

SINGAPORE'S WATERFRONT REJUVENATION EFFORTS

A Presentation by Mr Mark Goh, Head (Marina Bay Development Agency), Urban Redevelopment Authority, Singapore delivered to the Harbour Business Forum Luncheon in Hong Kong on 28 Mar 2007

Introduction

1 Much like Hong Kong, Singapore as an island city has been blessed with a long coastline and waterbodies right in the heart of the city centre. Within and near the City Centre, we have the Singapore River, Kallang Basin and Marina Bay. Today, I would like to share our experience of developing these waterfront areas and the strategies we took to help us transform these urban waterfront areas.

Singapore River

2 Let me start with the Singapore River. The 3km long Singapore River is located in the City Centre. The sheltered banks of the river made it an excellent place for trading and warehousing activities since Singapore's colonial days. Merchants were quick to build offices, godowns and jetties to facilitate these activities along the riverbanks.

3 By the 1860s, three quarters of all shipping businesses in Singapore was done here. By the 1970s, as business proliferated, so did the pollution. Both the river banks and water became polluted by the myriad activities and squatters along the river. In fact, the river was like an open sewer.

4 The task to clean up Singapore River was an enormous one, and involved many government agencies. To start off, all the boats were moved out to Pasir Panjang as container shipping had replaced this earlier mode of transporting goods from the ships to the godowns. Tonnes of garbage were dredged from the river.

Planning of Singapore River

5 After ten years of clean up, the river was ready for a new lease of life. URA was tasked to prepare the Master Plan for the area. We adopted three key strategies:

- Creating an activity corridor for recreation and leisure through mixed land-uses;
- Mixing old and new developments, and
- Forging a public/private sector partnership.

Creating activity corridor for recreation and leisure through mixed land-uses

6 The river is zoned for a mixture of land uses that include Commercial, Residential, Hotel & Institutional uses. These mixed-use developments would bring people to the area at different times of the day.

7 New developments are required to have activity generating uses on the ground floor to ensure that the area is lively at the street level. URA also released guidelines for Kiosks and Outdoor Refreshment Areas to encourage more developments to spill their commercial activities onto the waterfront promenade areas.

Mixing old and new developments

8 The identity and character for the Singapore River would be preserved through selective conservation of architecturally significant buildings and integrating them with new developments. This allows old buildings to be kept for the appreciation of future generations while land in the adjacent areas can be used more intensively for commercial and residential purposes. The conserved buildings would be allowed to be adapted for new uses to increase their viability.

Forging a public / private sector partnership

9 The Government implemented the key infrastructure works to make the area attractive for redevelopment. Many parts of the river walls which had fallen into disrepair were reconstructed and strengthened. The bridges across Singapore River were also upgraded. Underpasses were constructed to provide continuous pedestrian access along the river banks.

10 The Government also provided the planning framework and guidelines for the private sector to carry out the redevelopment along the river using private resources. State land and conserved buildings were sold through the Government Land Sales Programme to enable the private sector to participate in the transformation of Singapore River.

11 URA drew up urban design guidelines which guide developers to design their buildings at a compatible scale with the riverscape, and to design the riverfront promenade to complement their development.

12 The vision was thus realised through a public / private partnership.

Singapore River today

13 Today, Boat Quay, with its interesting mix of shophouses against the backdrop of skyscrapers, is a popular al fresco waterfront dining venue.

14 The Clarke Quay conservation area was sold to the private sector for development in the late 80's. The area has just gone through another refurbishment and the low rise warehouses have now become a popular shopping, eating and entertainment destination.

15 Robertson Quay, at the upper reaches of Singapore River, has been transformed into a quality housing area, dotted with medium scale hotels and arts facilities.

Tanjong Rhu

16 Next, I would like to share with you our experience of transforming the shipyards at Tanjong Rhu into a vibrant waterfront community.

History

17 While the Singapore River was busy with trading activities, the Tanjong Rhu area provided the shipyards which serviced these activities. Up till the late 1980s, Tanjong Rhu was occupied by shipyards, engineering workshops and warehouses. Most of these industries were on privately owned land.

18 Even as the Singapore River was cleaned up and adapted for new uses in the 1970s and 1980s, the planners recognised that the Tanjong Rhu area presented a great opportunity to be turned into a high quality waterfront residential enclave, given its proximity to the city.

19 URA prepared a new Master Plan for Tanjong Rhu in 1988 and provided urban design guidelines to transform the area into a high-quality waterfront residential area with a tropical flavour.

20 To realise this vision, the existing industries were phased out and the lessees compensated. Squatters were also resettled. Private landowners with land parcels capable of independent development could redevelop their land according to the Master Plan within a specified period. Boundaries of both private and public land parcels were also adjusted through land exchange to form more meaningful parcels for redevelopment.

Reclamation & Infrastructure Development

21 About 5.6ha of land along the coast of Tanjong Rhu was reclaimed to neaten the shoreline and improve the water flow. With the reclamation, a promenade and a pedestrian bridge could be constructed to bring people and homes closer to the water's edge.

22 Public infrastructure was constructed to meet the demands of the new developments. This is a crucial contribution from the Government to kick-start the redevelopment and provided the necessary infrastructure for a quality living environment.

