

LEGISLATION COMMENT

DECONTROL AND THE CONSERVATION OF OLD SINGAPORE

THE CONTROLLED PREMISES (SPECIAL PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) ACT 1989¹

THE PLANNING (AMENDMENT) ACT, 1989²

THE URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (AMENDMENT) ACT, 1989³

RENT control in Singapore is now in its last days. After numerous calls for decontrol, the Minister for National Development, Mr. S. Dhanabalan made the long-awaited announcement on October 6, 1988, that rent control will be phased out in stages, to speed up conservation of the city and free the affected areas for redevelopment. Acknowledging that the Act has long outlived its usefulness and holding it directly responsible for the dilapidated buildings in the older parts of our city, the Minister said:

“With our successful housing programme there is no justification for the Act ... In some of the old areas, the landlords have no incentive whatsoever to do anything because sometimes the rent they charge is not even enough to give the house a coat of paint. Landlords have therefore allowed their buildings to deteriorate into unsightly structures. The structures are a blight on our environment and hamper the efforts of our planners to develop a more gracious city. Our conservation programme for example, cannot move as quickly as we like it because of rent control problems.”⁴

The Minister’s focus on conservation of the city brings a new direction to the planning, land use and development of Singapore although conservation programmes have already been initiated by the Urban Redevelopment Authority some years earlier.⁵ The Minister explained why a blanket repeal of the Control of Rent Act was not adopted:

“If we repeal the Rent Control Act, it would amount to saying that all rent controlled properties are decontrolled and the owners can take possession.

¹ Act 14 of 1989, w.e.f. 31 March 1989 (S114/89).

² Act 12 of 1989, w.e.f. 31 March 1989 (S123/89).

³ Act 13 of 1989, w.e.f. 31 March 1989 (S127/89).

⁴ Straits Times, 7 October 1988.

⁵ The URA has undertaken conservation programmes in the Emerald Hill area (1981), Singapore River (1984), Peranakan Place (1985) and Cairnhill Road (1986). Other URA preservation efforts include the Food Alley project in Murray Street and Cuppage Centre, both completed in 1977. See URA brochure “Conserving Our Remarkable Past”.

The owners need not do anything with the property. All they need to do is compensate the tenant or just raise the rentals for the tenant and then if the tenant does not pay, he is turfed out and the owner takes possession and he can move in and occupy the property. That would be the effect of repealing the Control of Rent Act. By using the Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act, what we will be doing is that we will, in phases, decontrol areas and those owning properties which are rent controlled can take possession of the properties if they are able to come out with redevelopment plans. In other words, they just cannot take repossession of the properties. It must be coupled with some plan to redevelop. In the case of the conservation areas, the redevelopment will mean conservation works. Later, when we extend it to other areas, redevelopment will mean the traditional definition of "development" which is knocking down and re-building."⁶

This latest move towards decontrol links it with redevelopment and conservation, allowing owners of rent controlled premises in certain designated "conservation areas" to recover possession for purposes of redevelopment, within conservation guidelines. This is done by the passing of three amendment Acts namely, the Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 1989; the Planning (Amendment) Act, 1989 and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (Amendment) Act, 1989. Together, they constitute the framework for the conservation programme.

The Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act⁷

The principal Act (passed in 1969) was aimed at encouraging and promoting development in the private sector by enabling landlords to recover possession of rent controlled properties in certain "designated areas" for purposes of redevelopment. Until the Minister's announcement on October 7, 1988, the only area so designated was the "Golden Shoe" area.⁸

The term "develop" was then defined to mean the carrying out of any building, engineering or other operations in, on or over land."⁹ Redevelopment invariably took the form of repossession, consolidation of existing lots, demolition and rebuilding.¹⁰ Under the terms of the Act, compensation must be paid to the tenants and sub-tenants who are dispossessed. The Tenants' Compensation Board was established to hear applications for the recovery of possession and to assess the quantum of compensation to be paid by the landlord to the tenants and sub-tenants. It was amended in 1972 to enable the Board at its

⁶ Parliamentary Debates, 17 February 1989 col.795.

⁷ Act 10 of 1969 w.e.f. February 1970 (now Cap. 60, 1985 ed.).

