

FOCUS GROUP ON QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CONCEPT PLAN 2011 REVIEW: SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Singapore already provides a good quality of life. Located within the Asian growth region, Singapore is well poised to ride new waves of economic development over the next several decades. Along with new opportunities, there will also be increased competition for talent and resources. To stay relevant and anchor Singapore as the preferred home and destination for talent, both local and foreign, Singapore will have to continue to provide an even better quality of life and living environment, and even greater distinctiveness amongst other cities.

Achieving this necessitates building a Singapore that is inspiring and inclusive – one which retains and attracts talents and one which is an endearing home to a diverse range of cultures and different generations of youths, individuals, families and the elderly.

APPROACH

Convened in Jan 2010, the Focus Group considered wide ranging issues related to Quality of Life, including current policies and strategies as well as findings from URA's Lifestyle Survey and Online Survey. Site visits were also conducted.

KEY IDEAS and RECOMMENDATIONS

The key ideas and recommendations may be captured in 4 broad themes, viz:

- (A) Distinctiveness: An inspiring Global and Asian city
- (B) Proud home: Deepening the sense of community and ownership
- (C) People-centricity: Catering for diversity while being age-friendly
- (D) At the cutting-edge: Breaking new ground as a city of tomorrow

(A) DISTINCTIVENESS: AN INSPIRING GLOBAL AND ASIAN CITY

Today, Singapore is often described as a cosmopolitan, successfully multi-racial city; a lush “city in a garden”; and a nation with an international yet Asian character. Building on and beyond these, how can Singapore become an even more distinctive, inspiring, and beautiful Global and Asian city?

The Focus Group proposes a number of ideas centred around creating more iconic spaces and features, making the city centre “buzzy”, enhancing the public transport experience and giving a greater place for the arts.

1. Facilitating more iconic spaces

To raise Singapore's profile on the international stage, we can create more iconic spaces like Marina Bay. We could build on our "City in a Garden" image to become a city of great urban biodiversity. This could include larger iconic and themed spaces and parks as well as smaller, more intimate green spaces woven into our housing estates and city areas. Such spaces could be enlivened by regular activities including both unplanned local events as well as signature events. We could also emphasize our distinctiveness as a city where old and new buildings exist in harmony by making the integration and contrast even more dramatic.

2. Making the city centre "buzzy"

We could make the city more vibrant through having more live-in residential population within the city centre. There could be a wider range of housing options, such as different forms of public housing, short-term transitional housing including rental apartments for young adults, and adaptive re-use of existing buildings. As far as possible, the community in the city centre should be an inclusive one serving to attract those who aspire for city living.

To create a greater sense of connection and vibrancy on the city streets, there should be more innovative urban design to create positive experiences that engage the five senses and the public imagination. Street levels should have greater "transparency" and "porosity", e.g. through shops and spaces whose lively interiors are visible to passers-by and easily accessible, to create a sense of connectivity and buzz.

We could also bring more community life into the business district on weekends and public holidays through street closures. At the same time, we could enhance the branding and marketing of the city centre through more regular and consistent broadcasting of city centre images.

3. Enhancing mobility, walkability and the public transport experience

An efficient and enhanced transport experience is an essential dimension for a good quality of life. In the coming years, we will not be able to expand our roads at the pace that we are doing today given our limited land and rising concerns on the environmental impact of cars. Hence, a key strategy should be to enhance mobility through public transportation, cycling and walking.

(a) Creating the best transport experience in the city centre

Within the city centre, we could create our best public transport, walking and cycling experience. MRT stations should be spaced closer together to make public transport more convenient and comfortable in the city, in view of our hot humid climate. We could have a comprehensive intra-city shuttle bus network, with convenient pick-up points that would encourage more to take public transport. There could also be more elevated walkways that link buildings. Adequate cycling infrastructure and dedicated cycling lanes could be planned in advance at Marina Bay. Hire-and-ride bicycle stations could then be provided to serve the city centre. We could also take advantage of the waterways in the city centre by developing a water transport network to complement other modes of public transport.

(b) Enhancing mobility outside the city centre

Our towns should be planned cohesively to encourage greater use of public transport, walking and cycling. We should continue to plan more homes near MRT stations, e.g. through mix-use housing options, to make it convenient to use public transport.

To encourage more cycling within towns, dedicated cycling lanes can be provided. This will also make the journey safer for cyclists and pedestrians. Essential facilities for parking and storage of bicycles as well as changing and shower stations for bicyclists are needed at major transport nodes and interchanges. However, we need to examine whether a tropical and densely built city is conducive for mass use of cycling for transportation.

More regular and extensive feeder bus services from residential estates, including private estates, to MRT stations would also encourage more to use public transport.

(c) Managing private car usage

The cost of riding public transport could be reduced further so as to encourage motorists to switch to public transport. We should also encourage clean-energy car usage as a more environmentally sustainable option for the future.

