

**SPEECH BY MR LAWRENCE WONG, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECOND MINISTER FOR FINANCE, AT MND HUDDLE 2019 ON 11 OCTOBER 2019 AT FORT CANNING PARK**

1 Good evening. I am happy to join you for our annual MND Huddle. All of you are our key stakeholders— serving as board and committee members, volunteering on our workgroups and taskforces, and helping to advance various ground-up initiatives.

2 We are grateful for your many contributions to the MND Family. Tonight, we also want to pay special recognition to our MND Medallion and Dedicated Service Awards recipients. Let us give them a round of applause, and to all of you as well – thank you very much.

3 This is a special year for us – it is our Bicentennial; it is also MND’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, as MND was formed in 1959 when Singapore first became self-governing.

4 The Singapore we have today is the result of partnerships –the Government working closely with all Singaporeans, and in our case, it is MND working with our stakeholders, with everyone chipping in, and contributing our diverse energies, skills and talents.

5 This ethos of partnership is even more relevant today. DPM Heng emphasised this when he launched the Singapore Together movement earlier in June this year. So, when we say “Singapore Together”, it is not a slogan or tagline; it’s an important guiding principle for the future we are going to build together.

6 There are many aspects of our future where we will seek greater engagement from Singaporeans. For the MND family, it is about building our future home and city. All of you know that we are not done building Singapore. There are major plans that we have in the coming years, which would take decades to come to fruition. We want to strengthen our partnerships with Singaporeans in the way we

design and implement these plans. Let me share the ways we can do so in several areas.

### **Partnerships to plan and build our future city**

7 First, we want to strengthen partnerships in master-planning our future city. We are fortunate to have very good architects and planners in government, in the public sector. But we also recognise that good city planning cannot be done simply from the top-down – we also need inputs from local stakeholders and communities. So in our planning processes, we always strive to gather feedback and take in ideas from all stakeholders. For example, we recently had our Draft Master Plan 2019. What we exhibited was itself the culmination of years of engagement with different stakeholders, and even during the exhibition itself, we continued to get feedback and input to refine the plans. We will continue to do this and strengthen our consultative and engagement processes in planning.

8 Recently, I had lunch with several veteran architects arranged by the Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA). Some of them were involved in a previous exercise to come up with Development Guide Plans in the early-to-mid 1990s for various parts of Singapore, which then served as inputs to the 1998 Draft Master Plan. They suggested to me that we should do a similar exercise. Subsequently, I also met the Singapore Institute of Planners (SIP), who were also very keen to be involved.

9 I think this is an excellent idea. I discussed with URA. We will work with SIA and SIP, and invite their members to prepare Development Guides for new areas like the Greater Southern Waterfront (GSW) and Paya Lebar Airbase (PLAB), which will be a new site for development when the current air base moves to Changi. These Development Guides by the SIA and SIP can then serve as inputs to subsequent Master Plans.

10 I will let SIA and SIP decide how best to organise their teams. They can include veteran architects and planners, but I also encourage the two associations to bring in younger architects and planners, and help guide and mentor them.

11 Areas like GSW and the site of the current PLAB will take many decades to implement, so it is good to have young architects/planners involved. We can let them imagine and dream of what our future city can be, and let them provide input in shaping our future city. They will ultimately be the ones responsible for taking care of this place and making it better.

12 Of course, we also know that plans can only be as good as its implementation; we will also need many partners to help implement these plans, be it our architects, engineers, builders, as well as our innovators and researchers who will equip us with many new ways of doing things. Today, we have a good system of implementation – if you look at how we are able to translate plans to actual projects, I think we have a very good track record. But we cannot be satisfied with the status quo, and certainly not a continuation of existing business practices. We have to keep improving to stay at the cutting-edge.

13 Here too, we look forward to stronger partnerships – be it in the way we review and update regulations with the industry; in the way that we work together on industry transformation plans, or the way we invest in R&D in a whole range of urban solutions – from building materials to smart sensors to protecting our shorelines from rising sea levels. These are ways where we can improve our partnership in how we plan and build our city, and how we can re-make Singapore for the next century.

### **Partnerships to upgrade and rejuvenate our estates**

14 Secondly, building Singapore is not just about having new projects. We also have to renew and upgrade our existing housing estates, where the majority of Singaporeans live.