⁸ This is the area bounded by Collyer Quay, Shenton Way, Shenton Circus, Telok Ayer Street, McCallum Street, Stanley Street, Cheong Wan Cheng Place, Cheong Hong Lim Street, Telok Ayer Street, Church Street, Synagogue Street, South Canal Road, Boat Quay and Fullerton Square (S62/1970).

⁹ See s.2 Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act.

¹⁰ The Act defined "develop" to mean the carrying out of any building, engineering or other operations in, on or over land" (s.2, 1970 Act).

discretion, to award compensation to occupiers who are neither tenants nor subtenants.¹¹

Other De-control Measures

After the passing of the Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act, other efforts at decontrol have been made. In 1980 the Control of Rent (Exemption) Notification¹² was passed, exempting from rent control all *domestic* premises which fall vacant after 24 October 1980 or, if owned by a body corporate, are occupied by or let to any director or employee of the company after 24 October 1980. The scope of this Notification was broadened in 1988¹³ to encompass *all* types of premises including business premises. These premises are no longer subject to the Control of Rent Act if they are owner occupied or vacant. In the case of premises owned by corporations, these will be decontrolled if they are vacant or occupied by or let to a director or employee of that corporation. The net effect of these two Notifications is that the Control of Rent Act today only applies to premises which are tenanted. Additionally, various parts of Tanjong Pagar were exempted from the provisions of the Act in 1987.¹⁴

A. The Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 1989

This new Amendment Act contains only two short amendments, both amending the definitions. The first inserts the definition of "conservation area" (which ties in with the new definition contained in the Planning Act as amended in 1989); the second amends the definition of "develop" to include the carrying out of any renovation or building works on any premises situate within a conservation area which would enhance or restore the character or appearance of those premises.

In so doing, the Amendment Act broadens the scope for the recovery of possession of controlled premises - so long as these are situate in designated "conservation" areas, their owners may recover possession according to the provisions contained in the 1970 Act. This, of course, means that compensation must be paid to tenants, subtenants and in appropriate cases, occupiers. The Tenants' Compensation Board will (as before), assess the quantum of compensation where the parties cannot come to an amicable agreement. However, the difference is that for premises in conservation areas, redevelopment is restricted to renovation works which would enhance the character or appearance of the premises. Such works require the prior permission of the Urban Redevelopment Authority, are closely monitored and must follow specified guidelines issued by

¹¹ S.9, inserted by Act 14 of 1972.

¹² S290/1980, w.e.f. 24 October 1980; see author's Commentary in (1981) 23 Mal. L.R. 258.

¹³ S284/1988, w.e.f. 7 October 1988.

¹⁴ *Vide* the Control of Rent (Exemption) Notification 1987 (S 274/87). These areas are more particularly described as follows: "All the premises within the area bounded by Tanjong Pagar Road, Cook Street, into the backlane, along Murray Street, meeting Tanjong Pagar Road, into Neil Road, along the North-eastern boundary and South-eastern boundary of Lot 70 TS 5, along Craig Road, into the Southern boundary of Lot 61-1 TS 23, along the backlane and the Eastern boundary of Lot 207-9 TS 23, meeting the North-eastern boundary of Lot 724 TS 23, into Craig Road" (see plan set out in the Schedule to the Notification).

the URA. These restrictions are contained in the Planning (Amendment) Act 1989. It should be noted, however, that not all buildings within the conservation areas are to be conserved. Buildings that have no historical or architectural value may be redeveloped subject only to the usual controls on the scale of development, building height and roof forms.

B. The Planning (Amendment) Act 1989

This Act brings the conservation of areas and buildings within the purview of town planning and development control. It provides for the appointment of a conservation authority. This is defined in section 2 to mean the Urban Redevelopment Authority (hereinafter referred to as “the URA”) or such other body or person as the Minister may appoint¹⁵. The amendments also empower the Minister to designate “conservation areas”. Every conservation area so designated must be demarcated on the Master Plan.¹⁶

The appointment of the URA as the conservation authority comes as no surprise, for it has been instrumental in initiating and embarking on several conservation projects in Singapore, even before the Planning Act provided for conservation.¹⁷

(a) Meaning of “conservation” and “conservation areas”

The term “conservation” is defined to mean “the preservation, enhancement or restoration of (a) the character or appearance of a conservation area; or (b) the trades, crafts, customs and other traditional activities carried on in a conservation area.” A similar definition appears in the new amendments to the Urban Redevelopment Authority Act.

