

The Importance of Planning: A City in a Garden

Text by Lim You Ling
Images as credited

Introduction

Setting land aside for parks might seem like a luxury for land-scarce Singapore, especially when compared to using it for residential, commercial or industrial purposes to meet the demands of housing and provision of jobs. However, in any healthy and liveable city, the provision of well designed parks and green open spaces is just as important as any other land use. In fact, it is especially critical to the well-being of a highly urbanised city like Singapore. The denser our city develops over time, the more important parks become in providing a healthy relief for our residents. The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore (URA) plans and facilitates Singapore's physical development in partnership with other agencies and the community, to create a vibrant and sustainable city of distinction.

Forms of Parks in Singapore

Park spaces in Singapore take many forms. With slightly different focuses in mind, they range from biodiversity-rich nature parks (e.g., Labrador Park and Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve), to regional, town and neighbourhood parks, which serve as social gathering and recreational spaces for the local community.

Beyond zoning selected plots of land as parks, innovative measures to create more park spaces have also been implemented. As early as in the 1960s when Singapore was beginning to industrialise rapidly, then Prime Minister Mr. Lee Kuan Yew started a tree planting campaign and called for Singapore to be developed into a "Garden City" through intensive landscaping. There was active planting along all roads, vacant plots and new development sites, capitalising on every opportunity to green our city as we develop. Today, roadside planting has become part and parcel of our streetscape, providing lush boulevards and shady sidewalks. Since then, park connectors have also been planned and implemented around the island to connect as many housing communities as possible to nearby regional, town or neighbourhood parks. Park connectors are creative ways of making use

of our land. These are linkages created alongside canals and roads running through towns, to improve accessibility between parks. Park connectors make it possible for people to stroll, jog or cycle from park to park and coast to coast, bringing parks closer to homes. These well-planted linear open spaces give residents easy access to a nearby park and a sense of being near a park. Beyond parks in the public realm, URA has also put in place multiple incentive and regulatory schemes, such as the LUSH (Landscaping for Urban Spaces and High-rises) programme to encourage the provision of skyrise and urban greenery in private developments. Since LUSH was launched in April 2009, more than 100 developments have proposed skyrise greenery features in their development proposals. These new sky terraces, balconies and communal planter boxes provide spaces of relief and greenery and create a distinctive image of the city in the tropical climate.

Hence, parks in Singapore are not simply green open spaces for visual and physical relief; they typically serve multiple functions from environment to social aspects, such as carbon sequestration, enriching the city's biodiversity, and serving as social gathering, recreational and events spaces. Like any other land use in Singapore, park land is also planned with optimisation in mind, by being easily accessible to ensure good use and programmed to engage the people. Parks thus play an essential role in enhancing the liveability of our city.

Nature Appreciation

Parks in Singapore allow Singaporeans opportunities to be close to two major natural assets - tropical plants and the sea - and create awareness and appreciation of our unique natural assets. Careful planning and thought are put in place to both safeguard our natural assets, such as the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, the hilly ridges along the Southern waterfront and our dynamic coast lines, and to allow public easy access to these parks to be close to our natural flora and fauna.