15 Today, we have many upgrading programmes. For public housing – we have the Remaking Our Heartland (ROH) programme at the town level. At the neighbourhood level, we have the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (NRP), Community Improvement Project Committees (CIPC), and within the flat, we have the Home Improvement Programme (HIP). For private estates, we have the Estate Upgrading Programme (EUP).

16 For Singaporeans living in HDB flats, HIP is one of the most important upgrading programmes as it affects their homes directly, as we fix the spalling concrete and help to upgrade their doors and bathrooms. Most Singaporeans look forward to that.

17 Previously, only flats built up to 1986 were eligible for HIP. By this year, we would have completed the final selection of these flats. This evening, I am happy to share that we will launch the HIP for flats built between 1987 and 1997 from 2020 onwards. We will start with a first batch of 55,000 units from next year, which are already 30 or older. After that, we will schedule the remaining 175,000 units progressively, as the flats reach about 30 years old. We think that we can complete the upgrading over the next 10 or more years.

18 Apart from HIP, we will continue with other upgrading programmes. For the ROH, we are completing 3 towns now: Woodlands, Toa Payoh and Pasir Ris. We will plan for another new batch sometime next year. We have the NRP and CIPC, which are ongoing programmes. We also have the EUP for private estates; we will launch the next batch later this year as well.

19 In total, we can expect more than \$1 billion in upgrading projects across Singapore over the next few years, for both public and private estates. This is a significant amount that we are putting in to upgrade and renew our housing estates. This comes on top of other public sector projects which we are continuing to do – for infrastructure, hospitals, and our public transport system.

20 Overall, we can expect a healthy pipeline of public sector projects in the coming years. For all of you in the Built Environment industry, I am sure this will come as good news, because in the current economic climate, our assurance is that we will continue to have a good pipeline of public sector projects, which hopefully will provide support for our important industry partners, be it consultants or contractors.

21 We are not only undertaking more projects; we also want to change the way in which we go about these upgrading projects. The typical way in which we do such upgrading projects today is that the Town Council or government agency will work

with the consultant, put together the plan and exhibit it, and gather feedback from residents. It will then do some minor fine-tuning; and proceed to implementation.

22 The process is not bad, but certainly it can be improved. We want to involve residents at the early stages of the project, even in the design and planning stages. This will take more time and effort, but I think it will be worthwhile. Residents will have a stronger stake in their estate and they will have a greater sense of ownership of their common spaces.

23 In fact, we have started trying out this different approach – one example is this upgrading project at Tampines Central. The residents came together to design new spaces along a linkway frequently used by the community. They got together and discussed their plans. They eventually decided on several projects, including a community garden and an art mural. From an empty void deck, they now have a cosy community café that also functions as a community library. As the residents were the ones designing and coming up with the project, it is a space that is well-used and even maintained regularly by them, and now we see spin-off projects because they are making use of these new spaces for regular breakfast and even exercise sessions.

24 This is a good example of how when residents themselves are empowered in designing, thinking and developing the project, the sense of ownership is greater and they make full use of these spaces. It takes longer, as I said. A lot more effort is needed – sometimes to even work out compromises because one group of residents wants something and another group wants something else; you have to sit down and sort out your differences and reach a compromise. That kind of engagement is worthwhile and we should do more of that.

25 Upgrading projects are typically implemented at the local level by Town Councils and Government agencies. We will encourage them to involve residents more extensively in these upgrading projects. Hopefully, over time, such resident engagement and involvement will be the norm for estate upgrading projects.

## **Partnerships for a greener, more sustainable Singapore**

26 Thirdly, we also want to have partnership for a greener and more sustainable Singapore. This is certainly a major priority for our future development because we have to make our living environment greener and more sustainable. This will not only improve our daily living conditions; it will also help us to mitigate the impact of climate change.

27 In fact, we are already doing many things to green our estates. We have solar panels on rooftops; energy-efficient lighting; rooftop greenery and farms. We are now studying what more we can do, including using new technologies to make our estates greener and more sustainable. We welcome ideas from all of you to make every HDB town green and sustainable.

28 One specific area which I would like to talk about today is our parks, which many of us enjoy and are very proud of. Over the years, we have worked with many stakeholders to green and to conserve our natural heritage. In fact, more than 25 years ago, we had Singaporeans join us as our first park volunteers at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve where they did guiding work, and they supported efforts to track the migratory birds.