Conservation areas are areas designated by the Minister under the Planning Act, where after considering proposals for revision of the Master Plan, he is satisfied that any area, district or premises is “of special architectural, historic, traditional or aesthetic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to to preserve, enhance or restore.”¹⁸ Every conservation area must therefore be demarcated on the Master Plan.¹⁹

To date, ten such areas have been so designated, of which four are in Chinatown. These four areas are Kreta Ayer, Bukit Pasoh, Telok Ayer and Tanjong Pagar. The other areas are Little India, Kampong Glam, Boat Quay, Emerald Hill,

¹⁵ In explaining the appointment of the URA as the conservation authority, the Minister emphasised that over the years, the URA has built up the resources and expertise necessary to carry out conservation in Singapore - see Parliamentary Debates, 17 February 1989 col. 785. It has earlier been mentioned that the URA has already carried out conservation projects in various parts of Singapore (see n.5, *supra*).

¹⁶ New s.6A inserted by Act 12 of 1989.

¹⁷ See n.5, *supra*.

¹⁸ New S.6A, *ibid*.

¹⁹ S.6A inserted by Act 12 of 1989. The Master Plan was accordingly amended vide No.1154 Singapore Government Gazette, 31 March 1989.

Cairnhill and Clarke Quay.²⁰ All these areas (with the exception of Clarke Quay which is state owned), are concurrently designated as “development areas” within the meaning of the Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act.

(b) *Restriction on works carried out on conservation areas*

A new section 10A controls all works within a conservation area. No person is allowed to carry out works in a conservation area unless he has the prior written permission of the competent authority. The phrase “works within a conservation area” is defined to mean “any decorative, painting, renovation or building works which may affect the character or appearance, whether external or internal, of any building, premises or land situated within a conservation area but does not include any works which involve the development of land.”²¹ The Minister has, however, clarified in Parliament that notwithstanding this broad definition, a coat of paint is not conservation.²²

All applications for permission to carry out such works must be made to the competent authority in the prescribed form and manner.²³ The competent authority must give a decision within three months after receipt of an application for permission to carry out works. Where the application is granted subject to conditions or refused, reasons in writing must be given. The decision may however, be deferred in “unavoidable circumstances” for such period as the competent authority thinks fit (section 10A(9)).

The competent authority may impose such terms and conditions as it deems fit, including the imposition of a time limit or deposits to be paid to a public or statutory authority to secure compliance with the requirements of that authority. In dealing with any such application, the competent authority must act in conformity with the Master Plan and any certified Interpretation Plan which may be material. Such works must be completed within two years failing which the permission lapses. However, the competent authority may renew the permission for such period as it considers necessary.

The Minister may direct the competent authority to require that all or any of the applications be referred to him instead of being dealt with by the competent authority and any such decision of the Minister “shall be final and shall not be challenged or questioned in any court”. The Minister may in giving his decision, impose such conditions as he thinks fit (section 10A(11)). The Minister may also, by notification in the Gazette, authorise the carrying out of any works within a conservation area (section 10A(10)). Where the competent authority is itself carrying out works on its own land, the Minister may give such directions as he deems fit.

²⁰ S113/89, S161/89, both containing sketchmaps of these areas.

²¹ New s. 10B Planning Act, inserted by Act 12 of 1989.

²² “Conservation guidelines are quite detailed and anybody who has a property in a conservation area, if they go to the URA and obtain the guidelines, will find that it is not just a coat of paint. There are not only restrictions on what can be done but also things that ought to be done, and this goes far beyond just giving a coat of paint.” Parliamentary Debates 17 February 1989 col.791.

²³ These will be prescribed by rules made under s.25. See The Planning (Development) (Amendment) Rules 1989, (S202/89).

A person who carries out any such works without the necessary permission commits an offence carrying a fine of up to \$3,000 as well as a fine of up to \$100 for every day that the offence continues. Failure to comply with any condition imposed by the competent authority or the Minister also carries a maximum fine of \$3,000. In addition, a person who fails to comply with any condition imposed by the competent authority or the Minister may have his written permission cancelled by the competent authority.²⁴

Section 10A also requires the competent authority to keep a record of all permissions granted or refused under this section, as well as a record of all decisions of the Minister. Copies of such records together with all relevant plans can be inspected by the public on payment of the prescribed fees (section 10A(14)).

