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Not in my back yard to Yes in my back yard

Food for thought
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SIXTY years ago, while I was studying in the University of Sydney, I read an article in the press of a lady living at Redfern, a suburb just after Central Station, complaining about a proposed high-rise development opposite her terrace house. "I have stayed here for the last 50 years. Now you want to build buildings here which will block my views."

Because of such complaints, the then city councillors acceded to her demand.

Redfern became a semi-slum over time despite being located within 3 km from the city centre. Instead of Redfern, people were compelled to live further away from the city, eventually even in Parramatta, which is located 30 km or 40 km away from Sydney. Redfern should have become part of the central zone in Sydney, just like our KL Sentral is to Kuala Lumpur City.

Today, Redfern is finally catching up with development. However, the previous restriction has hampered its growth. Today, it is too difficult in some cases to pull down old low-rise buildings for redevelopment.

The NIMBY (Not in my back yard) thinking displayed by the old lady mentioned above was one of the main reasons for Redfern's decline into a slum back then.

Assuming that there is no population growth in the city, then not developing the city would be fine. If however the population is growing, the city will also need to grow. This reminds me of the feedback and difference of opinions towards the Kuala Lumpur City Plan (KLCP) 2020 gazetted on Oct 30.

The first draft of the KLCP 2020 came about in 2008. It was further enhanced from ideas that came about from the series of World

Class Sustainable Cities (WCSC) International Conferences held every year since 2009 and co-organised jointly by the Real Estate & Housing Developers' Association (Rehda), Malaysian Institute of Planners (MIP), and Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM).

The purpose of the conference was to help planning authorities, development professionals, Residents Associations and the general public understand best city practices around the world.

From the ideas and concepts presented, KL developed the River of Life project, enhanced MRT networks, covered walkways, bicycle lanes, and other plans to lead the city development. KLCP 2020 was finalised in 2012. Unfortunately, it was not gazetted by the previous regime.

The new Federal Territories Minister was then left to make the tough call to gazette the KLCP 2020 now in order to prepare for the KLCP 2040.

The minister confirmed that there are gaps in the current plan and solutions to rectify these gaps would be taken into consideration in the draft KLCP 2040, which will kick off and hopefully be gazetted before 2020.

No plan is ever perfect. The City Plan is that way too as it has to take into account the many stakeholders with differing views. If everyone's demands are to be satisfied, the plan would likely never be gazetted. The minister and planners of the day must be given the mandate to take care of the greater good of the city.

If we want a city to grow, we need to cater to its future needs. The story of Redfern serves as a good lesson on how not to do it. It is always expensive for a city to sprawl and will surely destroy more green space. When we clear green lungs for developments outside of the current city area, the new population will have to stay in the city fringes.

However, when they travel by car to their workplace in the city, it triggers traffic jams and leads to a massive loss of productive time. As

and when the city expands to absorb more green lungs, the vicious circle will replay itself.

Let's look at Hong Kong. Despite being one of the cities with the highest population density in the world, it is blessed to have more than 75% greenery.

Due to its' mountainous terrain and rocky adjoining islands, Hong Kong has only developed 23.7% of its total land mass. The 76.3% which is difficult to develop on has remained green.

Of the developed land, only 6.8% or 76 sq km is used for residential purposes to house a population of seven million.

Special attention should be given to its high-density development and excellent public transportation system, all of which have brought impressive growth and vibrancy to this modern city. The city remains one of the greenest cities in the world because of its vertical approach to development.

High-rise residential properties in Hong Kong were built without spreading too far from the city centre. They are also placed near transportation hubs and commercial areas for ease of mobility.

The Hong Kong city model should serve as an inspiration to our own city plan. No one plan is for all. There will always be many opinions but a decision must be made to effect the plan so as not to stifle growth.

Any city plan should cater for long-term growth. However, the details can be reviewed along the way. We need to cater for growth in a more sensible and sustainable way.

As mentioned earlier, we should balance the views of individuals against the greater good of a city. It is time to change our thinking from NIMBY to YIMBY (Yes in my back yard) towards developments that will cater for our future generations.

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