We could also make the park-and-ride scheme more attractive, for instance, by providing season parking spaces during office hours at suburban malls next to MRT stations, or have “portable” season parking that allows car owners to park for the day at a carpark close to the MRT and then parking closer to home at night.

4. A greater place for the arts

Vibrant cities have lively arts and culture. Singapore could introduce more street level spaces for display of art, especially local art. Such spaces could be located in parks, town centres in heartlands and public spaces in the city centre.

To facilitate a more vibrant arts and culture scene, schemes could be created for members of the public, corporations and schools to adopt public spaces for arts display and public performance venues, similar to the adopt-a-park scheme. We could also provide affordable rental spaces to artists on the condition that they make their work and activities more accessible to the broader community. Beyond art spaces, we could also tap on the private sector (e.g. through sponsorship, adoption schemes and events programming) to support other public amenities in our built environment and parks.

(B) PROUD HOME: DEEPENING THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND OWNERSHIP

While the efficient and effective provision of good affordable infrastructure and services, adequate economic and lifestyle options are necessary, they may not be sufficient to engender a very strong sense of ownership, engagement and pride. It would be critical to create a deeper sense of community. How do we then make Singapore a home where citizens and residents feel a strong sense of ownership and pride?

The Focus Group proposes that community- and intergenerational-bonding be adopted as key principles that guide and inform the design

of public housing, facilities and recreational spaces, and to leave some spaces which the community could help shape the usage.

1. Adopt community and intergenerational-bonding as key principles that guide the design of public housing, facilities and infrastructure, as well as encouraging the same in commercial spaces.

(a) Spaces designed to help foster a greater sense of community

We should encourage the maintenance of close family ties through innovative housing arrangements. For example, we could have more paired housing arrangements whereby seniors could choose to stay next door to their family members. This is already being done at the Dawson estate at Queenstown. Rather than have stand-alone blocks of studio apartments for the elderly, all future HDB could have a few units which are meant for seniors or the physically disabled. These flats should also have modern and appealing designs not unlike regular flats.

We should also incorporate more mid-rise communal spaces within HDB blocks themselves to help facilitate greater interaction between immediate neighbours and foster “vertical kampongs” at a scale that could engender a greater sense of community. There could also be more multipurpose spaces within HDB estates for community activities.

Close attention should be paid to the the provision, design and location of community spaces to facilitate inter-generational use and interaction. This could be complemented by community-led programming and events. For example, amenities that cater to different age segments (e.g. childcare centres, eldercare facilities) could be clustered together to facilitate inter-generational activities. For instance, the Tampines 3-in-1 Family Centre model, which provides childcare, student care and eldercare services, could be replicated. Community facilities and public spaces (e.g. libraries, fitness corners, playgrounds) could also be designed for a wide spectrum of users. Some of these facilities (e.g. childcare centres) could also be located next to parks to capitalize on the greenery and tranquil setting.

(b) Integration of community facilities

The co-location and integration of community facilities can be further expanded to include a broader range of facilities (e.g. locating “museums” or displays of local art within libraries) to cater to the lifestyle interests of individuals and families. More spaces, e.g. at the second storey of HDB blocks, could be designated for non-profit groups, voluntary welfare organisations and for-profit social entrepreneurship companies to provide community services. We could also encourage the elderly to be involved where they live by introducing seed funding for senior-led enterprises that provide services to other seniors or by setting aside spaces for their activities.

Shopping malls could also set aside spaces that cater for the elderly, so that they can rest or be entertained while their family members run their errands or the children engage in more youthful leisure activities.

Economic incentives, such as URA’s Community and Sports Facilities Scheme, should be put in place to incentivise the provision of community and social services within HDB blocks and estates, e.g. through cheaper rental rates. In addition, government should also take into account the social merits of proposals, e.g. whether

they include community, elderly or youth-related amenities, or are from VWOs and NGOs, when evaluating tender submissions for selected State land and properties.

2. Making recreation spaces more accessible and better utilised

(a) Upkeep and maintenance of facilities

Recreational spaces, greenery, and parks contribute significantly to a good quality of life. While we have many parks and recreation spaces of different sizes islandwide, we could encourage greater usage by ensuring the adequate provision of amenities e.g. toilets and F&B facilities which are well-maintained, and open for business at the right time. Enhancement of natural shading or built canopies could encourage more people to visit during the day. More performance spaces for concerts by the community or local performance groups could increase the volume and range of activities. There can be better signages to help people find their way within parks and along park connectors. During public holidays, there could be dedicated public buses or valet service to the most popular parks.

(b) Recreation for the youths and young adults

There should also be more recreation spaces for the youths and young adults. For instance, there should be sufficient and affordable team-sports facilities that the public can rent, as participation in team sports can encourage greater interaction and bonding within the community.

