

CLC LECTURE

Limited Land, Unlimited Space

20 April 2018



The Centre for Liveable Cities' latest publication "Land Framework of Singapore: Building a Sound Land Administration and Management System", examines the critical role of the Singapore Land Authority (SLA) in optimising the land resources for the island's social and economic development.

As part of this publication launch, SLA CE Mr Tan Boon Khai will be sharing the history of the statutory board and its contribution to Singapore's Land Framework, including key challenges and developments in the land management system, changes in approaches to managing state land and collaborations with other planning agencies within Singapore.

This lecture will also look at the innovations SLA is spearheading in the realm of geospatial research to address the challenges ahead for Singapore's urban development.

Lecture Segment

Mayers Ng
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Good afternoon, I'm Mayers Ng from the Centre for Liveable Cities [CLC]. I'm the emcee for today's lecture. Today, CLC will be launching our latest Urban Systems Study, **The Land Framework of Singapore—Building a Sound Land Administration and Management System**. For today's lecture, we are honoured to have with us Mr Tan Boon Khai, the Chief Executive of the Singapore Land Authority, SLA.

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Mr Tan joined SLA as Chief Executive on the 1st of May 2015. While doing land administration business requires a good understanding of land laws, conveyancing, surveying and legal instruments such as leases and tenancies; one also needs to have a good grasp of real estate matters. Well in this sense, although Mr Tan actually said that he's a[n] atypical public servant, but actually he's a very suitable candidate for this position.

Mr Tan is a lawyer by training and held several positions with the Singapore Legal Service including Justice Law Clerk and Assistant Registrar of the Supreme Court. Before he joined SLA, he was the Senior Vice President of the Group Procurement Office in CapitaLand and Regional General Manager with the Ascott Limited.

Today, coming to almost three years in SLA as the Commissioner of Lands, he's best-placed to share with us the key roles of SLA including how SLA works with different agencies, the principles and key challenges in the land administration and management system.

The format of today's lecture will start off with a presentation by Mr Tan and it will be followed by a moderated Q&A [question and answer]. And kindly hold all the questions till the Q&A session.

So without further ado, let us put our hands together to welcome Mr Tan Boon Khai. Mr Tan please. (Applause).

Tan Boon Khai
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Your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you don't mind that I [will] take a more informal approach to the presentation, largely because I find myself very uncomfortable standing at the rostrum [and] not moving for some time. And if you can hear me clearly, I will be more than happy to answer any questions that you may have. I must confess that as a young undergraduate studying law, land law was not my favourite subject. You will know why later—it is an extremely tedious subject to study. In some ways, [it is] very archaic, and requires a very precise eye for detail.

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Now I have come to appreciate why this is so—more so in Singapore than in many jurisdictions, but I would also hope to at least convince you that it is because of the robust structure that we have, and the deep thinking that we have put in over the many years, especially those by the pioneer leaders, that today, Singapore is what it is today. Because the backend fundamentals, especially in land, are robust, are systematic and are very well-thought through.

I will be more than happy of course, you know, if you have any feedback on how things can be improved, because we also realized that going forward, the world in the future will be quite different. And I think, as I was sharing with Her Excellency a little while ago, from The Netherlands, there are many similar challenges, and I think it is through learning that we can try to constantly improve the built environment that we live in.

Introduction: Singapore Land Authority (SLA)

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So today I want to give a snapshot of the role that we undertake at SLA – not so much to replicate all the contents of what you will receive at the book launch subsequently, but just to give you a flavour, as well as to tease out some of the more interesting, or maybe to some of you the more contentious topics that we face in our work. Singapore Land Authority was formed in 1st June 2001, so we are, in effect sixteen, seventeen years old. It was formed through the amalgamation of four different departments in the Ministry of Law and I'll explain to you why we are in the Ministry of Law and subsequently, not in the Ministry of National Development. I think we are often confused because in today's context, perhaps as a testament to how the public service works together, it is not obvious that certain statutory boards still reside with certain ministries.

One of the oldest functions that we have is the survey department. [Soh] Kheng Peng, who is my Chief Surveyor is here today. [The] Survey [Department] is, I think, about 200 years old today, as well as the Land Office, you know, always to deal with the administration of land. We also

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have the Land Titles registry—a function that we inherited, a system that we inherited from the British colonial days, which now serves as the fundamental of land title and property title ownership in Singapore.

If nothing else, today, if you are a homeowner in Singapore, you have a title; that title is registered with the land authority and that forms your definitive rights and obligations of a land property owner. And of course, the land system support unit [exists] because of the data that we collect, because of a lot of the land-based information that we collect, which has now [been] translated into a geo-spatial department—which I will be more than happy to share a little bit more [on] later.

So, how do we see our role? In the Singapore Land Authority, our Vision is “Limited Land, Unlimited Space”. Very catchy, and to a large extent, very imaginative, if I may say. Limited land, anyone knows. Right? Singapore today is only about 720 square kilometers. But unlimited space? It is really how we unlock the value of land, for anything and everything that is possible. You may find that there’s a bit of a little red dot and it was deliberately made red, because it also, I suppose, says that we are small. But that doesn’t mean that we cannot grow in other ways. Our mission is to really optimise land resources for the economic and social development of Singapore. And today the Singapore Land Authority is structured in three core areas: you have the developmental role, the regulatory role and the geospatial realm. I’ll talk a little bit about this later on.

Our staff profile is about five hundred plus. We are considered a medium-size statutory board and we reside in the Ministry of Law. So in terms of the land operations area, it will reside with the developmental role, in terms of the regulatory, typically, the land titles registry; and for the geospatial technology, which is something relatively new, it will be on a separate platform.

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One of the things that you may be familiar with is we produce a free app called One Map. One Map is based on all the data that we collect from land owners and land ownership. Incidentally, for many young people, you may or may not be familiar, but I assure you that today if you are a parent of school-going children, that will be your most vital app because that is effectively the app which shows all the properties within a one to two kilometer radius.

Ecosystem of Planning: Collaborative Agencies

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Before I start talking a little more about the Singapore Land Authority, I would also like to at least say that today, the ecosystem that we have, is a result of the functions and the responsibilities that come together from the different public agencies. And really if you look at it, from its very broadest, it all starts with the Concept Plan that is produced by the Urban Redevelopment Authority. That is done every ten years, [and] it tries to extrapolate based on data, both present and future, to see and plan what the future of Singapore should be or would be. So it [is] really concerned about the strategic land use and transportation plan that would guide Singapore in the long term.

Thereafter obviously you would have the Master Plan, which is also produced by URA, which is reviewable every five years, which guides Singapore's development in the medium term. Zoning, planning parameters are then all spelt out in this plan so that in the nearer term whether it's public agencies or the private sector developers, [we] would be able to rely on it and build. So you will see this being constantly refreshed, because as time passes [and] sometimes circumstances change, that will also require a review of the plans.

