SPEECH BY MR MAH BOW TAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE CONCEPT PLAN 2011 REVIEW PUBLIC CONSULTATION EXERCISE ON SATURDAY, 23 JANUARY 2010, AT THE URA CENTRE

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

Good morning. I am happy to join you today for the launch of the Concept Plan 2011 Review Public Consultation Exercise.

Over the past 50 years, our city has changed remarkably and our quality of life has improved. Today, Singapore’s GDP per capita ranks among the highest in the world. Our city is regarded as one of the most liveable in Asia. Many of these achievements did not come by chance, but resulted from forward looking and comprehensive planning.

Planning is a necessity for Singapore. It is not a choice. With just 710 sq km of land, we need to plan meticulously to ensure that we maximize every bit of our limited land. We plan not only to meet our immediate needs. We also plan to accommodate future growth so that we can continue to provide opportunities and a good quality living environment for future generations.

Concept Plan Review

In Singapore, we carry out land-use planning at two levels. At the broad national level, the Concept Plan maps out the vision for Singapore’s physical development over the next 40 to 50 years. It is reviewed once every 10 years to keep pace with changing trends and aspirations. The Concept Plan is then translated into the Master Plan which guides the development of individual land parcels in Singapore over a 10 to 15 year horizon.

Previous Concept Plans have had a major impact on our cityscape. In the first Concept Plan in 1971, we drew up plans for major infrastructure projects such as Changi Airport and our first MRT lines. In the 1991 Concept Plan, we systematically planned for the decentralization of commercial space from the CBD, which led to the development of new regional commercial nodes such as Tampines Regional Centre. Arising from the 2001 Concept Plan, a Parks and Waterbodies Plan was introduced to inject more recreation choices, green spaces, and park connectors island-wide, while an Identity Plan was formulated to retain and enhance selected areas in Singapore that have special character and charm.

Now, at the start of a new decade, we are embarking on the next Concept Plan – Concept Plan 2011. When completed next year, the Concept Plan 2011 will map out our land-use plans and strategies to guide the future physical development of Singapore all the way until 2050 and beyond. This may sound like a speck in the horizon for some of us. However, the decisions we make for Concept Plan 2011 will have a major impact on the lives of our children and their children.

Economic and Social Trends

The starting point of the Concept Plan review is simple: How can we make Singapore a Better Home for Singaporeans? The key objective remains unchanged, which is to strive for the best quality of life for Singaporeans.

While this objective remains unchanged, our land use responses to achieve this objective will have to take into account new trends and circumstances in the decades ahead. Three key trends will set the context for the Concept Plan Review this time round.

The first trend is economic. The competition for investments and talents among cities will intensify. In the next few decades, more big cities will emerge,
especially in Asia, and many of these cities will be improving their offerings in terms of choice and quality of business locations. So we will have to compete with many more cities, and more sophisticated cities in Asia, as a location for business, funds and investments. And many of the businesses will go where they can attract top talents. So successful cities must also have a high quality living environment and attractive lifestyle offerings to retain and attract a highly-talented workforce.

10 The second trend is demographic. We expect the composition of the population in Singapore to change in the decades ahead. Our population is expected to grow, through immigration as well as from local births. But the growth of our population going forward may not be as rapid as in the last decade, when our population grew from 4 million in year 2000 to close to 5 million last year. At the same time, our population will age rapidly. With the availability of better healthcare and increased affluence, our life expectancy has risen from just 65 years in 1965 to 80 years today. Today, 1 in 10 Singapore Residents are aged 65 and above, but by 2055, the ratio will be 1 in 4.

11 The third trend is environmental. Climate change has surfaced as a critical global challenge that will significantly impact our civilization in the decades ahead. To avoid the potentially disastrous impact of climate change requires all nations to take decisive action now to minimise their carbon footprints and grow in a more environmentally responsible manner.

Key Issues

12 All of these trends have significant implications in terms of the way we plan the physical development of Singapore. We have to decide, in Concept Plan 2011, how we can best position our city as a home and as a global business hub, in the context of these trends. Let me highlight four specific issues that emerge in our planning, namely, quality of life, ageing, identity and sustainable development.

