

Tam to discuss with fellow secretaries alternative locations for greyhounds

Staff Reporter

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Alexis Tam Chon Weng said yesterday that he would discuss with other policy secretaries alternative locations for the relocation of the about 500 greyhounds from the former racetrack on the peninsula, instead of a plot of land adjacent to the Asilo Vila Madalena retirement home in Coloane.

Tam made the remarks while speaking to reporters during a visit to the retirement home near Coloane Village yesterday morning.

Tam did not mention which policy secretaries he was referring to. The Macau government has five policy secretaries.

The policy secretaries mentioned by Tam concerning the greyhound relocation row are understood to be Secretary for Administration and Justice Sonia Chan Hoi Fan, who oversees the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau (IACM), and Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosario, who oversees the Lands, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT).

Tam was accompanied by Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Celeste Vong Yim Mui and her bureau's other senior officials during his visit to the retirement home.

Another extension

Meanwhile, the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau said in a statement last night that it has decided to approve another seven-day extension for Macau (Yat Yuen) Canidrome Co. Ltd. before moving the greyhounds left behind at the Fai Chi Kei racetrack to another location, due to the impact of Super Typhoon Mangkhut – which pummeled Macau on September 16 – so that the installation of the facilities on an agricultural plot of land in Coloane to be used to house the dogs had been delayed – the plot next to the Asilo Vila Madalena retirement home. Now the new deadline for Yat Yuen to remove the greyhounds from the former racetrack's kennels will be October 6. Previously, the relocation was slated for this coming Saturday, September 29.

The now-defunct Macau (Yat Yuen) Canidrome Co. Ltd. controversially plans to move the about 500 greyhounds from the closed racetrack in Fai Chi Kei to the plot – where about 100 air-conditioned



Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Alexis Tam Chon Weng (centre) yesterday looks at the air-conditioned shipping containers to be used as kennels to house the about 500 greyhounds from the ex-Canidrome on a plot next to the Asilo Vila Madalena retirement home in Coloane during his visit to the facility. Photo: MPDG

shipping containers have already been set up for the dogs to be housed in – next to the Asilo Vila Madalena retirement home.

Speaking to reporters during yesterday's visit, Tam said that he got to know that the senior citizens living in the retirement home are worried that the greyhounds' relocation to the adjacent plot would have a significant impact on their daily life and that some of the residents already can't sleep due to their worries, adding that he had, therefore, decided to visit the home with several officials under his portfolio.

Both glad and unhappy

Tam said that he felt both glad and unhappy by his visit to the retirement home. He said that the happy thing was that he could see that the elderly home's facilities are excellent and that it has a beautiful natural environment around it, and that its staff are taking good care of the senior citizens.

Tam said that what made him unhappy was that the senior citizens and their family members told him that they are worried about the greyhound issue and that some of the elderly home's residents were even crying while talking to him about the matter.

The International Centre for the Rehoming of Greyhounds (Macau) said last Friday that it had recently received opinions from the Social Welfare Bureau and the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) about the possible impact on the retirement home by the facilities on the plot to be used to house the

dogs, and regarding the concerns expressed by senior citizens living in the retirement home.

The so-called International Greyhound Adoption Centre said last Friday that it had improved the facilities in line with the opinions and suggestions made by the two bureaus.

Yat Yuen has previously said that it would cover all the costs for the operation of the centre run by local animal protection group Anima.

When asked by reporters yesterday if he thought that the plot next to the elderly home was suitable for housing the about 500 greyhounds, Tam replied that the relevant government entities "could" try to look for a better location for the greyhounds'. Tam said that he would discuss the matter with the respective policy secretaries to see if there are alternative plots of land that could be used to temporarily house the greyhounds.

Petitions

Since early this month, representatives of the Asilo Vila Madalena retirement home have petitioned the government a number of times, urging it to stop Yat Yuen from moving the about 500 greyhounds to temporary facilities – shipping containers – just a few metres away from their home, due to hygiene and noise concerns. They also submitted a petition on the matter addressed to Chief Executive Fernando Chui Sai On last week.