Thereafter, the different agencies in Singapore—and these are mostly public sector agencies—will come together, and based on the long-term planning for Singapore, each of us will take up certain specific roles in order to build. So for example in public housing, most of you would know that the role resides with the Housing Development Board. For industrial

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use, typically it's with the Jurong Town Corporation and so on. Right in the centre, if I may put it perhaps a little bit simply, is Singapore Land Authority. Because then we serve as the gatekeeper where public agencies will liaise with us for land use and we will issue the titles and the leases for that use.

Of course, backend we will also make sure that a lot of these uses conform to the rules and regulations protecting land use in Singapore. If nothing else, other than people, land is Singapore's only resource, and I think it is important that we continue to use land judiciously as well as with prudence. So in terms of understanding our role, SLA plays the role in facilitating the development of Singapore through a robust land administration framework. And I hope this sort of sets the context of a lot of our work.

Areas of Interest: Main Issues

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Then now I will explain briefly some of, perhaps, the areas of interest. Because I think in the book that will be launched, we will describe in detail some [of the] many other areas which I would not have time to go through. I thought that I could possibly touch a little bit on some of these key areas—quite contentious sometimes, but hopefully over time, I would like to share that there are also different ways that we have undertaken to try to mitigate some of the issues that have arisen.

The first one is compulsory acquisition; the second is optimization of state assets, the third one obviously is the geospatial and geodetic development in Singapore. Each, I will summarise with some of the challenges that we are faced [with] today, and some of our thinking about how we can improve the processes going forward. So the first one is perhaps, compulsory acquisition. I used to have a standing joke with many of my colleagues that when people see the Singapore Land Authority officers knocking on their doors, it's really a purveyor of bad news because the thing that you expect [next] is that the government has come to acquire your land.

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So let me give you a little bit about our history of this. Since Independence, I think, Singapore has been fairly well-developed. Certainly when we became independent in 1965, Singapore was already a bustling, small country struggling to find its own identity. Many of the businesses, many of the homes were centred around the central area. And I think the pioneer leaders believed that that was the time when we needed to re-plan the entire Singapore, to have a more systematic structure of zoning certain areas, as well as to build in a more tidy [*sic* tidier] manner.

So in that sense, land acquisition came into being because it allowed the government to be able to secure large tracts of land from the private community without excessive cost. Now obviously, if you've read the literature in many of the public literature today, that is a very contentious issue. The last thing that many people want or would accept, is the fact that the government comes in to take away your home, your private land without what many people perceive to be fair compensation. But really, the imperative there was that to make sure that Singapore could continue to redevelop or to develop in a sustainable manner without bankrupting the country. So like I said, it was necessary for the construction of new housing, industrial estates and really comprehensive redevelopment of the entire central area.

Of course, fifty years ago, if you had told them, well fifty years later in 2010, 2015, Singapore will be what it is today, I think many of those then would not have believed you. But the reality is that the government, I believe, especially the pioneer generation, has been able to keep to its word. And today, Singapore is largely very different from how it used to be when we first become independent.

But of course, land acquisition did not come on its own. When you do land acquisition, one of the big key fundamentals then was to make sure that we also had a structure where we could provide housing for those who have been dislocated. So in this hand, acquisition and resettlement

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went hand-in-hand. And really, once the land was acquired, when people had their homes taken away, when people had businesses away, you still needed to provide somewhere where they could continue their livelihood or their home—and that was really quite clear in the government's mind at that point of time. So in that sense, those [who were] affected were also given some priority for public housing that came through, and HDB at that time also offered subsidised mortgage loans for those [individuals]. So I think if you read the book again, some of these will go into it in detail.

So if you look at how Singapore has really transformed itself in the last fifty years—you would have heard and seen that obviously these are in the literature in the public—it is nothing short of a miracle. For the last fifty years, there have been many projects that have been undertaken by the government. First, you started in the 1960s where you have the housing developments and the public housing projects. Today...since the '70s, you have the construction of the Changi Airport—in the north and in the northwest, we also had to resettle some of the farms.

In the 1980s—that was when we started to look at building the MRT, schools and so on and in the 1990s, we continued with more infrastructure development. And of course in 2000, there's even more... in today's context more infrastructure, more transport being carried through. So all in all, a lot of the acquisition that had taken place has now [been] translated into the public projects that have been built.

When we look at the land acquisition regime, or the land acquisition scheme which is contained in the land acquisition act, there has also been changes as Singapore matures, as Singapore becomes a more developed country, as Singapore, perhaps, becomes a country which is more economically affordable. One of the things that you would have noticed in the last time, before 2007, was that [for] any acquisition, the compensation would have been based on the value of the land as at the date of gazette, or a historical statutory date. And the statutory date

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would have been in 1973, 1988, 1993, 1995—whichever is the lower [one]. This did not reflect the actual market value of the property or the site that was acquired.

In 2007, fundamental change was made by the government to now ensure that any acquisition would be compensated by market value—as at the date of the gazette. So that is actually a big shift in the way that we have looked at compensation. But [this was] largely also because it was also, I suppose, a recognition that the country would be able to afford that, as well as it being a much fairer or equitable manner of compensation. So over the times, as you can see from this time chart, there has also been changes to the Land Acquisition Act, the latest one being in 2015, where now amendments were made in order to allow the government to acquire sub-stratum titles, which mean underground titles. We will continue to enhance the Land Acquisition Act obviously, to look at ways of how we can be improved and how it can continue to serve the needs of the country as well as the society.

But more importantly, the manner in which we deal with land acquisition has also shifted. [This is] not to say in the past I think it has been done with a high-handed approach. But today, we recognize more so than ever that land, property, [and] houses are very emotional issues. For many of us, it is where our memories are made, it is obviously also where many children—our children may have grown up, you know, families come together and so on. Because it is an emotional issue, you have to try to then draw the balance between the redevelopment or the development for the country, and the ability to be able to take back or acquire the land at market value and how do you manage that process?

So one of the things that we have now done, is that as far as possible, for every acquisition that is done, we will walk the journey with the stakeholder involved. And this is no mean task because first and foremost, when emotions are high, the last thing you want, or the last thing you expect is that they will welcome you with open arms. And I

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think sometimes I give credit to the officers—the junior officers especially, who will need to be very patient in dealing with this. Thankfully, I probably will say this; thankfully, I think many Singaporeans, many members of the public are quite understanding. They understand that for the public purpose, in order to redevelop Singapore, in order to make better use of the land in Singapore, they are prepared to make that trade-off. But usually in the first, I suppose, couple of weeks there is always that little bit of shock. There's always that little bit of surprise which needs time. So we recognize that for us to do our jobs better, one of the things that we must do is, we must walk the journey with them.

