Spurring a broader urban discourse

A vertical Lion City

Clifford Pier – a gateway to new life
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Spurring a broader urban discourse

The first ever World Cities Summit Mayors Forum held outside of Singapore united city leaders on a common platform to discuss common challenges and best practices in urban solutions.

Over 250 city leaders and senior representatives from international organisations and urban solutions companies came together in Bilbao to exchange ideas at the World Cities Summit Mayors Forum, held from 13 to 15 June 2013.

A pivotal event under the World Cities Summit programme, this was the first time that the Mayors Forum was held outside Singapore. Bilbao City was naturally the best choice as the host city since they were conferred the inaugural Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize in 2010. The Mayors Forum is a yearly event co-organised by Singapore’s Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC), and has become one of the most important and biggest platforms in the world for city leaders to generate greater collaboration and learning across regions.

Singapore’s Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan, who was the Chairman of the Forum, reiterated the need for collaborative learning in his opening address: “At this forum, we hope to gain insights from Bilbao’s remarkable transformation – from an industrial city to the vibrant knowledge and cultural hub that it is today.”

The Prince of Asturias HRH Prince Felipe De Borbón Y Grecia graced the event as Guest-of-Honour, while Deputy Mayor of Bilbao Ibon Areso shared on Bilbao’s “Guggenheim Effect” of urban and economic rejuvenation. With cities becoming new engines of growth and innovation, it is no wonder that urban leaders are motivated to integrate ideas across urban planning, development, governance and technology solutions when addressing complex urban challenges.
Common challenges, shared solutions

Moderated by Greg Clark, founder and principal of The Business of Cities, the Forum explored a plethora of issues within the theme of “Liveable and Sustainable Cities: Common Challenges, Shared Solutions.” This fourth edition saw 56 city leaders from all regions – including North America, Latin America, Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Oceania – gathering at this peer-to-peer platform to communicate their leadership experience. Half of these city leaders attended the Forum for the first time, with notable increased participation from Latin America and Africa.

Traditionally a one-day affair, the Forum was extended to three days this time round to accommodate a more sophisticated programme of plenary presentations and discussions. The main objective of the Forum’s programme was to initiate and kick-start more robust dialogues and interactions among the city leaders and delegates. The Forum was to spur a broader urban discourse, with new topics such as sustaining economic growth, the provision of urban services, combating climate change, rural-urban migration, widening income gap and the rapidly ageing population of many cities today.
Strong governance is key

Each morning’s dialogue opened with plenary presentations on city issues. They were followed closely by roundtable discussions on four topics – Integrated Planning and Dynamic Governance, Building a Competitive Economy, Ensuring a Sustainable Environment, and Achieving a High Quality of Life.

Cities such as Cape Town, Fukuoka City, Cairo, Perth, Shenzhen, Jakarta and Guadalajara City seized the occasion to present their case studies to the table discussion. Dr Liu Thai Ker, Chairman of the CLC, distilled the principles behind Singapore’s urban transformation. He expounded on the city’s urban makeover narrative with succinct explanations of how a fishing village was tremendously changed into the liveable and sustainable city today through careful long-term planning.

URA Chairman Peter Ho, who was a facilitator at one of the discussion sessions, had this to say in his opening remarks: “There are three main challenges to city administration – limited resources available, change in expectations, and a volatile environment due to globalisation. Integrated planning is therefore critical in good governance. We have to look at challenges that confront cities within such a totality. A city’s ability to respond to volatile urban environments will be the key competitive advantage to their success.” He emphasised the need for an urban governance system to respond to the changes in our dynamic political, economic and social environments, such that cities’ needs may be optimised to achieve the three liveability goals of a competitive economy, sustainable environment and high quality of life.