The home on the outskirts of Coloane Village has about 80 residents. The home's director, Sister Ip Pui King, told reporters last week that Yat Yuen had only contacted her after workers had almost finished transforming the previously vacant plot of land into a "temporary greyhound adoption centre" where about 100 air-conditioned shipping containers have already been installed for the roughly 500 greyhounds to live in.

The plot of land is reportedly owned by a family involved in gaming junket operations.

When asked by reporters yesterday if he would ask Chui to visit the retirement home, Tam said that he had visited the home on behalf of Chui.

Chui's wife, Winnie Fok Wai

Fun, is the honorary president of animal rights group Anima which has said it wants most of the greyhounds to be adopted by dog lovers overseas.

Ip told reporters yesterday during Tam's visit she felt happy and "reassured" that Tam visited her retirement home yesterday, adding that she now felt hopeful that the greyhounds could be relocated to somewhere else.

Fresh air

Ip also said that the hygiene and noise problems would surely happen if the about 500 greyhounds were to be relocated to the plot adjacent to her retirement home. She said that the home's residents are fond of the natural environmental and fresh air around the property, adding that they do not want to be forced to close the windows and use air conditioners due to the possible relocation of the greyhounds there.

The government announced two years ago that the Canidrome would have to close down in 2018. When the racetrack shut its doors for good on July 20, the fate of the over 500 greyhounds left behind in its kennels made global headlines.

Yat Yuen is headed by lawmaker-cum-gaming executive Angela Leong On Kei.

Before last night's IACM statement, the government had said that the greyhounds would have had to be moved from the ex-Canidrome to another location by September 29 at the latest, following a 60-day extension granted by the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau in late July.

Relocation flops

Initially, Yat Yuen planned to move the roughly 500 greyhounds awaiting adoption to a vacant factory in Pac On in Taipa. Later, the company proposed to move them to 11 private homes. None of the two relocation plans got off the ground.

The government plans to redevelop the former racetrack, which had been in business since 1963, into a complex for schools, sports and recreation.

The Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau said in a statement on July 31 that it had decided to approve a request by Yat Yuen for it to be granted an additional 60 days before taking back the greyhounds left behind at the Fai Chi Kei racetrack after its July 20 closure, as the bureau considered the company's relocation plan at that time to be "feasible", according to which Yat Yuen planned to move the dogs to 11 residential units – most of them in villas or detached houses – where its staff and volunteers from Anima would take care of the dogs.

However, IACM President Jose Fonseca Tavares told reporters on August 13 that his bureau had received another greyhound relocation plan from Yat Yuen earlier that month, according to which the company planned to move the dogs to an agricultural plot of land in Coloane. Tavares said at that time that his bureau considered this proposal to be better than the plan to house the greyhounds in 11 private homes proposed by the company in late July.

Tavares also said at that time that the Lands, Public Works and Transport Bureau had not rejected the proposal to house the greyhounds on the agricultural plot of land – adjacent to the retirement home.

Before Tavares made the remarks on August 13, Anima president Albano Martins had told the Portuguese-language TV channel of government-owned broadcaster TDM in early August that Anima was considering moving the about 500 greyhounds from the old racetrack's kennels to an agricultural plot of land near Largo da Cordoaria in Coloane. Local online media outlet *All About Macau* later reported that the plot mentioned by Albano is next to the Asilo Vila Madalena retirement home.

The plot of land chosen for the temporary greyhound kennels and the retirement home are located close to Largo da Cordoaria on the outskirts of Coloane Village. The plot of land, which is privately owned, reportedly covers 7,718 square metres. ■



Accompanied by Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Celeste Vong Yim Mui (third from right, standing) and other officials under his portfolio, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Alexis Tam Chon Weng (first from right, standing) talks to residents in the Asilo Vila Madalena retirement home in Coloane during his visit yesterday. Photo: MPDG

Published since August 2004

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- Printed by – Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Wire services – AFP, AP, Bloomberg, Xinhua

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