Interestingly, and don't put this down—we now have more and more stakeholders or owners whose properties have been acquired where we'd walked the journey, where they come back and tell us, "Thank you for walking the journey with us, we appreciate the help. We may not, you know, have been so appreciative in the first place, but we really thank you for walking the journey with us." Now, of course having said that, we will also try to do as much as we can backend, including liaising with other agencies, liaising with other parties should there be the need arises. This I think is quite fundamental because I think the entire public service in Singapore, we are also looking at how we can serve members of the public together. And I think this is the step that we have done at the Singapore Land Authority.

Challenges Ahead

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But looking forward, as I said earlier, what are some of the challenges that we face? One of them, if I put them very briefly, is market value. We define market value; when we assess market value, we will have a valuers to do comparable values and so on. But to be fair, I think sometimes – not all the time – there are indications that that is not the compensation that the other party is looking at, okay? How do we balance this? Well, under the Land Acquisition Act, if a party whose property, whose site has been acquired and is not happy or does not accept the compensation amount, he or she has one right of appeal

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which goes to the Land Appeals Tribunal Board consisting of independent parties. We accept that right because we also believe that there should be an avenue not to challenge the acquisition, but to review and relook at the compensation—so that route of appeal is open to parties who are affected by compulsory acquisition.

But over and beyond that, before you reach the appeal stage, then lawyers will tell you, once you start fighting in court everything breaks down. Is there a better way to manage? Is there a better way to value the property and so on? So that is one of the challenge[s] that we constantly face.

The second one of course is that in today's context, the land acquisition regime, to some people, it's still viewed as a very draconian measure. I think if you look at many countries today, they do not have a similar legislative regime as [*sic to*] Singapore, which allows the government to be able to acquire the property. Should there be other ways of doing it? Now I should say this also, that in the Land Acquisition Act, the reason for the acquisition is stated very clearly: it is for a public purpose. And I think over the last couple of years, you would also have seen that many of the acquisitions that are done, is really done for the intended purpose of either building public infrastructure or trying to redevelop the area.

The most recent big, large scale ones that we have done are the acquisition of the two golf clubs, to build the High Speed Rail to Malaysia as well as the comprehensive redevelopment of the entire Jurong Lake area. Now if you see it in that context, perhaps as a bystander not affected by the acquisition, that may seem very logical. But how do you then square off with those people who are affected? Well, perhaps for the case of golf courses, well nobody stays there, it is only a club, but sometimes we may also need to impact those who are staying there. So how do you draw this balance?

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Having a regime which can still be considered fairly draconian, versus a public purpose which is actually for the greater good of the country. And I think this is where we look at tension, or the difficulties between the citizen as oneself and the larger development of the nation. And this is a challenge I think all of us struggle [with] today: deep down inside I think what we're trying to do is to look at Singapore's long-term plan to ensure that Singapore continues to have relevance not only just ten, twenty years down the road but fifty, hundred years down the road. And in order to do that, there needs to be certain areas that the government may need to have some flexibility to move. The Singapore Land Acquisition Act is one of those that is at least enshrined in legislation. But in order for us to carry that out properly, we also have to be mindful that we take due regard for the concerns as well as the needs of those who are affected.

The second one which I will talk about is the optimization of state assets. Singapore today has many old properties: some reside within private hands, some within public. In the past, we have had many, for example, black and white bungalows that you will see around the country. Those come under the purview of the Singapore Land Authority. Where possible we will try to optimise the use either by leasing them out, or by putting them to different uses. But more importantly, one of the things that we have done recently is that we have now tried as far as possible to open up as many of the vacant lands—bare lands which are not being built for the moment, for the members of public to enjoy.

And we will put up a sign there to say, "Please come and enjoy." The children can play football, play games, play sports and so on. This is also a marked change from, I think, quite a number of years ago, where if it's state land, you're not allowed to come in. Right? So going forward we do intend, as far as possible, to open up as many of these plots of land as possible. To-date I think we have made available more than two hundred plots of land—even sometimes lands [which] you [may] consider a little bit, I should say, out of the norm: land under viaducts.

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You know that because we have quite a lot of expressways, you will find that sometimes the land under the expressways...we have tried as far as possible to perhaps put in some infrastructure, work also with the various different parties, so that they can be put to better use. And really at the end of the day, this is really for the enjoyment and use by the public.

For those that have a more specific use, for those that have properties on board, for example perhaps vacated buildings that have been returned by other ministries or statutory boards, we have tried to look at short- or medium- term uses, provided they are not impacted by long-term development plans. So for example in certain areas, one thing that many of you will be familiar [with] is the Dempsey area, Tanglin Village. It used to be the old army barracks, it has been returned to the state and it has turned itself, or you know, we have let it out for a mix of different uses including food and beverage, retail—and it has now, I suppose, built an identity of its own.

Our long-term objectives, provided there are no plans for the site, is to make sure that members of the public can still go and use those facilities in whatever form, and hopefully also be able to maintain and keep those properties for the longer term. Because you never know when some of these may be taken for redevelopment; but in the meantime, especially to keep them well for the next generation or for the many generations to come. So we will try to put, as far as possible, many of these properties out for interim use to support social and economic development.

Others that you would have noticed, for example, would be maybe childcare facilities, and sometimes in state properties in black and white bungalows and so on—and we will of course look at new creative uses. For example, I think Dempsey, like I said, is one of them. The other one more commonly you will know is the Turf City. It used to be the old Turf Club, which has now been converted into a whole host of different uses.

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You'll have on the one hand where the open fields are, you will have many of the futsal or sports activities taking place. In the main block itself, you have a mixture of not only F&B [food and beverage] but also other uses.

More and more we are also finding—and this is something we're constantly looking into: how many of these properties can be put for social and community uses? So land under viaduct is one of them that I've mentioned. Sometimes interestingly, we find that because the building has a historical angle to it, there are more and more historical buffs, who sort of want to visit these places. And there are tours being organised to bring people around, to explain the history to them. So this is the Old Changi Hospital. Right, for those of you who know there are many stories about the Old Changi Hospital but believe me, every time there is a tour that comes up, it's fully booked out within minutes. So this is one of them.

The other one of course, which you have seen, which is closed now for restoration is the old Tanjong Pagar Railway Station. This is the inside and this is the outside. Before we closed it fully, we tried to open it as much as possible for members of the public. We organized some events so that you can actually have more and more people come and appreciate what it used to be like, because no trains run through it anymore. So these are some of the things that we hope, whether it's for the old or the young, that we'll be able to perhaps also relive some of the history that they may be familiar with.