Mayor (Central Singapore District) Sam Tan, who represented Singapore at the Forum, gave a presentation on “Building a Competitive Economy – The Singapore Experience”, while the Mayor of Fukuoka City, Soichiro Takashima, shared on his city’s unique “Fukuoka Method” in the creation and reuse of landfill sites. Under this method, landfills are turned into lush green areas quickly. The Fukuoka Method has since been modeled after in areas around the world. The Mayor of Guadalajara City Ramiro Hernández García shared on infrastructure and service development challenges faced by his city. With “over 250,000 living in urban and suburban areas… and in a situation of poverty and marginalisation,” the city plans to steadily reverse the problems through a Housing Promotion Programme. Under this scheme, the government targets to build 15,000 new homes and 30,000 improvement projects over the next five years.
More focus on business and young leaders

In addition to the plenary presentations, discussion sessions and networking events, this year’s Mayors Forum outshone its past chapters with a compelling business focus. Amongst several new additions were the Business Summit and the Young Leaders Initiative. The Business Summit provided a platform for urban solution providers and companies to articulate their ideas into real business proposals for city implementation. Singapore and Bilbao each facilitated a panel – moderated by Mr Lee Tzu Yang, Chairman of Shell Companies Singapore, and Mr Jon Andoni Aldekoa de la Torre, CEO of Bilbao City Council, respectively. Urban leaders from Keppel Corporation, Surbana International Consultants, IBM, and Siemens shared how integrated solutions were successfully implemented in the face of harsh urban challenges in cities such as Tianjin Eco-City and Kigali.

The key objective of the World Cities Summit Young Leaders Initiative was to profile young individuals who have demonstrated commitment and passion to shape the urban agenda and drive social change. Just as the Mayors Forum has built a community of city leaders, the Young Leaders Initiative was conceptualised to do likewise for the next generation of urban leaders. At the inaugural meeting, nine Young Leaders nominees convened a discussion on the sidelines to discuss the direction for the group, propose initiatives and brainstorm the agenda for the next World Cities Summit 2014, where the group will be officially launched. The discussion was led by Singapore’s Chief Negotiator for Climate Change, Ambassador Burhan Gafoor.

Looking forward

Urban themes such as these, amongst others that emerged from the Forum, will continue its thread into the 4th biennial World Cities Summit to be held from 1 to 4 June 2014. This will be held in conjunction with the Singapore International Water Week and CleanEnviro Summit Singapore events. At the next World Cities Summit, city mayors and urban leaders can expect to continue this learning journey with greater finesse and improved programmes.

In the closing address of the Mayors Forum 2013, Minister Khaw aptly noted: “The hard fact is that cities need to continuously transform themselves in order to stay relevant. We cannot just stand still. Change is therefore inevitable – it is part of the process that enables cities to rejuvenate and to revitalise themselves. Transforming a society is hard work and there will be failures and push-backs. But ultimately, success will come to those who have the perseverance to work at the dream until it materialises.”

By Rachelle Su
Towards a liveable, sustainable and resource-resilient Singapore

The second Urban Sustainability R&D Congress throws a spotlight on innovative R&D on urban solutions and future capabilities that will enable Singapore to develop more sustainably.

The inaugural Urban Sustainability R&D Congress, co-organised by the Ministry of National Development (MND) and partner agencies, was held in 2011. Now a biennial event, the second Congress was held from 27 to 28 June this year at the Biopolis, and attracted more than 600 participants from government agencies, research institutes and private sector companies.

Themed “Creating a Future-Ready City – Liveable, Sustainable and Resource-Resilient”, the Congress provided a platform to facilitate exchange and cross-fertilisation of urban solutions knowledge between participants from institutions of higher learning, public agencies and the industry.

Speakers from diverse fields of expertise were invited to provide their insights and perspectives on topics ranging from future mobility, liveable high-density townships, innovation in green buildings for the tropics, resource-resilient districts, creation and optimisation of new and existing spaces, socio-behavioural aspects of sustainable urban living, as well as information and communications technology for sustainable cities.

Skyline highlights two particular interest areas.

