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KL needs high density to flourish

By YIP YOKE TENG and JAYAGANDI JAYARAJ

Roundtable discussion: Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020

KUALA Lumpur must have a high density if it wants to continue flourishing and become a world-class city. This was the message brought across at a roundtable discussion organised by the Real Estate and Housing Developers Association Malaysia (Rehda).

As such, intervention in urban development is timely and necessary to cater for the unavoidable population growth and the Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 is doing just that.

The roundtable discussion, entitled *Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 as a roadmap towards a sustainable world class city*, held yesterday at the Sime Darby Convention Centre, gave some fresh viewpoints.

The panel comprised representatives of the Malaysia Institute of Planners (MIP), Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM), Rehda, transport management consultants, planning consultants and Kuala Lumpur City Hall department heads.

Rehda Federal Territory (Kuala Lumpur) branch chairman Datuk Michael Yam and Rehda immediate past president Datuk Jeffrey Ng were the moderators.

The panellists, having tabled views and suggestions in line with their expertise, recognised that the plan was the way forward even though there were areas to be further revised and improved.

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Malaysia Institute of Planners council member Khairiah Mohd Talha

Khairiah shared that the 3E – Economic prosperity, social Equality and Environmental integrity – were the basis adopted by the city plan to ensure sustainability.

The main aim of the plan is to give a good quality of life to the people living in a compact environment, which is the case in major cities like Hong Kong, Tokyo and Singapore where densities are much higher.

“The capital is the engine of growth for the country and we cannot deny the huge migration of people into the city. In fact, many cities lure the people back into the city by providing housing and infrastructure. This keeps it vibrant and cuts down on traffic congestion resulting from people travelling in and out of the city,” she said.

As such, the city plan is vital to mould strategic developments through addressing all relevant issues, such as public transport, employment and solid waste management.

Architect David Mizan Hashim from Veritas Architects Sdn Bhd

The KL City Plan's population growth projection from the current 1.6 million to 2.2 million was a conservative estimate, said David Mizan.

“It was projected during a recent conference in Singapore that Asian cities will grow at the rate of 100,000 people a day, whereas our projection for KL is only an increase of 150 a day,” he pointed out.

He said great cities around the world required intense re-planning or the cities would erode into chaos that might generate an angry response from unhappy residents, so the draft plan was undoubtedly in the correct direction.

He added that intense development through enforced plot ratios would be the solution to retain green space and to save energy, as exemplified by Los Angeles.

However, David Mizan did highlight that a massive change of paradigm was necessary to address the possible lack of public infrastructure such as multi-modal public transport, waste treatment, bicycle lanes and security system.

Housing for the less privileged, disaster management, urban identity and flexibility are some other aspects the city plan's implementers should look into.

Transport management consultant Goh Bok Yen from Mag Technical

and Development Consultants Sdn Bhd

KL needs a multi-modal transport system to achieve its world-class status, not one with great rails but leaves commuters stranded at the stations, Goh emphasised.

He said measures had to be taken now to ease movements within KL, keeping in mind that the easy availability of vehicles was also a hindrance.

“Existing facilities like buses and taxis should have been fully utilised to complement the rail system, but they are going in different directions,” he said.

He highlighted the need to look at various alternatives, and suggested setting up an urban rapid transit system to facilitate movement within the city as well as having retired residents to operate feeder services from housing estates to rail stations.

DBKL's masterplan director Zainab Mohd Ghazali

Zainab reiterated that all the views raised by KL denizens would be tabled to the Public Opinion Hearing Committee that consists of 21 members, including academicians, planners, engineers and NGOs.

So far, there had been 200 views and they can be read on the official KLCP2008 website.

“It's a plan for everybody, all must contribute to the plan. We want to have a good plan, there's no point for DBKL to quickly gazette it,” she said.

Transportation was again highlighted during the Q&A segment. Zainab assured attendees that even though it did not fall under DBKL's control, the government was taking it seriously and hence the setting up of the National Infrastructure Committee.

It was learned that public transport was now managed by four ministries and 18 agencies.

On comments that the draft plan had neglected other modes of transport, Zainab said the draft plan did not specify that KL would solely depend on the LRT and that it did not include the details because they had been mentioned in the KL Structure Plan.

Regroup Associates executive chairman Christopher Boyd

Regroup Associates executive chairman Christopher Boyd said the draft plan should consider the young people in the city as Malaysia was a young country and half the population were under 27 years old.

Referring to the expensive luxury apartments in the city especially those around the Suria KLCC, Boyd said planning was crucial to have some affordable and nice looking housing for the young working class who had just come to the city.

“It is also a great opportunity for Rehda to work with the DBKL on the matter.

“Currently most of the 4000 very expensive apartments are taken up by the expatriates or those who can afford those.

“The city should consider its young people and offer nice apartments within a certain package affordable to first hand buyers without it being low cost.

“This is to allow them to be able to live, work and enjoy the city. They don't want to be working in the city and living because mom and dad probably have done that,” said Boyd.

Ahmad Jefri Clyde from AJC Planning Consultants

Ahmad Jefri Clyde from AJC Planning Consultants raised another point where the city hall could acquire land instead of just giving them out.

Using the Brisbane city hall as an example, Clyde said the city hall could buy lands and keep them as parks to create balance to all the approved developments.

With regards to the draft plan, Clyde said the understanding of the bigger issue was very difficult for the general public to grasp.

He said Kuala Lumpur was part of much larger urban area and the National Physical Plan recognised this.

He added the Kuala Lumpur conurbation was not going to be all centred in the city but also included its surrounding areas such as Subang, Petaling Jaya and Sepang.

“The population increase from the current 1.6mil to 2.2mil is just a target. It is up to the city how to achieve it,” he said.

Rehda Kuala Lumpur secretary Tan Ching Meng

Rehda Kuala Lumpur secretary Tan Ching Meng's opinion on the draft plan was self-explanatory.

He said the draft plan should follow a single objective and that was towards achieving its economic prosperity through a sustainable approach

for a sustainable world-class city.

He said the population in the city should grow as that will help Kuala Lumpur sustain itself as a city.

“Assuming there are no economical activities and growth in the people who come to work in the city, how are we going to maintain the city? If that is the case, the city will die as there will be no funds to maintain the many causes of the city,” he said.

Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) president Lee Chor Wah

Meanwhile the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) president Lee Chor Wah said the draft plan should concern the qualitative aspect more than the quantitative aspect of things.

“It should encourage good quality buildings, focusing on good designs in general that last for a long time,” he said.

Rohayah Abd Karim from DBKL's legal affairs department

Rohayah Abd Karim from DBKL's legal affairs department said as far as the DBKL was concerned, they have followed closely with all the procedures that were required to come up with the plan.

“We have also spoken to many focus groups and taken the input of community leaders before the draft plan was tabled for public hearing,” she said.

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