

Pedestrian streets to bolster economy

Premier says renovation work must be in line with market principles and consumer choices

By XU WEI
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The State Council has decided to revamp and modernize more pedestrian streets nationwide as part of broader efforts to spur consumer spending and investment in urban infrastructure and shore up economic growth.

At its executive meeting on Dec 30, the Cabinet said giving face-lifts to more pedestrian streets will encourage new models of business to grow and improve the shopping experience for consumers.

It highlighted a market-oriented approach and the introduction of tailored policies and measures to create more job opportunities, according to a statement released after the meeting.

Premier Li Keqiang said at the meeting that the revamping of pedestrian streets must be moved forward with the development of small shops so that the streets can be more popular, distinctive and indicative of cultural backgrounds.

The renovation of pedestrian streets must be led by local authorities and be in line with market principles and consumer choices, he said.

“We need to research the possibility of encouraging private capital to take part in the policy measures so the market’s role can be further amplified,” he said, adding that the new pedestrian streets must see sustained economic returns.

The meeting also stressed the necessity for greater strides in cutting red tape, innovative approaches to government oversight and developing more convenient and intelligent facilities, with greater efforts to integrate online and offline commercial models. It also called for policies to be fine-tuned to local conditions, with proper arrangements to prevent vanity projects.

The growth of China’s consumer spending last year, as represented by retail sales, was estimated to have fallen by 1 percentage point year-on-year to 8 percent, the Ministry of Commerce said in a statement on Dec 30. The country’s retail sales volume for the year is expected to total 41.1 trillion yuan (\$5.89 trillion).

In the face of mounting downward pressure on the economy, the central government has unveiled 20 measures to boost domestic consumption, from improving commercial pedestrian streets and encouraging night markets to canceling restrictions on car sales.

The Ministry of Commerce issued a work plan in September that set a target of revamping 30 to 50 model pedestrian streets in the next three years with the aim of boosting consumer flows and business turnover by 30 percent.

The ministry said it will not encourage the construction of new pedestrian streets during the process or the demolition and rebuilding of existing ones, with digital upgrading being a main focus. Measures will be adopted to expand the coverage of



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wireless networks, the application of fifth-generation mobile communication technology and the use of big data for operational monitoring, it added.

The ministry launched a pilot program at the end of 2018 to upgrade 11 pedestrian streets nationwide, a project that enabled the refurbishment of over 800,000 square meters of commercial areas and introduced over 900 name brands and dozens of flagship stores.

The 11 streets saw their business turnover surge 17.3 percent year-on-year in the first 11 months of 2019 to 115.1 billion yuan, with the flow of customers up by 21.2 percent to some 825 million visits.

Yin Hong, an official with ministry’s department of circulation industry development, which manages industries related to the market circulation of goods, said the revamping of the pedestrian streets has focused on improving transport networks,

facilities and equipment and green-up projects.

The authorities will also focus on cracking down on counterfeit products, she said.

Chen Sheng, a professor with the School of Public Affairs at Chongqing University, listed a number of problems in the pedestrian streets in some cities, such as a lack of proper planning and local cultural elements, which resulted in their failure to attract local consumers.

“The revamping of pedestrian streets will be a significant measure to counter the downward pressure on the economy,” he said, adding that it will help drive investment in urban infrastructure and unleash more consumer spending in urban areas.

The renovated pedestrian streets, as potentially iconic new commercial areas, will also improve the competitiveness of cities and drive economic growth and job creation in neighboring areas, he said.

POLICY RESPONSE

Spring Festival pork supply boosted by reserves

By WANG QINGYUN
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Several ministry-level departments, including those responsible for commerce, health, and market regulation, have recently responded to issues of public concern.

Ministry says wholesale pork price down 16.3%

The supply of pork will increase significantly for Spring Festival, Xinhua News Agency quoted a Ministry of Commerce official as saying.

The ministry has worked with other departments and made plans to ensure the supply of pork during Spring Festival, and has distributed State pork reserves to the market since mid-December, Wang Bin, deputy director of its department of market operation and consumption promotion, said on Dec 30.

The amount distributed will increase, he said, pointing out that monitoring by the ministry showed that from Dec 16 to 22, the average wholesale price of pork in 36 large and medium-sized cities had



dropped by 16.3 percent from early November to 43.76 yuan (\$6.28) a kilogram.

The ministry will closely follow the supply and price of pork and other essentials at Spring Festival, he said.