Potential R&D areas for the Land and Liveability National Innovation Challenge (L2 NIC)

The L2 NIC launched by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong last November aims to support an economically vibrant, highly-liveable and resilient city of the future with land capacity for sustained growth.

The challenge is to create new space cost-effectively and optimise the use of our existing land, while maintaining liveability. These areas will be supported by R&D in enabling Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and platforms.

A total of S$135 million has been set aside for the L2 NIC for the first six years from 2013 to 2018. The funding will cover basic research, applied research and small-scale demonstration projects for both technical research and relevant social and behavioural studies.

To ensure that the research will have strong implementation potential in Singapore, MND,
National Research Foundation (NRF), together with URA and other partner agencies, held extensive R&D road-mapping consultation with some 200 stakeholders from the research community and industry in May 2013. Examples of some promising R&D areas drawn from the road-mapping exercise include:

- Exploring an expanded range of uses in creating new underground spaces, thus freeing up surface land for more optimal uses. Possible uses include an estate goods mover system at 2 West, warehousing and logistics facilities at Tanjong Kling, and biomedical research and industry at the Underground Science City at Kent Ridge.

- Exploring ways of co-locating and integrating industrial infrastructure to optimise and intensify land use so as to achieve greater supply chain and production efficiency, as well as cost savings, through shared infrastructure and amenities.

- Studying how community needs, social behaviours and perception towards high-rise high-density living can be addressed through good urban design and urban solutions such as ways to improve thermal comfort, create more green and community spaces, and improve urban mobility. This will help to create liveable, sustainable and community-centric towns of the future.

This inter-agency road-mapping effort to identify most promising R&D areas will lead to the launch of the L2 NIC’s first competitive call for research proposals by end 2013. The L2 NIC R&D programme is a long-term, multi-agency effort to provide funding in R&D to provide sustained land capacity and options for future generations.

S$8 million in R&D grants offered under MND’s Sustainable Urban Living (SUL) programme

To initiate R&D efforts for urban solutions in land and liveability, MND launched the inaugural SUL competitive call for research proposals on 31 August 2012 to provide nearer-term seed funding for R&D in innovative and applied urban solutions to sustain Singapore’s long-term growth, while maintaining a highly vibrant, liveable and resilient environment. In this context, the scope focused on two key areas, namely (i) Creating space to expand Singapore’s land capacity; and (ii) Creating highly-liveable and compact model towns.

The Call attracted a total of 67 proposals. Following an assessment on their scientific merit, as well as application potential and economic impact for Singapore, four projects amounting to S$8 million have been selected for offer. These projects encompass the areas of Underground Construction Technology, Land Reclamation Technology and Space Optimisation, namely:

a. The use of “biogrout”, a type of organic material, to stabilise rock conditions in Singapore. This will lower the construction risks and make underground developments safer.

b. The use of locally-generated waste materials to develop an alternative fill material for land reclamation. This also reduces the space required for waste disposal in Singapore, e.g. landfills.

c. The use of a natural, green GeoBarrier System in underground structures. This natural geobarrier will replace the need for a concrete retaining wall, and potentially free up at-grade space for other uses, e.g. social and community facilities.

d. The study of new construction methods to improve structural and safety performance for ‘long-span’ bridging structures. Such large bridging structures could potentially be used to deck over roads and utilities and be used to create new innovative spaces.

These projects will take about three years to complete.

By Jolene Hoon
A vertical Lion City

As founders of architectural firm WOHA, Mr Richard Hassell and Mr Wong Mun Summ have a radical vision of what Singapore’s cityscape should be.
It is 2063. The world no longer relies on oil for energy. Rising sea levels have rendered traditional coastal settlements unfeasible.

There are 59 megacities – metropolitan areas with an excess of 10 million residents each – most of which are in Asia. The global population continues to skyrocket and shows no sign of abating. Singapore has cracked its birth rate puzzle, but now, the city-state has to answer the question, “Where to put everyone?”

