/department(s) will continue to expedite the processing of the applications. Meanwhile, the HYAB will continue to keep in touch with religious groups to render appropriate and practicable assistance. Regarding promoting tourism activities as mentioned in the question, it is stated in the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry 2.0 promulgated in December 2024 that the Government will focus on diversified development of religious tourism to enrich Hong Kong's tourism offerings, including engaging with religious groups to explore opening up religious venues as tourist attractions on a limited scale without affecting religious activities. The HYAB will assist in liaison with relevant religious groups to explore the feasible arrangements and actively collaborate with the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau's work.

Besides, to encourage the preservation of graded historic buildings, including religious premises, the Commissioner for Heritage's Office of the DEVB launched the Financial Assistance for Maintenance Scheme on Built Heritage in 2008 to provide financial assistance to the owners of privately-owned graded historic buildings, as well as tenants, who are non-profit-making organisations, of Government-owned declared monuments and graded historic buildings for them to carry out minor maintenance works by themselves. Private owners of declared monuments may seek technical advice from the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) or apply to the AMO for the AMO to carry out maintenance and repair works for their declared monuments, and the cost of which will be borne by the AMO.