But to some extent, there are challenges. First and foremost, many of these are not built to be re-adapted. If you look at, for example, again I come to the old Turf Club, it was not meant to be the F&B...the use that it is now. It does require some time, effort and resources to be able to reconfigure [the space]—and even if you reconfigure you can't reconfigure the whole place into a particular use. So these are some of the challenges that we do face.

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The other one is the 'not in my backyard' mentality sometimes. For example, increasingly we also find that as Singapore matures as we have a more elderly population, some sites perhaps can be used for these elderly care facilities. But we have also faced feedback, we have also had feedback that [*sic where*] sometimes many people say, "No, no, no, I don't want these in my community," for various reasons. How do we square off the balance, how do we strike the dynamics and the tension between these? So these are the challenges that you face when you look at trying to reconfigure some of these properties sometimes.

The last one is really the geo-spatial and geodetic development in Singapore, and this is a relatively new development. Over the last two hundred years because of the property information, and because the land titles information that we have kept, we have developed a full body of information or land information in Singapore—which is now critical if you talk about the development of the country going forward. Because if you do not know what exists now, it is very difficult to plan properly what is going forward. Together with the advance of technology, instead of having things in 2D – two dimensional form, you are now able to have it in three dimensional [form] simply by modeling, simply by capturing images and re-doing.

Virtually, I think today the young, nobody talks about 2D anymore. Everybody is 3D, or even live information. So you will find that for planning purposes and for a host of other purposes, there is a need—there is a growing need for three-dimensional information. And this is something that the Singapore Land Authority is actively collating and capturing. You may say of course, well we have Google Maps. Or we have, I don't know, Waze or some other platforms, which is true. But our responsibility is to make sure that the information that we capture is accurate and up-to-date. I think you may have heard some stories about properties being wrongly identified in Google Maps and therefore being wrongly demolished and so on. Imagine if that were to happen in Singapore. Imagine if a public agency were to use Google Maps and say

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“Well, I’m going to acquire this land.” but actually, it turns out to be another plot that you should be acquiring. I think the repercussions are going to be very serious.

3D Information: Proper, Accurate Information

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Our responsibility is to be able to collect proper, accurate information, which of course as far as possible, we will share with members of the public. There are other reasons for collecting 3D information as you can see from here: in fact things like airflow management, flood simulation, urban heat studies and solar potential studies and so on—I think some of these, even CLC has done some studies around it. In order to be able to have proper studies being done, the most fundamental [aspect] is that you must have accurate land data and accurate building data to do so. So what we have embarked [on] over the last couple of years is that we have started to collect 3D data in Singapore comprehensively.

First by using airborne laser scanning, by flying a plane around Singapore, thereafter by using a car, which is not dissimilar to the one that Google uses to collect underground data. Now obviously when you use a plane to capture images, there will be certain blind spots, and really the cars is to supplement the blind spots and to confirm certain areas. So you take it from the top as well as take it from the bottom. And once we collect all the information, we will then model it such that it becomes a 3D platform which we will use [and] share with other agencies for their planning purposes. So this is what something would’ve looked like, and obviously the resolution, as technology improves, will be improved. Our challenge today, and later I will share, is how to make sure that we continue to keep this dataset current? Because as you know, Singapore redevelops at an increasingly fast pace. Today you take a picture, tomorrow something else may have happened. So what are the ways [*sic* things] that we can do to keep this current?

The second one, which is quite interesting, is the fact that now we are starting or embarking on an effort to collect underground data. I

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mentioned this morning to a group that I was discussing with, that in Europe, and many western countries, underground infrastructure is much more advanced than ours because typically, people go underground to escape the cold. And I think in many of the Scandinavian countries, that is the way to keep warm during winter, during the cold harsh winters. So we are now starting to, trying to figure out what is the best way to collect underground data—not necessarily deep underground, but even surface underground. For example even simple things like utility lines, gas lines, sewage pipes and so on, I think all of us would have encountered sometimes, workers digging up the roads and putting back pipes and so on. How do we accurately capture that data so that going forward we are able to plan in a very clean manner as well as to be able to have this accurate data?

It is not so simple because for the surveyors in us, one of the, I think one of the things that they used to learn is that you cannot survey what you cannot see. And really, underground is something that unless you open [the ground] up, you will not know what is there. There are evolving technologies, there are evolving science to be able to use either electromagnetic wheels or sonar or radar but it is still not fully accurate, or it is still not as good as opening [it] up to see what it is. So this is the challenge that we have, but because Singapore is land-scarce, we do feel that there is a need to go down deeper to see what more potential we can have for underground use, so that we are able to maximize the land that we have. So with that I thought I'll stop. I hope that gives you a flavour of some of the things that the Singapore Land Authority does. Obviously, there are more details in the book that's [been] launched, and I will be happy to answer any questions that may arise. Thank you very much.

Panel and Q&A Segment

Mayers Ng
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Thank you, thank you, Mr Tan. May I invite you to remain on stage while we set the stage for the Q&A session. As we've heard from Mr Tan, I think it's really very challenging for SLA on one hand being the bad guy, to acquire land, to ensure we have enough land for the future; but at the same time also being the good guy, pumping out information and ensuring a zero vacancy rate for our state properties, at the same time also putting out land for public spaces.

So may I now also invite Mr Choy, the moderator for today's session and he is actually the former Senior Adviser of the Urban Redevelopment Authority, and also a member of CLC's Panel of Experts. Mr Choy will first start off the dialogue before opening up to the floor. During the Q&A, please state your name and organization before posing your questions or comments. So over to you, Mr Choy.

Choy Chan Pong
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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. As Mayers has introduced me, I'm now on the panel of experts with the Centre for Liveable Cities. But I spent twenty-seven years of my career with the Urban Redevelopment Authority in selling land and property market policies, so I worked a lot very closely with SLA over the last twenty-seven years. Boon Khai, that was a really excellent presentation.

Tan Boon Khai
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Thank you.

Choy Chan Pong
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And I must say that in my almost thirty years of working with land matters, I've not had the opportunity to witness such a[n] interesting, comprehensive and informative presentation. Well, my job here is to warm up the Q&A so that you can ask the questions. So maybe I can start ...

Tan Boon Khai
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Please..

Choy Chan Pong
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...with one question. Boon Khai, you have talked about the SLA being the custodian, acting as the custodian for state land. And we have agencies

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like URA and HDB, who are agents selling state land, most noticeably under the government land sales or GLS Programme. For us in government [agencies], such distinction of roles is very important, that you are the custodian and we are the agent. And we really want to keep such roles separate. But there was a time, I remember some years back when SLA experimented with being an agent at the same time. It was [a] very interesting time, about three years [where] we attempted that, and it's conceivable that one day SLA could become agent for land sales again. Maybe you can comment about this, and explain this distinction and why it's so important to keep the role of the custodian and the agent separate?