These are the sort of hypothetical scenarios WOHA frequently sets up, scenarios for which the architecture firm can propose creative urban solutions. For its version of Singapore in 2063, the practice dreamed up the “Permeable Lattice City” (PLC) to be built on the Southern Islands, which are currently used to house oil refineries. The PLC has been designed to house five million people, which means, at just one-fifth the size of the mainland, it is nine times denser than Singapore now.

“We were going to raise a new city using buildings as city columns to support what we call a ‘permeable city’,” says Mr Wong Mun Summ, one of the two directors of WOHA. Subway stations are found near the ground, and apartments up in the air, with amenities such as restaurants, sports facilities and public spaces sandwiched in between. It is an elegant solution: sustainable and eco-friendly without sacrificing liveability. But it will probably never be realised.

“It’s a provocation,” explains Mr Richard Hassell, the other director. “There are lots of challenges, obviously, such as how you would fund it, how you would build it, all those kinds of interesting things. If you’re only talking about this in abstract, people won’t understand it. But when you show them something like this (the PLC) they start asking themselves how to solve this?”

It helps that most of the issues the PLC addresses are relevant to the current housing situation, such as how to ensure that high-density residences are still liveable to a first-world standard. As in science fiction movies, the PLC establishes a “what-if” context that, although far removed from the present, could rouse urban planners and architects enough to change the way they work.

“So we’re not talking about affecting a hundred people,” says Mr Wong. “We’re talking about millions.”

**Breaking ground**

WOHA was founded in 1994 by Mr Wong and Mr Hassell. In the early days of the company, the duo focused on residential projects, but after about five years, they spent a few years solely working on competitions, and promptly won the first two they entered in 2000. You have probably seen the end products: Stadium and Bras Basah MRT stations, the latter of which was intentionally “hidden” underground so it would not cause obstruction at the street level.
According to Mr Wong, most architects are trained and educated following “Western ideas, where everything tends to be compact.” “But here in the tropics, the reverse should happen: everything should be exploded, so that you actually have spaces in between that encourage cross-ventilation. Here, we actually have to think about the negative spaces. This is one way we have been rethinking our architecture.”

Designing a “high-density, high-liveability” Singapore is another architectural riddle WOHA is trying to answer. It is tough but the practice already has an inkling of which direction to take: the “club sandwich” approach. By stacking different programmes and uses on top of one another, you could have an array of amenities, infrastructure and residences in a single block. Imagine an entire megapolis of such high-rise blocks, decked with vertical greenery. Squeezing into an MRT cabin would be a thing of the past.

The two believe the city-state has a unique set of problems that cannot be solved by looking outside. “Everywhere else, it’s still cheaper to waste space,” says Mr Hassell. “We’re the canary in the coal mine that’s run out of space first in the world, and we need to be really creative. No one can help us now. We’ve got to do it ourselves.”

A year later, WOHA went on to submit an entry for the Duxton Plain Public Housing competition that would prove to be the watershed in the firm’s career. WOHA’s design of nine 40-storey towers, linked by sky bridges and brimming with vertical greenery, was radical in Singapore. Although WOHA did not win (the lot is now occupied by The Pinnacle@Duxton), the typology they proposed left a lasting impression on planners.

“People agreed it was an exciting scheme but, at the same time, they’re saying it wasn’t possible in Singapore,” Mr Hassell admits. “We have a kind of interesting relationship with the URA. We’re constantly pushing the boundaries. In a way it’s been a dialogue: an ongoing thing where we propose things that don’t fit in with current planning.”

Vertical greenery is now everywhere. It is even a statutory requirement, introduced by the URA where all new developments in Marina Bay, Kallang Riverside and Jurong Gateway are required to provide greenery within their developments, occupying an area at least equal to the plot of land that the developments sit on. The greenery can be provided through a combination of landscaped areas, sky terraces, and rooftop gardens.