This is by far the most important provision in the Act, for it provides for planning control of works to be carried out in a development area. The Planning Act prior to this amendment did not provide for conservation works.

(c) *Delegation of Powers*

The Act amends section 3 of the Planning Act to allow the duties and powers conferred on the competent authority to be delegated without dilution of that authority. Presently the competent authority responsible for enforcement of the Planning Act is the Chief Planner. A new subsection (2) provides that the powers and duties of the competent authority may be exercised by any officer of the Planning Department or any officer in the employment of a public authority constituted by written law. These persons shall, however, be subject to the Chief Planner's direction and control.

With the appointment of the URA as the conservation authority, a new subsection (3) enables the powers and duties imposed on the conservation authority to be exercised by any officer of the URA, subject again, to the direction and control of the Chief Planner.

The new role of the URA as the conservation authority requires its functions to be broadened. Thus the Urban Redevelopment Authority (Amendment) Act was passed.

C. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (Amendment) Act, 1989

This Act amends section 15 of the principal Act to provide that the URA shall have the following additional powers:

- (1) power to prepare and execute plans and proposals for the conservation of any part or whole of any conservation area as agent or consultant for the Government, and

²⁴ S10A(6), (7), (8).

- (2) to inform, advise and make recommendations or proposals to the Government or any person or statutory body on the designation of conservation areas and all matters related to the conservation of these areas.

The term "conservation" is defined, to bring it in line with the definition in the Planning Act.

Section 18 of the principal Act which empowered the URA to request the compulsory acquisition of any land needed for the Authority's purposes is repealed, the Minister declaring that this repeal is "in line with the Government's move towards removing from statutory bodies powers relating to land acquisition."²⁵ A new section is substituted enabling the URA to issue guidelines for the conservation of any building or land within a conservation area and to make these guidelines available for inspection by and for sale at a reasonable cost to members of the public. These guidelines have just been issued in a twenty-three page brochure entitled "Procedures for Conservation Works", covering the role of the URA as the conservation authority, conservation standards, recovery of possession of controlled premises and rules to protect dislocated elderly tenants.²⁶

Recovery of Possession of Rent Controlled Properties in Conservation Areas

A landlord may now recover possession of his rent controlled premises for purposes of restoration works, provided they fall within the designated conservation areas.²⁷ He must first submit restoration plans to the Planning Department to obtain written permission for restoration works. All restoration works must conform to URA conservation guidelines. He must also obtain the approval of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Development for his restoration plans. He then applies to the Tenants' Compensation Board in the prescribed form²⁸ and supported by affidavit. Every application must be supported by evidence that he has sufficient funds to carry out the project as well as to compensate those persons entitled to compensation under the Act. He must give two undertakings - the first, that all works will commence within six months of his obtaining possession; the second, that he will deposit with the Board, within 14 days of being informed that approval has been granted, such amount of compensation as the Board deems to be fair and reasonable.

²⁵ Parliamentary Debates 17 February 1989 col.792. "All compulsory acquisitions will now be through the Commissioner of Lands and the URA or any other statutory body which wants to acquire a particular piece of land can still initiate action which will be coordinated by the Minister for Law. So in substance there is no change..." *per* the Minister for National Development, *ibid*.

²⁶ See Straits Times, 26 May 1989.

²⁷ Again, it should be emphasised that not all buildings within a conservation area are to be preserved. Only those buildings with architectural or historical value require conservation; the others can be redeveloped subject to the usual control on the scale of development, building height and roof forms.

²⁸ The procedure is contained in s.4, Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act 1970 and Rules passed thereunder [see Rule 2, (S155/70), amended in 1972 (S160/72)].

The Board then informs all occupants in the premises, giving details of the time the application will be heard.²⁹ All tenants and occupiers have the right to be heard. The Board will make an order for possession when it is satisfied that the landlord's plans for development or renovation have been approved by the relevant authorities and that sufficient funds are available for the project.³⁰ The landlord must within 14 days of the making of the order, deposit with the Board the amount of compensation awarded by the Board.

When the Board makes an order for possession, all tenants and occupiers must vacate the building within 90 days of the order. Upon their vacating the premises, the Board will pay each of them the compensation awarded. The landlord must then proceed to renovate his property within the time frame allocated.

