

# First heritage survey gives conservation efforts a boost

Comprehensive study of existing sites will also aid Govt in land planning

By **MELODY ZACCHEUS**

THE first survey of Singapore's heritage sites and structures will kick off within "the next two months", a move that could help the authorities map out its conservation and preservation efforts.

The project, which will be a comprehensive study of existing heritage sites, will also aid the Government in its land planning and take about 16 months to complete.

The survey will study places of architectural, historical, cultural, social or educational significance, and include sites or structures completed in or before 1980.

The effort, announced by Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong in March, is expected to cost approximately \$1 million and will have two components, said the National Heritage Board (NHB).

The first involves "desktop research" that will tap maps, newspaper records, archival material and other publications to consolidate data about a place.

The second involves field work that will document and photograph the geographic coordinates, typology and physical condition of the structure or site.

If information is limited, interviews with the community and other stakeholders will be conducted.

The board will use its findings to work with the Urban Redevelopment Authority at each stage of land planning. This includes the 10-year Concept Plan or the five-year Master Plan. Significant buildings and structures identified through the survey could undergo further research for possible preservation or conservation.

NHB chief executive Rosa Daniel said the exercise is a step forward in enhancing the country's capabilities in research, documentation and commemoration.

"As Singapore's population grows, it is important to ensure

that, in tandem with intensified development, there are increased efforts to preserve our heritage," she said.

The NHB said it adapted the heritage survey from similar ones done in other cities. It cited Hong Kong's 1996 survey in which over 8,800 historic buildings built before 1950 were identified. This was followed by in-depth research and assessment to identify buildings of heritage value.

Singapore's version will be guided by members of a newly formed eight-member Heritage Advisory Panel comprising architecture, geography, sociology, anthropology and history experts.

They include Professor Brenda Yeoh, dean of the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences; Mr Eric Chin, the director of the National Archives of Singapore; and Mr Zahidi Abdul Rahman, principal architect of Zahidi A.R. Arkitek.

The heritage community welcomed the survey as it represents the first step towards a more long-term strategic plan for heritage issues.

Dr Kevin Tan, president of the International Council on Monuments and Sites Singapore, said that for the survey to be effective, the criteria for what constitutes a heritage building should be "crafted as widely as possible". For it to be truly comprehensive, he believes surveyors should comb every square metre of the Republic.

Heritage enthusiast and editor Choo Lip Sin believes the survey will help the authorities make more informed decisions. He hopes there will be space for public input to be factored into the exercise, "beyond what the authorities value as heritage".

A separate survey on the country's intangible heritage, spanning cultural activities and traditional trades or businesses, will be launched at the end of the year.

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