Tanjong Rhu today

23 Today, Tanjong Rhu is a thriving waterfront community with over 3,300 dwelling units. The residents enjoy a jetty, a look-out tower, a unique suspension bridge and a jogging track. At a stone's throw from the City, the area makes an ideal place to live and to enjoy the view and sea breeze.

Marina Bay – A Garden City by the Bay

24 I will now touch on Marina Bay, one of Singapore's most exciting urban projects. Land was reclaimed here more than 30 years ago in the 1970s to serve the future growth of the city centre. It was planned as a new future downtown that will

extend seamless from the existing Central Business District (CBD), which is an asset few other cities can offer.

25 Marina Bay is more than just a business and financial centre. The area is planned to have a wide range of quality residential, shopping, dining, cultural and entertainment facilities to establish a lively 24/7 live-work-play community.

Planning strategies

26 A detailed Master Plan has been worked out to create an attractive total lifestyle environment. It is based on an extension of the existing grid pattern of the city and has in-built flexibility to meet changing business needs and market demands. The regular parcels can be easily amalgamated or sub-divided and the sites are zoned as “white” sites to allow a mix of uses.

27 The Master Plan also includes a variety of development intensities and building heights, with lower-rise buildings located along the waterfront and higher buildings stepping up behind. This helps to create an attractive signature skyline.

28 A comprehensive network of reliable utilities, road and rail transportation system has been carefully laid out at Marina Bay. Marina Bay is also planned as a pedestrian friendly district with a comprehensive pedestrian network. Pedestrian links are meticulously planned at grade, above grade and at subterranean levels.

29 Another key idea at Marina Bay is to provide a series of open spaces, gardens and signature boulevards that will enhance the value of the land and developments around them.

30 A landscape master plan featuring different trees, plants, colours and fragrances has been drawn up for each district so as to create distinctive landscaped environments and treatments.

31 Over 100ha of prime land in the city centre is set aside for the development of 3 new world-class gardens. The creation of these gardens not only enhances the urban environment but also creates public green spaces for the enjoyment of the community.

32 An international design competition was concluded last year to develop the Gardens, which is targeted to open in 2010. Grant Associates will design the Gardens at Marina South which will feature show gardens, event spaces as well as cooled conservatories to allow visitors to enjoy flowers from around the world in a cool environment.

33 The Gardens at Marina East to be designed by Gustafson Porter will feature panoramic view of the city skyline, water gardens and recreational facilities for aquatic sports.

34 Another key component of the Master Plan is the concept of a necklace of public attractions along the waterfront. Some of the attractions around Marina Bay are already in place, such as the Esplanade Theatres and Merlion Park. Others such as the Floating Stadium, Arts and Science Museum, Singapore Flyer and Art Park are under construction and will be ready over the next few years.

36 These attractions will be linked by a continuous 3.5km network of promenades, plazas and bridges. The objective is to ensure that the waterfront area remains accessible and the public can come down to the water's edge to enjoy the attractions and scenery.

36 Marina Bay will feature the world's first double-helix pedestrian bridge. This 280m-long bridge is slated to be a focal point for the community, linking all the cultural, recreational and entertainment facilities in the area and completing the walking loop around the Bay.

Marina Bay today

37 Marina Bay is shaping up well and fast. Some of these key developments currently under construction include Singapore's first Integrated Resort, the Marina Bay Sands. The development will include convention facilities, three 50-storey hotels, theatres, retail, a casino and an art and science museum. It is scheduled to be completed at end 2009.

38 One Raffles Quay, our first sales site which was awarded to a consortium made up of Hong Kong Land, Cheung Kong Holdings and Keppel Land has been recently completed. It is a prime office development housing major global financial institutions.

39 The same consortium also won the tender for the neighbouring Business and Financial Centre site which is currently under construction and the first phase developed in 2010.

40 The Sail@Marina Bay at 70 storeys will be one of the top ten tallest residential buildings in the world. It is developed by City Developments Ltd and will be completed by 2009.

41 Along Collyer Quay, the historic Clifford Pier and Customs Harbour Branch buildings have been sold to be redeveloped into a new waterfront hotel and lifestyle development.

42 By 2007, the Marina Barrage will transform Marina Bay into a freshwater reservoir. This will allow the water levels to be stabilised so that the Bay can be used for the staging of events and activities.

43 With all these developments happening at Marina Bay, we expect to see a dramatic transformation around the bay in about 5 years time.

44 Besides facilitating the physical development of Marina Bay, URA as the development agency, also works with other government agencies to introduce greater vibrancy to the waters. A Water Activities Master Plan has been formulated to facilitate the use of the Bay for water-based activities and events.

45 Marina Bay is planned as a Bay of Celebration. It is the venue for large-scale public events such as the Marina Bay New Year's Eve Countdown, F1 Powerboat Races and sporting activities like wakeboarding and dragon boating.

46 The examples that I have shared with you this afternoon – Singapore River, Tanjong Rhu and Marina Bay are some of Singapore's urban waterfront areas which have undergone transformation. They are still works in progress and the process is a continually evolving one as we work towards realising our vision of making Singapore a great city to live, work and play.

Thank you.