Re-housing of Dislocated Tenants

In ensuring that decontrol will be effected in stages, the Government has wisely taken a cautious approach, clearly mindful of the fact that total decontrol with immediate effect will cause grave hardship to a substantial number of people. It has indicated that in the case of genuine hardship affecting tenants such as aged persons who are single with no families, alternative accommodation will be found for them, in Housing Board estates as near as possible to their previous residence.³¹ Those receiving assistance from the Ministry of Community Development will continue to receive such assistance.³²

The recent URA guidelines include rules to safeguard elderly single tenants living in premises earmarked for conservation.³³ Owners of premises with single elderly tenants must submit lists of such tenants to the URA which will then check to ascertain if they are eligible for special assistance. The Government gives special assistance to "old single person tenants". These persons must be at least 40 years old for females and 50 years old for males. They must also be Singapore citizens or permanent residents. They must have been staying at the site on or before the cut-off date (the date of the area being designated a conservation area); and must not be residing or have any interest in any HDB or private property.

The URA will then interview each tenant. Those who are eligible for and require Housing Board flats will have to apply to the Board for flats. The URA will issue each with a letter certifying their eligibility for HDB flats under this Special Plan. The HDB will then allocate either one-room or two-room flats to

²⁹ S. 19 requires the Board to put up a notice in the four official languages on the premises, informing every occupant that the landlord has made an application to recover possession and that the Board intends to consider the application at a stated date and place; that if the landlord obtains possession, the Board will determine the compensation to be paid; that each occupant may attend the proceedings and be heard.

³⁰ S. 4, Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act 1970.

³¹ Straits Times, 7 October 1988.

³² Parliamentary Debates, 17 February 1989, col. 798.

³³ Straits Times, 26 May 1989; see URA publication "Procedures for Conservation Works", available at the URA office for \$2.00.

these tenants to be shared with at least one other person of the same sex (in the case of one-room flats) or two other single persons (for a two-room flat). With effect from 25 May 1989, owners of such premises must pay in advance, rent for four years (amounting to a fixed total sum of \$2,400) for each elderly single person tenant they relocate. If the tenants are not eligible for this special plan, the URA will inform the landlord who must relocate them himself.

Remission of Property Tax

Under the Property Tax (Premises Exempted from Rent Control) Order 1989³⁴, owners of de-controlled premises which are wholly owner-occupied or vacant may apply for property tax remissions in the prescribed forms.³⁵ A remission of two-thirds of the tax increase is granted for the first year, and a one-third remission of the increase for the next year. Thereafter, owners will have to pay the full tax.

However, this remission only applies where the initial increase in property tax occurred on or after 7 October 1988, as a direct result of the Control of Rent (Exemption) Notification 1988. The remission shall cease if the premises cease to be wholly owner-occupied or vacant. The remission also does not apply to:

- (a) any increase in property tax which in the opinion of the Chief Assessor is due to an increase in the annual value of the decontrolled premises as a result of any alterations, additions or improvements to the decontrolled premises or any reason other than the exemption of those premises from the Control of Rent Act;
- (b) property tax payable in respect of any owner-occupied dwelling house or place of which the owner had been granted a concessionary rate of tax pursuant to the Property Tax Act or any order made thereunder;
- (c) property tax payable in respect of any property of which the owner had been granted a concessionary rate of tax pursuant to the Property Tax (No. 3) Order, 1961;
- (d) property tax payable in respect of any building or part thereof built or completed after 7 September 1947 upon land with premises thereon which are or have been subject to the provisions of the Control of Rent Act; and
- (e) property tax payable in respect of any premises exempted from the provisions of the Control of Rent Act by virtue of the Control of Rent (Exemption) Notification, 1980.

Where an increase in property tax is due partly to decontrol and partly to any other reason, the remission under this order applies only to that part of the increase which is directly due to decontrol.

³⁴ S307/89; made on 8 July 1989, to take effect as from 7 October 1988.

³⁵ It is estimated that there are some 2,000 such properties - see Straits Times, 8 August 1989.

