

'Amenity Features' in Buildings

The carrying out of alterations and additions to buildings without approval or exemption under the Buildings Ordinance after they have been certified for occupation is a matter of concern.

2. Such building works are usually carried out to provide more accommodation or for profit, while others provide what may be described as 'amenity features' omitted from the original design because of plot ratio constraints. These features are often viewed by residents as essential rather than optional, and the sheer number of them suggests that more attention should be paid to the demand at the design stage.

3. Many 'amenity features' improve the quality of a building, enhance the environment or provide additional security or protection, and the purpose of this practice note is to invite authorized persons (APs) to consider incorporating such features into the design of new buildings or making provision for them to be added later without contravening the Buildings Ordinance.

4. The main types of 'amenity feature' to which attention is invited are as follows:

(a) Air-conditioning

For residential buildings, it is to be expected that window-type air-conditioners will be installed. In order to improve the structural security of these installations, wall boxes or platforms in reinforced concrete or other suitable material may be constructed as a permanent feature of a building, even over streets.

In other buildings which are not to be provided with a centralized air-conditioning system, such as factories, offices, restaurants and shops, it is equally desirable to make similar arrangements for window-type units at the design stage. However, the possibility of the installation of larger plant after these buildings are occupied should not be ignored as there might then be even greater scope for structural danger and nuisance, such as noise, vibration, exhaust air or dripping water. It is therefore desirable to provide adequate ducting and trunking and allow for recesses, set-backs, open yards or other suitable spaces at and above floor levels where air-conditioning package units (or other plant and their accessories) may be accommodated without the need to project over streets. In accordance with Building (Planning) Regulation 23(3)(b), any floor space genuinely intended for air-conditioning use may be excluded from gross floor area calculations.

(b) Security Gates

Provided they are of a type that does not significantly obstruct the means of escape from a building, and they have locks openable from the inside without keys, security gates may be installed prior to the issue of an occupation permit, or may be indicated on floor plans in suitable positions as possible future installations. Suitable positions are considered to be:

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- (i) entrances to individual units;
- (ii) main staircase exits from buildings; and
- (iii) in a composite building, between the domestic part and the commercial part; in this case the gate would be across an exit route, preferably in a lobby, and designed to prevent the entry of non-residents into the domestic part of the buildings.

(c) Counters, Kiosks, Offices, Stores and Lavatories for Watchmen and Management Staff

These facilities are normally necessary for the proper management of buildings in multiple ownership, and although normally accountable in gross floor area calculations their provision helps enhance standards of control and maintenance. Similarly, the provision of water and electricity supply points for use in some common areas, and the provision or reservation of space for communal and individual radio and T.V. aerials and relevant wiring, is also useful and adds to the quality of a building.

(d) Anti-burglar Bars, Clothes-drying Racks, and other Similar Household Fixtures

These are almost essential in domestic accommodation and will benefit occupants if available at an early date.

(e) Horizontal Screens

These may be located in open areas frequently used by occupants, either at ground floor or podium level, to provide protection where there may be a risk of falling objects. They should not materially affect the lighting and ventilation of the areas or nearby rooms, however, and they would not therefore be expected to provide much protection against the elements.

In domestic and composite buildings incorporating roof gardens/play areas at podium level around the perimeter of a domestic tower (see paragraph (h) below), solid screens of a width not exceeding 2 m may be permitted subject to the construction, planning and drainage being to the satisfaction of the Building Authority.

(f) Window Hoods

These may be designed to provide local protection against sun and rain, and also to reduce the potential danger of falling objects.

(g) Prestige Entrances

In multi-occupancy commercial buildings many companies desire impressive entrance doorways, but breaches of the legislation often occur when approved entrances are altered after a building has been certified for occupation. The need to maintain the integrity of protected lobbies and corridors related to means of escape and 'firemen's lifts' limits the scope for altering entrances, but careful design and planning can allow for such features to be installed later.

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(h) Podium Roof Gardens/Play Areas

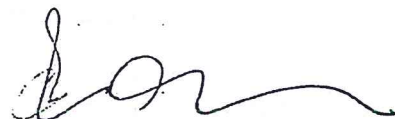
The incorporation of such features at podium roof level in the design of domestic buildings is increasing. Where these amenities occur under and within the perimeter of a domestic tower the Building Authority is generally prepared to grant modification of Building (Planning) Regulation 23(3)(a) where the area is not encumbered with structural elements which prevent an open effect. The Building Authority is also prepared to discount staircases or lift shafts which pass through such floors provided they are not connected with an entrance to the building from outside the podium level, or do not serve other accountable accommodation at that level.

(i) Canopies Over Streets

The provision of canopies over streets offers protection to the pedestrians against both the elements and falling objects. In order to provide effective protection, canopies should not be more than 7.5 m above pavement level and must be of adequate strength and be properly drained. To develop the concept further, favourable consideration will be given to designs of a canopy which incorporate, as an integral and permanent part, such additional elements as architectural features, structural supports and anchorages for shopfronts, lighting and ventilation installations and other amenity features of a like nature, subject always to this concession not being abused. APs are also reminded that canopies serve a particularly important purpose over busy thoroughfares and entrances to buildings.

5. Statements should not be made in sales literature which mislead the public as to the extent to which alterations and additions can be made to premises without approval and consent.

6. Some of the 'amenity features' listed above may impinge slightly on provisions of the Buildings Ordinance, particularly those concerning projections, window areas, and the like, and the requirement for certain spaces to be uncovered and unobstructed. However, APs are reminded of the possibility of obtaining exemptions or modifications by applications on Form 29. Provided the features are not excessive in scale, do not defeat the basic purposes of the Ordinance, clearly meet the needs of occupants and facilitate the maintenance and good management of buildings without creating potential hazard, they will be regarded as meeting special circumstances when any such applications are considered.



(A.G. Eason)
Building Authority

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Index under : 'Amenity Features' in Buildings
Unauthorized Building Works