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## ParkCity Group plans for the community

BY TAN ZHAIYUN

**B**efore Desa ParkCity became an iconic neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur known for its lush green environment, it comprised an active quarry and empty land. The area was hot and the soil was poor. At that time, ParkCity Group's vision to build a "park city" in the location invited scepticism. More than 20 years later, however, the plan has succeeded. Many of the strategies used to build the township was aimed at making it a liveable and community-centric neighbourhood. In time, these initiatives have also made it more resilient in a climate-changed world.

"We started by asking people, 'What do you want? If we want to make a place that the community enjoys, what do we have to do to make it happen? It comes back to what the people need. Along the way, climate change became an issue," says Datuk Joseph Lau, Group CEO of ParkCity Group.

"So, we said, 'How do we continue doing what we're doing, and be better at managing our emissions?'"

The company envisioned a township in which residents could comfortably walk and bike to commercial facilities and parks within 15 minutes. That can be impossible to achieve in a tropical country, where the weather is hot and humid.

Therefore, the company invested in landscaping and planted trees that provide shade, and built wide walkways that connected the different parts of the township. This has the added benefit of lowering the temperature, which is critical as climate change will result in a warmer environment.

"Because this was a quarry site, there were no [old and existing trees] to preserve. Instead, we went to the Forest Research Institute Malaysia and asked them what forest tree species we should plant. If you walk around Desa ParkCity, you'll see that we have names of the trees displayed. We try to educate people," says Lau.

He adds that the company aims to include as much green spaces as possible in its developments, above and beyond the requirements of Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL). "Where we can conserve, we conserve; where we can increase and allow for more greenery, we allow it."

These initiatives are part of the company's philosophy to create spaces that are "centred on life", whether it's for families, communities or nature.



ZHAIYUN/THE EDGE

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Lau

Meanwhile, ParkCity Group's decision more than two decades ago to turn one of the prime locations in its land bank into a huge man-made lake was a surprising one. But the company believed it was important to create a conducive environment for the community to gather and share. In addition, the lake, which the company says is one of its main selling points now, also serves as a flood retention pond.

All water runoff from the township flows into the lake, which is one of two such stormwater management systems in the township. During heavy rainfall — which is expected to occur more frequently with climate change — excess water will be stored in the ponds. This is meant to prevent flash floods on the roads.

The lake, which is the highlight of The Central Park, contains bio-filtration pumps lined with bacteria-treated lava stones that act

as biological filters. This ensures that the water is clean and healthy enough to host a range of fish and aquatic plants.

Other climate change impacts expected in Malaysia include more extreme weather events and, potentially, landslides. While the company has not formally done a climate risk assessment, Lau says these are factors that it already considers.

Geotechnical consultants are brought in twice a year to assess the slopes, for instance, and the maintenance team regularly checks on tree health and prunes them to prevent them from falling during intense weather.

"It's not just about putting these things in. How do you maintain it? That's all part and parcel of what we do," says Lau.

Now that climate change has risen in the awareness of the public, the company is doing more to reduce its emissions and adapt to the impacts, he says. For instance, it is installing solar panels where possible, and installing LED lights, which use less energy. Buildings are also designed to encourage natural ventilation, as part of its passive design principles.

"We incorporate rainwater harvesting in all our new developments ... In terms of township, we also look at whether we can install solar panels at our club house and school. We continue evolving to make ourselves greener and more sustainable," says Lau.

Aside from building the necessary infrastructure, the company also tries to cultivate the right behaviour among residents by promoting environmental education in the Group's international schools, setting up a recycling centre and launching a Book Exchange Corner for pre-loved books. ■



**Above right: The lake in the middle of The Central Park is also a flood mitigation pond**

**Right: An aerial view of Desa ParkCity in 1999, before the company transformed the quarry into a township**



PHOTOS BY PARKCITY GROUP