

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to you. It is my pleasure to join you here at the “Active, Beautiful, Clean Waters – Towards Resilience, Liveability and Sustainability in Design” seminar.

2 First, let me thank the Institute of Engineers Singapore for co-organising this seminar with PUB for the past eight years. I would also like to thank the Singapore Institute of Architects and the Singapore Institute of Landscape Architects for their strong support.

Mainstreaming ABC Waters

3 The Active, Beautiful, Clean Waters Programme, or ABC Waters Programme in short, was launched in 2006 with a vision to transform Singapore’s utilitarian drains, canals and reservoirs into clean and beautiful streams, rivers and lakes. Our philosophy is to beautify our waterways and integrate them with our urban landscape. Doing so enhances our living environment with community spaces that bring the public close to water. With this, our people learn to value and cherish our waterways, and become stewards of water.

4 Over the last 12 years, that vision has turned into reality. With the opening of five new sites by the end of the year, PUB itself would have completed 41 projects. Work on another five sites will have commenced by this year.

5 Perhaps more important to making ABC Waters ubiquitous is how our fellow public agencies and private developers have embraced the concept and incorporated ABC Waters design features in their developments. There are now 75 ABC Waters Certified projects by them. Together with the 36 projects implemented by PUB, there is now an ABC Waters project in almost every heartland.

6 Iconic projects include the Kallang River at Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, where we naturalised a concrete canal to turn it into a flood plain and integrated it with a neighbourhood park. Another example, Punggol Waterway, which runs alongside residential estates, is an aesthetic waterway that supports water-based activities. I believe that many of us enjoy taking walks and runs along the waterway. Paya Lebar Quarter, a private mixed-use development, incorporates ABC Waters design features within the catchment that allows stormwater runoff to be cleansed before it is discharged into the Geylang River.

7 These and other exemplary projects by public agencies and private developers have been included in the fourth edition of the ABC Waters Design Guidelines, which we are releasing today. Besides case examples, this latest edition also highlights how the industry in Singapore has started to innovate and design for resilience when managing stormwater runoff.

8 The Guidelines not only showcase our successes, but also prompt us to contemplate taking the ABC Waters vision even further. To do this, ABC Waters design features should be positioned as fundamental elements of urban planning, and not just a “good to have”. Features like rain gardens and bio-retention swales not only improve the water quality of rainwater runoff, it can also detain and slow down stormwater runoff, and form part of our holistic source-pathway-receptor approach to flood risk management. With climate change bringing more frequent intense rainfall, there is indeed benefit in ABC Waters design features being more widely adopted in Singapore.

9 To move in this direction, PUB is engaging public agencies and private developers early, at the planning and design stage, to explore the implementation of ABC Waters design features. Moving forward, HDB will incorporate such features to treat stormwater runoff from at least 25 per cent of the site area, in all new public housing developments.

10 Another way to propagate the ABC Waters concept is to teach it to our young. For example, rain gardens have been implemented in 13 schools by PUB to serve as teaching aids to demonstrate how natural materials, such as plants and soil media, can be used to cleanse stormwater runoff. Through this immersive and experiential approach, students learn the importance of keeping our environment and waters clean. We hope that more schools will come on board and build rain gardens in their premises.

Increasingly Innovative and Resilient Designs

11 Even as we look at mainstreaming the ABC Waters concept, we cannot hope to replicate success just by using the same formulas.

12 That is why we must continue to encourage innovation, by improving competencies. We do this by building up the expertise of our industry professionals through the ABC Waters Professional Programme, and continued research and development.

13 We also work with institutions to incorporate ABC Waters design modules in tertiary curricula and collaborate with agencies such as NParks to organise workshops on the maintenance of ABC Waters design features. Personally, I think this is really important. It is one thing to create ABC Waters project design features; it is another thing to upkeep and maintain it so that it looks the same as when it was launched, particularly within the heartlands. So indeed, the training of relevant industry professionals is important.

14 I am encouraged to see more and more developers push the boundaries in design. Today, I will be presenting the ABC Waters Certification award to 13 projects that exemplify this. On top of that, we are introducing the new ABC Waters Certification (Gold) which recognises developers who go the extra mile, beyond the usual criteria for the ABC Waters certification. Projects must adopt ABC Waters design extensively and attain exceptionally high standards in managing stormwater runoff sustainably. The first two projects which have earned this accolade are the Learning Forest by NParks and Rivervale Shores at Sengkang by HDB. The Learning Forest features a comprehensive water treatment system consisting of vegetated swales, sedimentation basins and wetlands to treat about 55% of the stormwater runoff from the park. Rivervale Shores will incorporate rain gardens extensively to detain and treat about 50% of the precinct's runoff.

15 In closing, I would like to congratulate all developers on their ABC Waters Certification. I am certain that the seminar today will be an enriching one that allows all of you – developers, professionals, designers – to mingle and share ideas with one another.

16 Only with your support can we further our vision of a sustainable, resilient and liveable city. Thank you.

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