13 First, the biggest question is how we can continue to maintain a high quality of life in Singapore. A high quality of life is what makes Singapore a good home for our people. It is also a key competitive advantage for Singapore in attracting talents and investments. But planning for a high quality of life is extremely complex, because a high quality of life may mean different things to different people, especially as our society becomes more diverse and cosmopolitan. A high quality of life can also be a moving target because people judge their quality of life against their own expectations and aspirations.

14 This challenge is compounded by the fact that we have limited land. For instance, how do we allocate land between economic uses which are important to material wellbeing, and recreation uses such as parks and green spaces which contribute to a good living environment? How do we prioritise land use among different lifestyle options that can improve the quality of life for different segments of our population?

15 In particular, to maintain a high quality of life requires us to understand and study ways to address the aspirations of our people. In view of the changing demographic profile, a second and more specific issue for Concept Plan 2011 is how we can make Singapore "senior ready" and "senior-friendly" and provide a physical environment that empowers seniors to lead autonomous and fulfilling lives. This may mean careful rethinking and re-planning of our physical environment, including facilities and infrastructure provision, to better meet the needs of the elderly.

16 A third issue is identity. In a world where borders matter less, identity may matter more. With globalization, many of our people work across borders and our resident population will also become more cosmopolitan. Even as we seek to position Singapore as a leading global city in Asia, it becomes more important to think about what makes Singapore the special place called home for our people. While global competition dictates that we must constantly rejuvenate our city with new infrastructure, we can only become truly distinctive as a global city if we have our own unique character and sense of history. We must think through what else is needed to enhance this sense of identity and belonging to Singapore, and how to strike a balance between redevelopment and conservation of places that are significant markers of our common history and experiences.
17 The fourth important issue is sustainable development. The physical development of our city in the decades ahead must embody our aspirations to build a socially inclusive and environmentally responsible city. We need to consider how our planning of housing, facilities and community spaces can facilitate, rather than hinder, community bonding. We will also need to study how the physical development of Singapore can be planned to support a lower carbon lifestyle, for instance by encouraging the use of public transport, and the construction of more green or energy-efficient buildings.

**Shaping the Future Together**

18 So as you can see, many of these issues are complex and may involve trade-offs between different objectives. The Government does not have all the answers. How we calibrate the balance between different objectives in land-use planning will depend on what our society as a whole deems as more important in each stage of our development. The public’s views, ideas and insights are therefore critical to this exercise, and we want to hear from Singaporeans, both young and old, and from all walks of life on their needs, aspirations and concerns. We want to plan for a better future for everyone.

19 MND and URA will conduct extensive public consultation as part of the Concept Plan Review. In August last year, URA initiated a Lifestyle Survey to understand the lifestyle needs and aspirations of residents. Today, URA will launch an online survey on its website to reach out to a wider public audience, so that people from across the island can contribute their views from the comfort of their homes. The survey will seek the public’s feedback on how the provision of social and recreational amenities and facilities can be improved, as well as how we can foster a greater sense of belonging to Singapore among residents.

20 Today, we will also launch two Focus Groups, each comprising 30 individuals from different professions within our society, to discuss the four key issues I outlined earlier. Each focus group will be led by two co-chairpersons. Mr Edmund Cheng, Chairman of the National Arts Council and Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, President of the National University of Singapore will steer the focus group on Quality of Life and Ageing. Mr Lee Tzu Yang, Chairman of Shell Singapore and Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Director of the Institute of Policy Studies will lead the focus group on Sustainability and Identity.

21 The Focus Groups will discuss the topics over the next four to five months, debate among themselves, deliberate on the issues and brainstorm for ideas. They will also consider the public’s views gathered via the Lifestyle Survey and online survey. They will then consolidate their recommendations in a draft report, which will be presented at a public forum in the middle of this year. After incorporating the views from the public, the Focus Groups will then submit their final report to URA.

22 After taking into consideration the views of the Focus Groups and the public, a draft Concept Plan will be formulated. Next year, URA will organize an exhibition and public forum on the draft Concept Plan, where the public can still comment and contribute ideas. Hence, there will be ample opportunities for the public to have their voices heard before the Concept Plan is finalized towards the end of next year.

**Conclusion**

23 The future of Singapore is ours to shape together. The Concept Plan is an exciting and important exercise, and I look forward to active participation from all Singaporeans. By working together, we can envision, plan for, create and own an even better home for Singaporeans and their children in the decades ahead. Thank you.