Do it ourselves

“A lot of the architectural ideas here have been inherited from the West,” insists Mr Hassell. He cites public squares as an example. They are European in origin, and are unsuitable for our hot and rainy climate. “We’re interested in what kind of public spaces there should be in Asia.”

WOHA devised what they term “breezeway atria” as a localised equivalent of the plaza. These refer to sheltered corridors that cut through an entire structure from one end to the other. People can gather there but, crucially, “breezeway atria” allows wind to flow through the building. Not surprisingly, this would be too unpleasant in cool, temperate countries.

The School of the Arts (SOTA) is one of the first buildings in which Mr Wong and Mr Hassell implemented these atria. “We created a lot of covered cavernous spaces suitable for all weather conditions,” explains Mr Wong. “These are the ‘negative’ spaces where students hang out and play. And this is a typology that should be more common in tropical countries such as ours.”

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By Iliyas Ong

This article was first published in Going Places Singapore, an online magazine about appreciating our city anew.
01–04  Parkroyal on Pickering
05–07  School of the Arts

All Images © Patrick Bingham–Hall
WOHA
2H2013 Government Land Sales Programme supplies more sites to meet continuing demand

The second half of the 2013 Government Land Sales (GLS) Programme has 11 Confirmed List sites and 20 Reserve List sites which can yield up to 14,200 private residential units, including 3,300 Executive Condominium (EC) units, 268,000 sqm gross floor area (GFA) of commercial space and 960 hotel rooms.

To meet the continuing demand for housing, the Government has placed 25 sites on the 2H2013 GLS Programme for residential development, including six EC sites and one commercial and residential site. Together, they can generate about 14,200 housing units, of which 6,000 would come from sites on the Confirmed List, while 8,200 would come from sites on the Reserve List. All the private residential sites in the 2H2013 GLS Programme, including the six EC sites, are located either in the Outside Central Region or in the Rest of Central Region where more affordable housing is expected to be built.

Commercial site to kick-start developments in the North

A commercial site at Woodlands Avenue 5 has been added to the 2H2013 GLS Confirmed List to kick-start the development of Woodlands Regional Centre, which will anchor the upcoming North Coast Innovation Corridor. The site will add some 66,000 sqm GFA of office space to meet business needs, and have 3,500 sqm GFA of ancillary retail space.

In addition, 2H2013 Reserve List will have two sites for commercial development that are carried over from the 1H2013 Reserve List. These include the commercial site at Sims Avenue/ Tanjong Katong Road, and the white site at Marina View/ Union Street.

The GLS Programme is regularly reviewed to ensure that there is sufficient supply of land to meet demand for economic growth and to maintain a stable and sustainable property market.

Sites in the GLS Programme are released through two main systems – the Confirmed List and the Reserved List. Confirmed List sites are released on a fixed, pre-determined date; while a site on the Reserve List will only be released for sale if the criteria for triggering the sale of the site are met.

Outside Central Region refers to areas located outside of the Central Region. The Central Region comprises the following 22 Planning Areas: Downtown Core, Orchard, Marina East, Marina South, Museum, Newton, Outram, River Valley, Rochor, Singapore River, Straits View, Bishan, Bukit Merah, Bukit Timah, Geylang, Kallang, Marine Parade, Novena, Queenstown, Southern Islands, Tanglin and Toa Payoh. The Rest of Central Region refers to the areas within the Central Region but is outside of the postal districts 9, 10, 11, the Downtown Core Planning Area and Sentosa. The Core Central Region refers to the postal districts 9, 10 and 11, Downtown Core and Sentosa. A map showing these areas is available at http://spring.ura.gov.sg/lad/orc/login/map_ccr.pdf.

The first pair of sites are located at Upper Serangoon View for private residential developments while the second pair is at Choa Chu Kang Grove and means for EC developments.

