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CIRCULAR TO PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTES

CHANGES TO GROSS FLOOR AREA (GFA) EXEMPTION GUIDELINES – GFA TO INCLUDE (1) BAY WINDOWS IN ALL DEVELOPMENTS; AND (2) PLANTER BOXES WITHIN A RESIDENTIAL UNIT

Objective

This circular explains the changes to the GFA exemption with regard to bay windows and planter boxes for residential developments

Effective Date

With effect from 07 Oct 2008

Who should know

Qualified Persons (QPs), Developers, Home Buyers, Property Consultants

Background

1. Currently, bay windows and planter boxes are exempted from GFA and sold as internal spaces of a residential unit. There is a need to review the GFA exemption for bay windows as they have been found to have contributed significantly to the building bulk, affect the design of buildings and generally do not encourage energy efficiency.

Bay windows

2. Bay windows were originally exempted from GFA because these were viewed as raised window ledges and not part of the floor slab. Over the years, the height of the bay window ledge was relaxed and allowed to be lowered to 0.5m from the floor slab. This has effectively made

the bay window a usable internal space, no different from the rest of the floor space of the unit.

3. Increasingly, we are seeing a proliferation of bay windows among the newer residential developments with the buildings virtually wrapped around by bay windows. Often the provision of bay windows is intended mainly to increase the saleable strata space. In order to overcome the standard bay window façade appearance, some architects have resorted to provide cladding to hide the bay windows. The result is that this feature adds immense 'bulk' to a building and influences the design outcome of developments.
4. In addition, the extensive use of bay windows will lead to higher heat transfer into buildings and increase the need for air-conditioning to cool the building. BCA has advised that many existing residential buildings with extensive bay windows are found to exceed the prescribed Residential Envelope Transmittance Value (RETV) of 25W/m². The extensive provision of bay windows therefore runs counter to the objective of encouraging energy efficient building design and sustainability.

Planter Boxes

5. The objective of planter boxes is to encourage residents living in flats and condominiums to provide some vertical greenery to help create visual relief to our high-density living environment. However, feedback and our investigations have revealed extensive unauthorised conversions of planter boxes within residential units for use as a balcony space or an extension of the living room instead. This defeats the purpose of giving GFA exemptions for the planter boxes to encourage vertical greenery in the first place.
6. URA has also received feedback that flat owners (i.e. the end users) are unhappy that they are not allowed to convert the planter boxes, which are part of their strata space, to other uses since they have paid for the space when they bought the unit. Others are not interested in planting, while some found the planter boxes restrictive and impractical to maintain the plants. As planter boxes are exempted from GFA, any conversion to other uses will involve additional GFA and payment of development charge for which the owner may not be prepared to pay.

Changes

7. It is apparent that exempting bay windows and planter boxes from GFA has led to the unintended and undesirable consequences mentioned above. It has unwittingly shifted market behaviours and negated the objective of the GFA exemptions for these building features. As such, our review has concluded that bay windows and planter boxes should no longer be exempted from GFA.
8. URA will leave it to the developers and building owners to decide if they wish to continue to provide bay windows and planter boxes for their residential developments so long as these building features are counted as GFA¹. The industry will have a free hand to design and provide these building features based on their commercial considerations as there will no longer be restrictions on the size of bay windows and planter boxes. Planter boxes that are provided within the balcony can be treated as part of the 10% bonus balcony GFA. This revision will allow architects and developers to have more flexibility in the design of their buildings and internal spaces.

Exceptions

Planter Boxes within communal areas & non-residential developments

9. Planter boxes provided within non-residential developments (eg. commercial, hotel, business parks, etc), as well as those located within the communal areas of residential developments (e.g. as part of sky terraces, or along common corridors), will however continue to be GFA exempted. Our review has shown that these areas are typically well-planted and maintained by the MCST for the benefit of all occupants of the development. Communal skyrise greenery in particular has been shown to be more effective in achieving greenery for the city.

Implementation

10. The revised guidelines on bay windows and planter boxes will take effect 3 months from the date of release of this circular (ie, 07 Oct 08) and will apply to all new development applications for new erection, amendment and A&A received on or after the effective date. Only formal development applications (which do not include Outline Applications) with a valid PP issued prior to the effective date will continue to be evaluated under the old GFA guidelines.
11. For approved developments with approved bay windows and planters exempted from GFA, these approved spaces will remain as GFA exempted until the buildings are redeveloped.

12. I would appreciate it if you could convey the contents of this circular to the relevant members of your organisation. If you or your members have any queries concerning this circular, please do not hesitate to call our DCD Enquiry Line at Tel: 6223 4811 or e-mail us at ura_dcd@ura.gov.sg. We would be pleased to answer queries on this, and any other development control matter. For your information, the past circulars to the professional institutes are available from our website <http://www.ura.gov.sg>.

Thank you.

HAN YONG HOE
DIRECTOR (DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)
for CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

¹ The revised guideline will apply to all residential developments, including flats, condominiums, serviced apartments, strata landed and landed housing.

Clarification notes:

1. The GFA exemption for bay windows will be rescinded for [ALL Developments](#).
2. Bay windows and planter boxes incorporated in development applications submitted to URA before 07 Oct 2008, which result in a Grant of Provisional Permission will continue to be evaluated under the old GFA guidelines.

CHANGES AT A GLANCE

Current	Revision (wef 07 Oct 2008)
GFA exemption apply to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bay windows▪ Planter boxes	GFA exemption rescinded for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bay windows in all developments▪ Planter boxes within a residential unit GFA exemption continue to apply to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Planter boxes provided within non-residential developments▪ Planter boxes located within the communal areas of residential developments

(Text in blue inserted on 14 Jul 2008)