(c) Community greens

We should continue to set aside spaces for community planting, and have more neighbourhood-scale parks and roof-top gardens within our estates for community interaction. Green spaces provided near to the workplace may encourage more recreational activities at these sites. Some green spaces could also be retained in their natural state (e.g. wilderness playground or park) to provide room for fun and imagination.

3. Greater planning and design flexibility to cater to changing needs

Our towns should be designed and allowed to evolve with the changing needs of the residents. Spaces, buildings and infrastructure could be modified or re-adapted over time to respond to the lifecycles of our HDB estates. Instead of developing estates entirely, we could retain some empty plots of land for future development so that estates could evolve and be rejuvenated over time. These spaces could be kept in the interim as open spaces for the population to simply “stretch out”. We could also allow the community greater say on how best to put such spaces to good use, e.g. by designating them as “grey spaces” (ie with a list of non-allowable uses).

(C) PEOPLE-CENTRICITY: CATERING FOR DIVERSITY WHILE BEING AGE-FRIENDLY

To be an inclusive society, it is increasingly important to ensure that diverse lifestyle needs and aspirations of the different population segments (e.g. youths, families, elderly, foreign residents etc.) are catered for even as Singapore continues to develop. How do we make Singapore a home which cares for the needs of its diverse population?

In addition, with a growing number of the elderly, our living environment has to be senior-ready and senior-friendly, with “universal design” and “end-to-end” accessibility becoming much more pervasive. In this way, seniors can be empowered to lead independent and fulfilling lives. The Focus Group proposes the following ideas:

1. Enhancing spaces for different communities

In some districts which already have distinctive characters such as Bras Basah, Bugis and Little India, urban planners could take a “lighter touch” approach to let these spaces evolve organically so as to provide an exciting variety of “genuine” venues for individuals of diverse interests and backgrounds. Government agencies could help activate these areas through soft measures such as incentives, facilitating more events programming (e.g. the successful Bras Basah Night Festival) and helping share with local stakeholders and businesses on what other cities have successfully done so that useful ideas could be adapted for the local context. Government could also involve NGOs in place management and programming. Government agencies should also regularly review the implementation of plans and assess if districts are working well or if plans need to be tweaked over time.

2. Facilitating “ageing-in-place”

The majority of our population prefers to stay in familiar surroundings and close to family support, even as they become elderly. Hence, our housing estates should be designed in ways that facilitate “ageing-in-place”. Within each HDB block or precinct, there could be a mix of unit types to cater to the needs of the different population segments at the different phases of their lives. Alternatively, our flats could be modular in nature, so that walls could be easily knocked down for two or three units to be joined together to cater to different household sizes. We could also introduce a policy that allows residents to move to units of different sizes within a single block or within the precinct when their household sizes change. For existing flats, we could provide a menu of senior-friendly fixtures, so that residents could choose to retrofit their flats as they grow older.

Even as we continue to facilitate the majority who wish to “age-in-place”, we recognise that there will be different housing needs and preferences among the elderly thus we should provide a range of housing options to suit different needs.

3. Improving mobility among the elderly

Common public infrastructure should be modified to improve mobility among the elderly and the disabled. It would not be sufficient for individual buildings or facilities to be disabled-accessible, we must also aim for “end-to-end” accessibility to ensure that the disabled can successfully move from one facility to another. For instance, sidewalks widths, distances between pedestrian crossing, traffic signal time, and overhead pedestrian bridges could be made more senior-friendly. There could also be greater coordination in planning pedestrian traffic and vehicular traffic within residential estates to reduce the criss-crossing of the two. We could also extend the public transport concession rates for the elderly to encourage greater public transport use during all times.

(D) AT THE CUTTING-EDGE: BREAKING NEW GROUND AS A CITY OF TOMORROW

There is great potential for technological improvements to be harnessed to enable a high quality of life. As a small country, Singapore should continue to capitalise on its size and nimbleness to be a pioneer in the effective use of technology to create a high quality of life for cities in the future.

The Focus Group proposes the following ideas:

1. A fully “wired” and broadband-ready city

Ensure that Singapore is fully “wired” and broadband-ready so that the population can readily “plug” in for work, school, entertainment, obtaining services and keeping in touch.

2. Harnessing technology to enhance quality of life for the elderly

Take advantage of technology to aid in daily living activities, especially for the elderly. As the elderly of the future would be more internet-savvy, we could also make use of technology to enhance communication ties with their families, implement e-learning to keep the elderly engaged and to provide medical, health and safety assistance to the elderly.

3. Harnessing technology to enhance the transport system

Expand the use of technology to optimise transportation efficiency, manage private car usage and enhance the public transport experience, e.g. interactive kiosks at bus stops that provide up-to-the-minute information on bus services.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

More details on the Focus Group’s recommendations will be shared at the public forum on 10 May 2010 for public feedback. In the meantime, we welcome views from the public. Please send in your comments to the following link: <http://spring.ura.gov.sg/conceptplan2011/publicforum/>. The feedback received will be considered by the Focus Group for incorporation in its final report.