The Government will put up a Reserve List site for public tender if it receives an application from a developer who commits, by signing an agreement and paying a deposit of 3% of the bid price, to bid for the site at or above the minimum price which is acceptable to the Government. The Government will also consider launching a Reserve List site for sale if it receives sufficient market interest for the site. A site is deemed to have received sufficient market interest if more than one unrelated party submit minimum prices that are close to the Government’s Reserve Price for the site within a reasonable period.

By Heng Chan Yeng
New sites in the Government Land Sales Programme for second half of 2013

### Confirmed List

#### Residential Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Site Area (ha)</th>
<th>Proposed GPR</th>
<th>Estimated No. of Residential Units⁽¹⁾</th>
<th>Estimated No. of Hotel Rooms</th>
<th>Estimated Commercial Space (m²)⁽²⁾</th>
<th>Estimated Launch Date</th>
<th>Sales Agent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Upper Serangoon View (Parcel A)</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Sep-13</td>
<td>URA</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Upper Serangoon View (Parcel B)</td>
<td>1.23</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Westwood Avenue (EC)</td>
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<td>485</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>HDB</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Canberra Drive (EC)</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Upper Paya Lebar Road</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>URA</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Anchorvale Crescent (EC)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Choa Chu Kang Grove (Parcel A) (EC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>685</td>
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<td>0</td>
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#### Commercial Sites

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<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<th>Estimated No. of Residential Units⁽¹⁾</th>
<th>Estimated No. of Hotel Rooms</th>
<th>Estimated Commercial Space (m²)⁽²⁾</th>
<th>Estimated Launch Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Woodlands Avenue 5 / Woodlands Square</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68,950</td>
<td>Dec-13</td>
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### Reserve List

#### Residential Sites

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<th>Proposed GPR</th>
<th>Estimated No. of Residential Units⁽¹⁾</th>
<th>Estimated No. of Hotel Rooms</th>
<th>Estimated Commercial Space (m²)⁽²⁾</th>
<th>Estimated Launch Date</th>
<th>Sales Agent</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Aug-13</td>
<td>URA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lorong Lew Lian</td>
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<td>HDB</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

⁽¹⁾ The actual number of housing units, hotel rooms and commercial space could be different from the estimated quantum depending on the actual plans of the developers in terms of mix of uses and the size of the housing units and hotel rooms.

⁽²⁾ Refers to the estimated date the detailed conditions of sale will be available and applications can be submitted.
Exchanging planning expertise

In 2009, Singapore and Qatar signed a Memorandum of Understanding to deepen bilateral relations through the mutual exchange of ideas and experiences in urban planning. As part of the agreement, both countries arranged to hold a series of forums to exchange expertise on planning in an urban context.

The second Singapore-Qatar Urban Planning Forum was held from 27 to 29 May 2013 in Doha, Qatar. The forum not only facilitated an exchange of ideas and experiences in urban planning, it also provided opportunities for both countries to explore additional areas of cooperation.

Led by URA, the Singapore delegation also comprised representatives from agencies such as the Building and Construction Authority, Infocomm Development Authority, International Enterprise Singapore, Land Transport Authority, Singapore Sports’ Council, and several Singaporean private firms.

Senior officials from both countries shared their respective planning strategies and updates on key development projects. The Qataris highlighted plans drawn up to guide the development of Qatar and Doha, such as ongoing infrastructural works in preparation to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Delegates also visited some of Doha’s urban planning landmarks, including West Bay, Doha’s central business district; the Souq Waqif traditional market; Aspire Zone, a 250-hectare sporting complex; Education City; and the upcoming Hamad International Airport.

Through these site visits and interactions with the Qatari hosts, the Singapore delegation gained insights into Qatar’s integrated urban planning approach, particularly in striking a balance between creating modern, innovative developments and preserving local heritage and culture.

By Ruth Soh
Clifford Pier – a gateway to new life

A historic jewel by the waterfront celebrates its 80th anniversary this year. Step back in time as we trace its elegant transformation.
Before the age of affordable mass air travel, travellers to Singapore would have arrived by sea, on a luxury steamer if one was fortunate and wealthy enough. The majority of the rest – men and women in search of their fortunes would have entered the Singapore harbour in more humble vessels.