Schools told to operate their own canteens

The General Office of the State Administration for Market Regulation and three other departments have issued a guideline to strengthen food security at schools and kindergartens.

The guideline stipulates that middle and primary schools and kindergartens should operate their canteens

themselves, if they can, instead of contracting them out to catering companies.

Also, day schools and kindergartens should not have grocery stores or supermarkets on campus, and those that do should gradually close them.

The decision was made to help students and young children develop healthy dietary habits, and reduce their consumption of snack food, the administration said in an online statement published on Dec 30.

The administration said some caterers outside schools tend to have lax food safety management and focus only on economic gains, which is why the guideline requires schools to cater for students themselves.

Guideline sets standards for care of the elderly

The National Health Commission, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine have issued a guideline for institutions that offer both medical service and elderly care.

It includes basic standards for

such institutions, including the kinds of departments and equipment they should have, and the qualifications required for staff members.

It also specifies the kinds of services the institutions should offer, and the standards for such services.

According to the guideline, the institutions should offer at least three kinds of services — basic services that include catering and cleaning, nursing services and psychological support.

Psychological support should be provided by counselors, social workers, and medical workers or nurses who have taken psychology courses.

They should help elderly people familiarize themselves with the environment of the institutions and blend in, follow their mental health and urge third parties, such as the seniors’ family members, to pay them regular visits.

Institutions that take in elderly people with dementia should take effective measures to ensure their safety, including installing electronic surveillance in public areas, the guideline says, adding they could

also offer cognitive rehabilitation services if they have that capacity.

Website to detail local governments’ debts

A website was launched on Dec 31 to share information of local governments’ debts, Xinhua News Agency reported.

The China Electronic Local Government Bond Market Access platform (<http://www.celma.org.cn>) run by the Ministry of Finance will release information including local governments’ debt ceilings and outstanding debts and the bonds they have issued.

According to a ministry center that studies and evaluates government debt, the establishment of the platform is an important step to deepen government information disclosure in key areas and respond to public concerns.

The platform will help local governments better manage their debts and fend off and defuse debt risks and promote healthy development of the economy and society, the center said.

Policy digest

More insurance choices for senior citizens

Measures to develop more diversified insurance products for elderly people were decided upon at the State Council executive meeting on Dec 30.

China’s population is aging, with more than 250 million people aged 60 and above, and the country should actively develop commercial insurance programs in the areas of social services to better tackle the issue, the meeting was told.

One of the measures is to speed up the development of commercial endowment insurance programs.

China should draw on the experiences of other countries and support the development of pension programs, insurance programs that cover medical services and the treatment of accidental injuries for people aged 60 and above, as well as programs that cover long-term nursing, the meeting decided.

It also decided the country should improve the quality of its commercial insurance programs, and develop programs that suit low-income groups and people who work in emerging industries.

Insurance firms will be encouraged to offer comprehensive insurance policies that cover areas including medical services, nursing and childbirth, and to include cutting-edge medical technologies and products in their programs.

The meeting also decided to speed up the opening of the insurance market and upgrade the insurance sector through fair competition.

Regulation implements Foreign Investment Law

The central government released the Regulation to Implement the Foreign Investment Law on Dec 31. The regulation was passed at a State Council executive meeting earlier in December and took effect on Jan 1.

The regulation includes specific measures to promote, protect and manage foreign investment, and lays out behaviors that departments and their staff members should be held accountable for.

Governments and their departments should treat domestic and foreign investors equally and according to law in areas including the allocation of funding, land supply, tax cuts, the granting of certification and human resources policies, the regulation says.

When formulating their own foreign investment regulations, local governments should seek opinions from foreign companies and relevant associations. Such regulations should also be released in time, and administrative management must not be carried out based on regulations that have not been released.

Local governments should put laws, regulations, policies and other information related to foreign investment on their official websites, publicize and explain them, and provide counseling for foreign investors.

Foreign investors who use gains from investment in the Chinese mainland to expand such investment should enjoy favorable treatment according to law.

The guideline also lays out specific requirements for governments to grant foreign investors equal access to government procurement contracts.

The country will strengthen its punishment for intellectual property rights infringements and offer equal protection to the intellectual property rights of foreign investors, it says.

Governments, their departments and staff members will be held accountable for a number of behaviors, including formulating or implementing policies that discriminate against foreign investors, and illegally limiting their inward and outward remittance.

Governments and government officials who fail to honor promises to or deals with foreign investors, or make promises that exceed their jurisdiction will also be held accountable.