Tan Boon Khai
00:40:22

I think one of the greatest strengths of the Singapore government structure today is the fact that you have checks and balances that ensure that whatever it is, systems, issues are not abused. So when it comes to land issues, it is particularly important that we keep this check and balance. To some extent actually, it doesn't really matter who sells the land. What is important is that the sale of the land is properly accounted for, that the revenue that you get for the sale of the land is properly accounted for, because that forms part of Singapore's resource.

In that sense, in that context, there is then a distinction between who should sell the land and who should ultimately issue the lease. [This is] not to say that between SLA and the other agencies that undertake the sale of the land, there is any quarrel or there is any agreement. No, on the contrary, in fact the beauty of it is that each role or each agency has their specific function. But when all the agencies do their role[s], it comes together very seamlessly. To an outsider, to a developer for example, quite honestly I'm not sure that [sic if] they actually feel that there's a marked difference between one agency and another. It is almost like saying, "Well, it starts with somebody else but it ends with somebody else, but ultimately it's still the Singapore government." We hope to at least keep this distinction because [on the] backend, it allows not only for transparency, but [also] for accountability and I think this is

00:42:16

a huge strength of any public service that wants to continue to retain the trust of its people.

Choy Chan Pong

00:42:30

Can we hold the questions a bit later? I have one or two more questions. I don't think you're adequately warmed up yet. (Laughs) I will do the warming up. And the next question is quite hot. Recently there was this big news, and you mentioned it, **about almost two hundred private properties on terrace houses—in fact they were terrace houses in Geylang Lorong 3, which will be returned to the state when their leases expire in 2020.** So it was quite sensational, the news.

Well, **I would like you to give your version of the story,** because it's as if you didn't treat the property owners well. But a bigger question will be: **for properties on state land, with leases running down, the uncertainty of whether the leases will be extended can be quite disconcerting to the property owners.** There's also concerns that the **properties will not be well-maintained and will be run-down.** So, can you tell us **whether and how SLA provides sufficient information on its lease extension policies, and whether it can provide more certainty about its lease extension policies to address such concerns?** Maybe you can talk about how you have been more than fair to the property owners first.

Tan Boon Khai

00:44:08

I suppose, you know, I expected the question to come because I think in the last couple of weeks, there have been some reports in the media about issue of declining leases and so on. So maybe let me start from the beginning, or maybe where we should start.

From a public policy perspective, in order to allow Singapore to continue to redevelop and rejuvenate, and as Minister Lawrence Wong had stated publicly, all the lands will return to the state when the lease expires. And I would like to at least share that that is necessary, because it is only through that that we can continue to relook, redevelop, [and] rejuvenate Singapore as a country. But we do recognize that that argument may not necessarily sink in quite easily with those who have slightly different view[s] of what they would like their property—which they consider their asset, to do. But nevertheless, I think you have to

00:45:31

accept that when you buy a property, if it's on a declining lease, then you should take that into account. In the case of Lorong 3 Geylang, it is an estate where the leases will expire some time in 2020. There is a larger redevelopment plan for the entire Kallang area for public housing.

If you go to that site today, you will find that actually, the pathways next to the river are very well done. Right? The waterways are clean, it's beautiful. And really, it's in that context of redevelopment that the government feels that there's an opportunity to take back the expiring leases when it finishes, and to redevelop and intensify that area. That will not only rejuvenate the entire site, but it would give more people better homes to live with it.

Then of course, the question is how do we do it? Really actually the question is not why we do it; usually the question is how do we do it that's contentious. And in that context, we have gone out, I suppose with, in our view, sufficient notice and to be able to try to assist relevant parties or appropriate parties to either relocate or resettle. So just to give you a context when we look at the site: there are 191 terrace houses. The majority had been let out by owners as foreign workers' dormitories, so the place as it is today is quite crowded. The infrastructure is not keeping up, you know, with the crowd and so on. There are of course, some residents – I think there are thirty over [people] who are still staying there. And we accept, some of them [may be] elderly, and we thought that it was important for us to be able to reach out to them to not only explain to them the rationale for taking back the property after lease expires, but more importantly to be able to communicate with them—because many of them actually don't necessarily speak English. And when we have young officers, our young officers must be able to communicate with them and be able to provide whatever necessary assistance within our means to help them through the journey. Which is why I mentioned walking the stakeholder journey is important. To some extent, I think some of them have been very receptive. They actually understand the rationale of why the

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government is doing this. But perhaps because they are elderly, they now find that they need more assistance or they feel lost, trying to work through what are the different rules or what are the different applications that you have to fulfill in order to relocate.

And I think this journey is important. We hope that once we're able to take back the leases, then naturally it gives the development agencies—whether it's URA, whether it's HDB—the real opportunity to reconfigure the site. And I think the last fifty years have shown that hopefully when the Singapore government says that they will do it, it will happen. I mean it's probably only a matter of time, because we also have to look at phasing out the developments. But certainly from I think, the lands that they URA has shown, when we did the media announcement, it looked like a very exciting plan.

So I hope that that assures people that actually, we don't just take back properties or let properties decline for no reason. There is usually a larger goal behind that. I think on your second part about whether we can give more clarity on expiring leases, I think the answer is certainly, as far as possible, yes. But to some extent, we also have to work with the different agencies. Many plans can change. To be fair, we could extrapolate what Singapore would be like in a hundred years, but you may not know, somewhere along the line in twenty, thirty years' time, times may change.

I mean transport infrastructure is a classic case. When we built the MRTs, with hindsight we should have said, we should have built longer, we should have built larger, we should build more extensive. The reality is that there are still certain factors that you cannot foresee clearly. What we therefore try to do is we try to give clarity as far as possible, but at times when we are not able to, we will tell you, "Well, I'm sorry at this stage we are not able to," but we do tell you that we will give you sufficient time for you to plan. And hopefully that gives you some sort of assurance, even it's not [much]. I mean, to some extent and I will

00:50:58

perhaps, again, if you don't quote me, we do have enquiries coming where the estates are [sic have] like, eighty, seventy years still remaining. And you know, eighty, seventy years is still a very long time. Unless you have a crystal ball that you can [use to] really foresee the future, it would be quite difficult to be able to tell what happens. But certainly, if it's coming up to a much closer date, we will endeavour our best to be able to give you that clarity, or give the public the clarity.

Choy Chan Pong
00:51:33

Thank you, Boon Khai. I have a long list of questions, but I think I should not be unfair. We will open to the floor for questions. I can see a lot of very excited, anxious people. Please, Pam...