Sometime in the late 1930s…every seafarer would see, as the ships drew closer to the Lion City, the skyline would gradually rise up from the watery horizon. Perhaps initially as a hazy mirage before eventually becoming clearer, with the grand, grey landmarks lining up along the various quays, becoming more solid in the brilliant tropical sun that shines down over the Equator.

Scanning hopefully from the deck of the ship, a traveller would have seen his future anchored on one end by the Fullerton Building, possibly the grandest post office in the Far East. If the traveller had arrived on a fast steamer in the late 1950s, his attention would also be caught by the skyscraping Art-Deco style Asia Insurance Building that terminated the western end of the vista with its shiny silver crown. Or perhaps he is arriving at dusk, and as the flaming sunsets that this island is known for turns into velvety night, his eyes would be drawn ahead to a set of red lights marking the location of Singapore’s Clifford Pier. This is where all the smaller lighter boats seem to gather around, discharging passengers and their luggage that they have picked up from the larger ships. They would make their way gingerly up the steps into the Pier’s cavernous hall and then onto the bustling streets of our waterfront.
Fast forward to April 2006

On a balmy evening, as salt water breezes blew across the hall of Clifford Pier from the then un-dammed Marina Bay, over 200 people gathered to mark the passing of an era. After 73 years as a working pier that saw the arrivals ranging from dignitaries to coolies, the last boat would finally leave from the Pier. Marina Bay was about to be transformed into a freshwater reservoir, marking the next step in the remaking of our waterfront and our new downtown.

A question lingered in the air. What would be the future of this grand old dame, weathered, but full of charm? Unknown to many of the guests present, our URA conservationists and planners had started work a few years before, thinking through about what would be the future of our historic waterfront as part of this new centre for our city.

One key idea that was pursued was the recognition that for a city to have a unique identity, a sense of history and place is often critical. This could be achieved through the selective retention of markers of history, such as the conservation of architecturally significant buildings and the retention of historic urban features. Collectively, these markers also illustrate the social changes of a city, and can embody the memories of the city and its people.

For the new Marina Bay, Singapore would have the best of both worlds. Through proposing the conservation and repositioning of Clifford Pier, the Customs Harbour Branch, the Change Alley Aerial Plaza Tower, and the retention of the original hand-built granite seawall of Collyer Quay that dates back over a century, this original shoreline for Singapore, with its irregular profile, would lend a sense of old world charm to the precinct.

Packaged for sale via tender with conservation and urban design guidelines to protect key features, vistas and public spaces, Clifford Pier was also carefully nurtured through a Design Advisory Panel to evaluate the restoration and development process.
Today

Today is the history for tomorrow. A planning vision has been realised.

At all times of the day or night, we can now stroll along historic Collyer Quay and view the futuristic new downtown across the Bay. Clifford Pier, having just turned 80 years old, is now part of the Fullerton Heritage group. It is one of the many revitalised historic jewels that now graces the shoreline of a freshwater Marina Bay. Reaching the other side, on new land that we have gained back from the seas, we can finally look back at our skyline, with the buildings from our past illustrating the development of Singapore over a century.

Clifford Pier’s red lanterns have been relit, and beckon your eyes across the waters as the sky fades to a tropical dusk. After many years, we can once again imagine what it might have been like in the days of old, to first set eyes on fabled Singapore – the crossroads of the world.

By Kelvin Ang

The Fullerton Heritage celebrates Clifford Pier’s 80th anniversary with a nostalgic exhibition of photographs that chronicles the different roles the Pier has played in the socio-political landscape of Singapore between 1933 and 2006. It is held daily from 10 am to 10 pm at Clifford Pier, 80 Collyer Quay, Singapore 049326. Admission is free and the exhibition will end on 31 December 2013.