29 At that time, we only had 50 volunteers. Today, our volunteer network has grown to 45,000 across our parks and gardens, including Community-in-Bloom, Community-in-Nature volunteers, and Friends of the Parks. They help to take care of our parks, promote responsible usage, and organise activities including guided tours.

30 We want to do more with our volunteers. Some people tell me – your parks are great and we love them; but it will be even better if we have a say in conceptualising and designing the parks from the start.

31 So we will set aside more than 50 parks in the coming years for this purpose. These will be new parks or existing parks that are due for redevelopment or upgrading. For these parks, we will invite communities to come together to envisage what the parks will look like, and indicate their preferred features. You may prefer to

have allotment gardens, another group may like to have park amenities for the elderly, yet another group may want to have playgrounds for children. I may not be able to have all of these requests put together. While we want engagement, we will need to discuss and see if there is a need to make some trade-offs and compromises. But essentially, we will let the community decide what the park will be like.

32 You can also get involved in the implementation like mural painting, landscape planting, and even park management and programming. So these will be citizen parks. We are planning 50 or more citizen parks over the next five years, where Singaporeans will truly have a hand in designing and developing parks for our fellow Singaporeans.

### **Partnerships for active place management**

33 Finally, we want to partner stakeholders in enlivening our public spaces and neighbourhoods. We have started pilot Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). These are by private sector stakeholders. We have done this for 10 precincts in Singapore and they are going well. The BIDs have come up with many different and interesting initiatives that tap on each precinct's unique history and offerings

34 For example, Tanjong Pagar's stakeholders launched Discover Tanjong Pagar, and its first precinct-wide Mid-Autumn festival celebration. They are planning more activities for the precinct, even now. Other precincts are doing their own activities; all across the 10 precincts –Singapore River, China Place, City Hall, Jurong Gateway, Kampong Glam, Marina Bay, Marina Centre, Paya Lebar and Raffles Place.

35 Beyond structured platforms like BIDs, we would also like to encourage those with good ideas to step forward. To date, the MND Family has supported more than 200 such projects. We have street activities, neighbourhood gatherings – a whole range of projects we have supported from the ground up.

36 Today, we have different schemes for these projects under different agencies – if you want to close the streets or roads to do an activity, you approach URA; if you want to do something in the housing estate, you go to HDB. Sometimes, this can be confusing to members of the public. We will do better.

37 We will consolidate everything under a “Lively Places Programme” with a single portal for anyone with good ideas to apply. We will provide funding of up to \$20,000 per project. You can decide where you would like to do your project and we will sort it out for you backend. Besides funding, the agencies will also assist and facilitate you in the implementation of the project.

38 Besides these ground-up initiatives, we will also have a regular call for ideas, and select the best ideas for joint implementation. HDB has started doing this. For example, earlier this year, a group of residents proposed to create a hydroponics farm on a plot of empty land next to their void deck in Woodlands. We thought it was a very good idea. We got the team together, and with HDB’s assistance, the team brought residents along and built the farm within 2 months. The farm is already completed. They plant all sorts of different vegetables and they harvest it together for all the residents to share and enjoy.

39 This Lively Places Challenge was started by HDB as a pilot, but we are very heartened to see enthusiastic responses and ideas from residents. So HDB will scale up this Lively Places Challenge – we will expand to 8 towns next year, around 60 projects. Eventually, we will roll it out to all our HDB towns. We look forward to partnering Singaporeans to make our housing estates livelier and more vibrant.

## **Conclusion**

40 In conclusion, I have outlined several key areas of partnership work for the MND Family – in planning and building our city, estate upgrading, developing green spaces and solutions, and activating our common spaces. Ultimately, partnership has been and will continue to be a key part of how we work – because we want to give every Singaporean a stake in shaping our future city and our home.



41 There is tremendous potential, when we all come together, work together and build together. There is so much more that we can achieve together. I am confident that we can look forward to a better Singapore filled with new and exciting possibilities for all of us and also for our future generations.

42 On that note, I thank you all once again for your strong and steadfast partnership with MND. We hope that we can do more with all of you together in the coming year. Thank you very much. Please enjoy the rest of the evening.