Pamelia
00:51:52

I am Pamela Lee and in my last work life, I was a collector of land revenue and I sold land for the government. The sites that I sold were Alkaff Mansion for themed events, Telok Ayer Market, Laguna Golf Club, which I included a hotel component thanks to URA—a resort hotel component, Dragon Kiln, which I used to save and Tanglin Mall, which if you recall, used to be the Cultural Theatre Handicraft Centre, and it was given to me to run and I said I don't think I can make it succeed, so I amalgamated the whole site and I sold it as a hotel cum shopping centre. And that was the easiest parcel to sell.

But now that I [have] retired and I drive around, I see empty black and whites and I see people who run sea-side attractions always nervous about how long their lease will be. And I know that [the] land office has to maintain all these too. They have to maintain all the empty black and white houses; they have to maintain all the beach sites that we reclaim on the Southern Islands, and we thank you for that. But I'm wondering if we could be more imaginative with government, private sector, Tourism Board—if they would get interested, that we could bring new uses. Because I know a young couple that wanted to get married in a black and white house and they went door-to-door leaving notes to say, "Can I borrow your house?" And they went to Land Office but they found out it was too complicated to borrow the house for a month or for two weeks or whatever. But I thought, if such things could happen, it would

00:53:43

enrich our lives and maybe cut down the maintenance for Land Office, thank you.

Tan Boon Khai

00:53:51

Pam, you will be delighted to know that we had our first wedding held at a black and white...

Pamelia

00:53:58

Yay! How and when?

Tan Boon Khai

00:54:01

About two weeks ago, I think. Two weeks ago. It's on our Facebook page. So actually, how it came about is that a young couple drove by, I think drove by a black and white [house] which was vacant, they made an enquiry and I said yes. And I take your point. I think that there is certainly a lot more scope to be a bit more imaginative in using black and whites. My philosophy to black and whites is very simple. I think that if you have real estate blood in you, these are the treasures of Singapore. If you look at many other countries with black and whites, unfortunately they're not so well-maintained. We, thanks to many of my predecessors, have taken the step to deliberately maintain them. And together with URA, some of them are conserved. I think from the government's perspective, the government has also invested a lot in trying to upkeep the properties. But you will also notice that many of the black and whites today reside in residential areas. To a large extent, without even talking about the disamenities that it may cause, a lot of the black and white houses or bungalows today are not configured for mass use.

Let me give you an example. We may think that "Wow! A huge black and white bungalow." In the old colonial days all the houses were huge. In the old days, all houses were huge. When you look at a black and white bungalow [which is] like for example, twenty thousand square feet, you will think, "Wow!" You know. The reality of course, as we all know today, is that very few people would pay huge amounts to stay in this. So why not for others? Certainly, some of the challenges is that the infrastructure today can't cope.

For example, if you were to convert a typical black and white bungalow to let's say, F&B use. The amount of infrastructure in terms of utilities, sewage and all these will have to increase. And this needs more than

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just a stroke of the pen to say, I can change. There will be disamenities caused and I think we are extremely conscious of the fact that the last thing we want to do, is to change the nature and character of the entire estate. So where we can, we do do so. There are black and white houses which are reconfigured, for example, to offices. There are also black and whites that are reconfigured, perhaps around the fringe of certain estates, to childcare uses. Because with the amount of vast land, it's perfect for the little children to run around and so on. So we have to at least strike that balance.

We work very closely with URA in that respect and I think to be fair, URA has been quite open to how we can...not only URA—URA, LTA, even the other public agencies like SCDF—how we can configure some of these properties for other uses other than residential [uses]. So I hope that I can give you that assurance. Some of my team members are here. Believe me, everyday I'm asking them, "So what next?" Because the last thing you want is, everything's still just for one use [which] is residential. So hopefully in time to come, we will see more and more, without necessarily changing the entire character of the estate and without causing undue inconvenience to the surrounding neighbours.

Choy Chan Pong
00:57:47

Okay, next question? Can I remind you to state your name and the organisation that you're from?

Lim Soon Heng
00:57:59

Hi, my name is Lim Soon Heng and I'm the President of the Society of Floating Solutions, Singapore. Our port activities are now moving west to Tuas: Tanjong Pagar, Keppel and Brani, they're all moving westward. That leaves us with a huge opportunity to develop the sea space around these areas. Alright? And if you look around in other parts of the world—the Netherlands is a good example—they are now experimenting with developing a city that is three square kilometers on floating islands. Maldives is building floating golf courses, Korea is building floating theatres, Dubai has got floating mansions. We are so short of land, we should also exploit that potential.

00:59:11

I come from a shipyard. I worked for Keppel for many, many years and I know it can be done. After all, we built structures that are 500-room floating hotels for operation in the North Seas where the environment is extremely harsh. I had the opportunity here just last Friday, to meet up with URA, HDB and STB to explore this area. And this question arises from one of the parties that we talked to: **if I put a floating structure in the sea, does that come under SLA? Or MPA?** (Laughter in room) And nobody seems to know the answer to that. So it's...

Tan Boon Khai
01:00:06

I think the answer to your question is [that] it will definitely come under somebody. (Laughter in room). In terms of reclaimed land, it comes under SLA. In terms of foreshores, it comes under SLA, but I think what you have mentioned is obviously something that we have not quite determined. To some extent, the difference between land and I suppose sea—I mean you can say sea, but it could be non-land for example, is the ability to mark out the boundaries. So if today on land, it's very clear. You are able to determine where your boundaries are and you are able to determine from that boundary, therefore, what your rights and obligations are.

I'm told that in [the] sea, it's a little bit different because obviously it moves while I suppose, conditions may change as well. So I don't have an answer to your question. I think instinctively, I might hazard a guess that it might depend on what you put on it. But that is really something that has just come, but I think obviously on land it's very clear. If today, instead of on the sea, you were to say how about if it floats into the air semi-permanently, right? I would have no answer for you as well. But I would like to think that if you can consider it as part of Singapore's territory—not territorial waters, but territory, then perhaps SLA might raise a hand and say, "I think we should consider that as land."

Choy Chan Pong
01:02:17

Next question. John?

John
01:02:25

I have a follow up of questions to Chan's question. I think what he told you about the terrace housing, to me, is that it's a little tea storm in a teacup. [It] does really nothing. **My sense is [that] on the ground there's**

01:02:41

a bigger storm brewing that SLA should pay attention to, and by that I mean the ninety-nine year lease of the HDB. How so? Now, land acquisition was easier in those days because why? You were playing with small numbers, high value. So only a few people will complain. With the ninety-nine year lease, you got about eighty-five percent, maybe more, of the population who will be knocking on your door. Right? It's not there yet, but it will be knocking on your door in twenty years' time.

The compound problem to the ninety-nine year [lease] is the SERS [selective en-bloc resettlement scheme]. Because SERS, by nature, is selected. The problem with SERS is that every time the government goes down to do a SERS of say, six blocks, the people [of] the six blocks are happy because, "Whoa! Extra income comes in." Capital value, right? They may top up a little bit, but the value goes up. They each get off with a X dollar income: hundred thousand, two hundred thousand easy, per pop. The problem is that [while] the thousand people are happy, you got about six thousand people around there who are completely unhappy. And a recent advance notice from the Ministry [stated] that the SERS by nature is SERS—it's not going to happen to all the blocks, which is correct. The question is how you're going to manage that emotional problem.

Technically I know what you're doing. You can do it, you can do the numbers, you can do all your assessment[s] and say do it here, do it there and you do your redevelopment. But the question [is that] now, you're dealing with eighty-five percent of population knocking on your door with unhappiness, not so much technical problem, but emotional annoyance. Thank you.

Tan Boon Khai
01:04:24

Yes, well, I think you're right. This is obviously a very complex issue. This is an issue that potentially affects many parties. But like I've said earlier before, at least the guiding philosophy today is that when leases expire, it should be returned to the state. But as you rightly pointed out, it is not an economics, it is not an infrastructure issue—it is a[n] emotional issue. And for various reasons, I mean you can go deep into all the details. But fundamentally, I suppose the question is: do people accept that when

01:05:17

their leases expire, the land should be returned back in order for better things to be done? I don't think there's a perfect solution, honestly.

And I think MND and I think [Cheong] Khoo Hean recently has also said, what we are able to at least say now is that, when you choose on your own free will to buy a property which you know has a declining value, then you need to go in with your eyes open. Because at the end of the day, it's a personal choice. I mean, this is I think, all we can say because I don't think at this stage there is a perfect solution. We, to some extent, and I know you said the Lorong 3 Geylang is just a snippet. But certainly, I think we found that people understand. And that is very important, because when people understand, their expectations also follow accordingly. They may be very emotional first because of the issue that stares at them, but I would like to think that, rationally, people actually know and they go in with their eyes open.

Choy Chan Pong

01:06:47

The lady over there, yeah. In black.

MK

01:06:49

Hi, my name is MK, I'm here in my personal capacity. Interesting to hear all the comments, but with due respect to Mr Chan, I think as what Dr Cheong also stated in the recent public seminar: if you buy ninety-nine years, then you know right, as what Mr Tan also said. So emotion aside, there is the legal sanctity of contract, that if you buy ninety-nine years, you **would** be getting ninety-nine years and full-stop.

But correlated to that, what I cannot understand, is from the presentation slides that Mr Tan put up just now, **there is another aspect of private non-landed properties which have been sold from previous GLS or whatever, that are ninety-nine years. And yet typically now, even owners of freehold condos are facing that through the en bloc law, they're effectively getting anything from ten to twenty to thirty-five years of lease. How does that square up with legal sanctity, rule of law, all these things that should matter to Singapore?** Your comment please?

Tan Boon Khai

01:08:03

If I can paraphrase that, I think you're asking why do we have a regime to allows the majority of owners to be able to agree to an en bloc even

01:08:18

though the tenure has not reached its end? (Pause). There are some issues that obviously—I'm figuring out, how perhaps to put it—there are areas that obviously, you cannot always expect the government to step in. In many of the en bloc developments, it is really an issue of the owners collectively deal[ing] with a potential buyer. I think that it's a never-ending, this is my personal opinion, I think it is a never-ending argument of whether you should say, "I must get unanimous approval," or at what stage do I allow eighty-percent, ninety-percent, and so on. Of course, that is not really the end story.

The end story, subsequently, is that from a planning and from a development perspective, the public agencies must allow the redevelopment to take place. If it doesn't happen then, well, you know, I suppose too bad. The developer has made a wrong choice, taken the wrong bet, and the place would not be rejuvenated. Fundamentally, there are two ways redevelopment can take place. One is the government takes an active role; [another] one is the private sector takes a role. I think it would be inconceivable to say that all development [has to] be undertaken by public sector, [that] the government undertakes [all]. You do need to leave areas where the private sector, the private developers can come in to perhaps produce something that is better, that the government has not done.

So for example...I mean, it is not the best example, but government's primary obligation is to produce, or at least to build houses or flats that are more affordable to the general public. We don't build flats which we sell at two thousand, three thousand dollars per square foot—that is left to the market to decide. And in that sense again, if you look at the sanctity of contract, it is really a willing seller–willing buyer transaction. You shake your head because if you are the minority then obviously you will...you....

MK
01:11:11

Sorry, but I shake my head because the eighty percent majority-ism came about through SLA[s] initiative of the LTSA—the Land Titles Strata Act. It did not come about through market forces. So, I can recognize

01:11:29

that you do need land intensification, you do need urban renewal. [The question is] **whether you should do it in a managed way with regulatory oversight, or you just say, well, to the dogs and to the market?**

Tan Boon Khai

01:11:46

The real estate sector today, as you probably will agree with me, is already a highly regulated sector. There is not as much room or freedom to manoeuvre, I mean if you look at any other countries, even our neighbouring countries, you will know that sometimes the developers can manipulate rules to suit their [needs]. And I think we have largely...I won't say we...I accept that there are room for improvements, but I would probably say that to have more regulation in an extremely regulated environment is not always the wise choice. Certainly, I take your point. To be fair, I don't have my colleagues from URA here who are actively also looking at all these issues constantly. But if you will allow me, this is something that seriously needs to be considered, and I will be happy to take this back internally and discuss with them.

Choy Chan Pong

01:12:54

In the interest of time, I think maybe we can have two more questions.

AUD1

01:13:00

Okay it's a very short question. Following what Ms Pamela Lee said about your black and white houses, I know there's some single-storey ones. **Would you be willing to rent or lease or sell [them on a] ninety-nine year lease for a living facilities for the elder care?** Because today, we're seeing an ageing population and not all need nursing home, but they do need to live together and be supervised. And some of your units are **really** ideal. But it's a lot of money to invest to conserve and to make it elder-friendly. And so, we do need a bit of time on the lease, if you accept, and don't forget, old people are also residential. I know that some people think that, "Oh, my property tax," people for example say, "You're running an eldercare, so not as commercial property tax." It's really not, but I don't mind because commercial is cheaper. So truly, **will you lease medium-long term for eldercare, for assisted living facilities?** Not nursing homes, nursing homes are a different story.

Second question is a follow-up of your very good talk on renewal of leases. **What happens if a ninety-nine year lease, conservation houses on**

01:14:36

both sides are freehold and it's a stand-alone residential.....there's a few, believe me, I know. Like in Little India, say [out of] three shophouses, one shophouse is ninety-nine years, left sixty, and the others are freehold. There's no reason to acquire because you can't redevelop it. Will the existing owner be allowed to renew the lease? There are a few. I did one in Telok Ayer Street, where it was down to sixty years, and I bought for ninety-nine years when I redeveloped—I mean restored it, not redevelop. So there's no good reason for the government to take [it] back because the rest are freehold, they can't do anything about it which the owner hasn't already done. Thank you.

Tan Boon Khai
01:15:22

I suppose the short answer is that if the owner, whoever the owner is, would like to ask for a lease top-up, please let us know. We see or we assess all the lease top-ups on a case-by-case basis, certainly taking into account the surrounding, certainly taking into account the planning intent and so on. And I take your point. We don't, for example, say, just because there is no reason to extend or to let it lapse, therefore we will not. We do consider a whole host of factors, we do consult all the different agencies to see what is the longer planning intent. And there are, as you know, instances where leases are renewed. So please, if you, if the owner feels that [way], there's nothing to stop the owner from applying to us. Sometimes we will tell the owner well, the planning intent is still a little bit longer, can you please come back a couple of years later?

AUD1
01:16:34

How many more years left?

Tan Boon Khai
01:16:35

It really depends....

AUD1
01:16:38

How many more years before we should bother you about it? Thirty years? Twenty years?

Tan Boon Khai
01:16:43

Well, I suppose, certainly I would like to think that [when it is at] twenty, thirty years, we would have much clarity. Right? I don't know because I don't know the specific property that you're talking about. Yeah, if it's twenty years, certainly I think it would warrant a full consideration. We

01:17:01 will work with the different agencies including the URA to say, I think maybe the time is right to really decide one way or the other. Okay?

On your other question about elderly care facilities. Well, as you know of course, the Singapore government is very, very concerned about this because of the ageing population, and it is true that they are also looking at this issue on broader terms—not necessarily nursing homes but the whole spectrum. For many of these black and whites that you mentioned, they are obviously available for lease, [but] they are not available for sale—when our lease typically is what you'll lease out in the market, for example two years, two plus two and so on. [This is] largely, because we don't take the position of selling the black and whites. Now....Sorry?

AUD1
01:17:55 Longer leaser? Because they are short...

Tan Boon Khai
01:17:56 Well, you know there's nothing...we don't...I don't think at this moment we actively chase out residents who stay....

Pamelia
01:18:07 To invest, to renovate will need sufficient time.

Tan Boon Khai
01:18:10 Well, it is no different, I suppose, if today you were to go into any private development and you were to lease. I mean the private developer will unlikely to tell you... I will give you thirty years.

AUD1
01:18:20 No, we have done for ten years, six years. Six plus six, long lease. That's a lot of money...[inaudible] special housing.

Tan Boon Khai
01:18:27 I understand it. If you think there are such areas that you look at, well please feel free to approach us, I think it warrants us taking a further look. We may come back to you with a slightly different proposal, but I'm open to at least taking a look at what proposal you may have.

Choy Chan Pong
01:18:46 Can have the last question, yes?

Raymond Kwok
01:18:48 Thank you very much, Boon Khaiat [sic Khai] My name is Raymond, Raymond Kwok. I'm the Independent Director of HSBC Insurance, which is my new role. I've got one question and one observation with your comment. The first is I love the picture behind you. What I'm asking is

01:19:04

that how can... what are the possibilities of us developing further up to the sky because we've got people talking about using the sea, et cetera. Because it's very important for us as a small island, I think we may be living in our space, although we still got a lot of space left – when I drive round there's still a lot of space. Second question is that I think there are questions asked, "Does the sea belong to SLA?" My thinking out loud is that most likely some authority should control all the aspects. Instead of saying land, Singapore Land Authority, we change it to Singapore Territory so you [that you can] take care of the land the sea and the space. And that might be easier, you know, somebody has to make a decision, right? We cannot be passing the buck to everybody. Anyway, that's just a second observation. Maybe the first one, less contentious question end the session.

Tan Boon Khai
01:19:53

I would probably say your first question is probably answered by the planners—you know, how high we can build. But if you ask me, really, certainly, safety and security aside, it is really what technology allows us to do so. I think today as you know, some of our buildings have gone beyond three hundred meters in height in the central area. Yes, if you look at some other countries, everybody's rushing to build the tallest [building]. So if from a planning perspective it warrants us to go that way, I'm sure that's only a matter of time. But like you said, maybe we don't need to go there in the near future yet, because we still have other areas of land.

I should mention and I did mention this—clear enough, you know at the end of the day together with all the other agencies—URA, NParks, HDB—and so on...really the fundamental that we're trying to build is we're trying to build a liveable city. And as Teng Chye would be able to tell you, it is really [about] having enough space, not just buildings—having enough greenery, having enough walkways, to make it almost like living in a garden, right? And I think one of the things, certainly, about exploring underground is not so much of living underground, but freeing up land above ground where you can put some of these infrastructure and so on underground.

01:21:25

It's a long-term project, but I think that if we get it right, with data, with information, with planning, with judicious land use, I'm sure that going forward fifty, even hundred and fifty years, Singapore will be a much better place.

Choy Chan Pong
01:21:44

Alright, gentlemen. Ladies and gentlemen, we have come to the end of the talk and the Q&A session. I think there's going to be a book presentation, a book ceremony. You can kindly stay for it...

Mayers Ng
01:21:58

Yes, thank you gentlemen. Yes, may I invite you all to remain on stage and may I now also invite CLC's Executive Director, Mr Khoo Teng Chye. Before that, yes, thanks, gentlemen, for the very lively discussion.

So thank you. And may I invite CLC's Executive Director, Mr Khoo Teng Chye to come on stage to present the Urban Systems Study: Land Framework of Singapore—Building a Sound Land Administration Management System.

So we would like to present this as a token of appreciation to Mr Tan Boon Khai and Mr Choy Chan Pong. May I ask the gentlemen to remain on stage? So we're very honoured to have the partnership of the SLA and Ministry of Law in documenting this publication. Thank you. Thank you, gentlemen. You may wish to adjourn to take a seat.

[Transcript ends at 1:22:56]

LECTURE INFORMATION

TITLE

Limited Land, Unlimited Space

SPEAKER

Mr Tan Boon Khai
Chief Executive, Singapore Land Authority

MODERATOR

Mr Choy Chan Pong
Member, Centre for Liveable Cities Panel of Experts; Former Senior Adviser, Urban Redevelopment Authority

DATE

20 April 2017

LOCATION

MND Auditorium

DURATION

1 Hour 23 Minutes 50 Seconds

Note:

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