01 Multi-hued stained glass fanlight at Clifford Pier entrance
02–03 Unique architectural elements at Clifford Pier
04 Aerial view of Fullerton Heritage, present day
Giving students a seat at the planning table

Even “SimCity” was not enough to prepare students for the real-life challenges in urban planning.
At the end of a one-day planning workshop, Riverside Secondary Two student, Tan Yishi shared with everyone: “The workshop made me realise how hard it is to plan and consider all the needs of the people.” Agreeing, Anglican High Secondary 3 student, Poh Chu Heng said: “I learnt that planning is not easy and that a lot of careful consideration is needed before an actual plan can be carried out. Communication too, is important as different people have different views and opinions and they all must be considered.”

These sentiments were echoed by almost all the 60 participants in URA’s educational outreach programme called, “Be Planners for a Day”. Youths can be powerful agents of change in the future if they are equipped with the right knowledge and tools. It is never too early (or too late) to expose the younger generation to the complexities and challenges in managing Singapore’s physical development. After all, juggling the needs of a city-state without hinterland and trying to provide sufficient land for economic growth and future development within 714 sq km of land is both an art and a science.

When a piece of land is available for a variety of uses, how does one decide which group gets it? How can we expose students to the intricate issues of land use planning in an interesting and engaging manner? By providing them with real-life examples and “live” sites to plan for of course!

Planners for a day

“Be Planners for a Day” programme was specially conducted during the recent June school holidays. Some sixty 14 and 15 year-old-students from Anglican High School and Riverside Secondary School were tasked with creating urban solutions for a “live” site that best meet the needs of residents and various community groups.

The challenge issued to the students: Create a vision and a site plan for the assigned area. Summarise all the ideas and planning considerations before presenting a coherent recommendation to the facilitators.

Before embarking on site studies, general planning concepts were introduced to the students using simple ice-breakers and quizzes. This was followed by a field trip to study the site that they had been assigned up close. The students had to make use of their map-reading, photography and observation skills as they took note of the area’s existing uses and ground conditions.

To up the ante, facilitators threw out letters in which current and future users of the site voiced their concerns, needs and wants. Managing the expectations of the stakeholders and incorporating the needs of the wider society proved to be a headache for some of the students. Riverside Secondary Two student, Xu Ming Wei cheekily commented: “It’s not as easy as it seems. The stakeholders seriously have a lot of concerns, making our jobs difficult.”

After the site study, students tried their hands at visioning and designing a site plan. With guidance from the facilitators, the class learnt how to parcel the site. They also decided how best to allocate various land uses. Using LEGO blocks to illustrate their site plans, the students were ever mindful of the diverse views of the stakeholders. Each team took turns to share their ideas with their class, eliciting much discussion and even laughter in the process.

And when the laughter died down and the programme formally wrapped up, the students’ takeaway was this: urban planning is no simple task and they might stick to playing “SimCity” for the time being as they ponder a real career in urban planning in the future.

By Ashton Chong and Sabrina Khoo

We welcome all schools to sign up for “Be Planners for a Day”. The programme can be held as a full six-hour session in one day or split into three-hour sessions over two days. The cost of the workshop is S$25 per student (excluding GST, transport and food costs). Please go to http://www.singaporecitygallery.sg/prog_schools.html for more information.
Red lamp pier

Affectionately known as “Ang Teng” (red lamp pier in Hokkien), Clifford Pier was the landing point for many of our forefathers in the 1930s. Its colloquial name harks back to the red oil lamp that used to hang from the Pier to alert ships as they entered the harbour. Ang Teng was also a favourite dating ground for our grandparents and parents.

Clifford Pier eventually evolved into a terminal for day-trippers bound for the offshore islands and was a scene of much panic and turmoil during the Japanese invasion in the early 1940s. Now part of the “Fullerton Heritage” development, this grand old dame turns 80 this year and we celebrate its majestic transformation over the years.