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COMMUNITY DAY @ KAMPUNG ADMIRALTY

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Good afternoon,

This project was conceived and launched in MND. There have been occasional requests for a retirement village in Singapore. This came from those who have observed how retirement villages function in Australia and Florida. They think that a similar idea could be pursued in Singapore. To test it out, URA set aside a piece of land, put it out to tender for such a retirement village, but the market was not enthusiastic. We were not surprised by the outcome.

2 With the bulk of Singaporeans living in HDB, our focus, instead, is on how seniors can live happily, actively and healthily in HDB town. Kampung Admiralty was an experiment on how such a concept could be implemented. After extensive discussions with the seniors and the professionals, we identified 4 important elements in such a retirement community.

3 First: it must encourage social interactions. There must be many public spaces to encourage the seniors to leave their apartments, to interact, engage and socialise. Our first aim is to fight against loneliness.

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4 Second: it must encourage active ageing. There must be easy access to green spaces and activities that seniors enjoy doing, like community gardening, to keep their body moving, and maintain mental well-being. Our second aim is to fight against ill-health.

5 Third: it must encourage inter-generation bonding. A retirement community that is senior-focused is likely to be depressing. The old like the very young to be around, to hear their laughing and their crying. It is most uplifting. As a grandfather, I know! Our third aim is to fight against depression.

6 Fourth: it must appeal to our instinct to be kind. The layout, the facilities, the activities must be natural, and ground up as much as possible. It needs some organisation, but it must be an invisible hand, nudging good behaviour, with social graces and compassion. We were reminded of the good old kampong days where neighbours look out for one another, help one another and are naturally considerate towards one another. Our fourth aim is to fight against inconsiderate behaviour.

7 How can the 4 elements gel together to deliver a wonderful result? We have many examples to draw inspiration from. Those of us who grew up in kampungs have experienced such elements ourselves. Like villages all over the world, it is normal for the very young, the adults and the old to live together and interact with one another naturally throughout the day, 24/7, 365/year. We set out to do just that.

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8 Three years of hard work and deep passion from many people have delivered this beautiful modern kampong. We have many people to thank: Dr Cheong Koon Hean, Mr Yap Chin Beng and their HDB team, Mr Liak Teng Lit, Ms Teoh Zsin Woon and their MOH and Alexandra Health System teams, Mr Wong Mun Summ and his creative architectural team, Mr Kenneth Er and his NParks community garden team, Mr Ronnie Tay and his NEA team, ECDA and LTA teams, the contractors and many others. Many agencies were involved in this project. Liak and Chin Beng told me that they made everyone recite the mantra “the whole is more important than the parts” at the start of every meeting! It was to get the agencies to look beyond their natural tendency to focus on their agency-centric perspectives. I think the whole has indeed come together better than the individual parts!

9 We now have the hardware to realise this way of life. Here, I see grandparents live in the studio apartments, young parents drop their kids at childcare, shop here, eat here, whole family can have many opportunities to come together. No need to rush if parents have to work late, grandparents can pick up kids from childcare, while both enjoy their time together. We have provided plenty of green features, just like in the old kampong, very pleasant for both people and butterflies, and perhaps even hornbills. I hope the residents, both living here, and nearby, can help grow and maintain the community gardens and harvest the fruits and vegetables. They can have communal cooking, on the rooftop, under the stars. Then remember to walk a few round, up and down the trails on the roof, to burn off calories and build some muscles too.

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10 Above all, make this kampong an example of neighbourliness, an example of cleanliness, an example of kindness and graciousness that we used to experience during old kampong days, and that we continue to observe in some villages in Japan, Taiwan and Korea. This is our dream. It is now in our hands to make it real. Let's work hard, and remind one another of this larger dream as we breathe life into this modern kampong.

11 I will visit this kampong regularly to experience its progress. I will certainly hold some of my Sembawang community dinners here. No need to set up tents!

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