Future Decontrol Measures

As for the eventual de-control of all properties in Singapore, the Minister has indicated that these will continue to be in accordance with the Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act, 1970, to ensure that possession of rent controlled properties can only be obtained if owners “are able to come out with redevelopment plans.”³⁶ However, the difference is that in the cases of premises not situated in conservation areas, the traditional meaning of “development” will apply, which is knocking down and rebuilding.³⁷

Some Problems

It is clear that possession of rent controlled properties can only be regained if owners have a plan for their redevelopment, be it in the form of renovations or otherwise. A pertinent question would be one of finance - owners of these properties may not have the necessary finances to carry out such developments. The Minister has indicated that the Government has no plan at the moment, to give financial assistance to those who own buildings within the conservation areas, taking the view that sufficient incentives and assistance are provided by the workings of these new amendments:

“First of all, once an area is designated a conservation area, then change of use of buildings within the area, for example, a residence changed to a shop or eating house, will not attract development charge. So that is an incentive. Secondly, we have also announced that such changes of use which under the normal circumstances may require payment of car park deficiency charges will also be waived. And the third very important aspect is that... the owner would be able to recover his premises, his rent controlled premises and carry out conservation.

So these are the types of incentives. Over and above that the Government will be planning and implementing infrastructural works. In other words, the public areas - roads, the side-walks, the lighting, planting and so on - would be done in such a way that the whole area becomes attractive so that people will spend money renovating and restoring the buildings and will find that they will be doing it within the context of a total redevelopment, and that will make their property more attractive. But we are not thinking in terms of cash grants because we looked at the problem and we did not think that was necessary. With these measures... anybody who has a property in the conservation area should be able to raise a loan from any financial institution to carry out his works.”³⁸

The problem is not easily resolved. It is a fact that landowners will have to find the necessary finances for redevelopment. Apart from the cost of carrying out these redevelopments, there are other incidental costs such as the engaging

³⁶ “In other words, they just cannot take repossession of the properties. It must be coupled with some plan to redevelop.” per the Minister for National Development, Parliamentary Debates, 17 February 1989, col.795 (see *supra*, n. 6).

³⁷ Parliamentary Debates, 17 February 1989, col.795.

³⁸ Parliamentary Debates, 17 February 1989, cols. 790-791.

of architects and solicitors; as well as the payment of compensation to those tenants and occupiers who are dispossessed. While landowners who do not wish to redevelop these properties themselves can sell their properties to others, it must also be borne in mind that in the context of properties in conservation areas, restrictions are placed on the use of the properties *after* redevelopment. "Incompatible trades" for example, will not be allowed (*eg.* Western fast-food restaurants in Chinatown), while traditional trades of the particular area will be encouraged (*eg.* for Chinatown - herbal tea shops, Chinese medical halls, fortune tellers and calligraphers). Such restrictions may reduce the marketability of these properties, for the hard fact is that in modern times, traditional trades do not generate sufficient income. In many cases, we can anticipate that decontrol will remove the very basis for the continuance of these trades, as their very existence is dependent on the exceedingly low rents of controlled premises. As could be expected, these reservations were voiced by tenants who are engaged in the traditional trades.

Notwithstanding these reservations, it can be reasonably anticipated that in the long run, the physical environment will clearly improve as conservation areas are redeveloped.³⁹ One need only take a passing glance at the recently restored shophouses in Tanjong Pagar to realise that the move towards conservation is not only necessary but highly laudable.

Conclusion

The move towards conservation and redevelopment of the city heralds a new era for Singapore. It recognises that in the heady leap towards her goal to be the model city of the tropics, special efforts must be taken for the preservation of her history. This awareness is crucial, as it will ensure her development as a great city with her own character and identity. Conservation must go beyond the mere preservation of historic buildings and monuments. Entire old districts each with their special architectural style, history, character and flavour must be preserved. These old districts are the enclaves of rent controlled properties. The Government has chosen to tie in decontrol with redevelopment and conservation. Notwithstanding the reservations outlined above, the linking of decontrol with redevelopment and conservation measures must be viewed as a step in the right direction. It is hoped that conservation will continue to be an important direction for our planners and that it will extend beyond the city to other areas of Singapore. The extension of conservation efforts beyond the city must be done very quickly, for already, old and distinctive houses in Geylang, Katong and Pasir Panjang (to name but a few areas) are being demolished at an alarming speed.

LYE LIN HENG*

³⁹ The URA's plans for each historic district include the improvement of the physical environment by providing pedestrian walkways, plazas, landscaping and control of signage as well as the enhancement of the special character of each area through the introduction of new activities while sustaining the traditional activities which have tourism value. See URA publication "Conserving Our Remarkable Past" p.4).

* LL.B.(Sing.), LL.M.(Lond.), LL.M.(Harv.), Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore.