

Streets become public spaces under new URA initiative

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"AS the streets get closed off, they come alive with activities: tables and chairs spilling onto the roads, diners enjoying a leisurely cuppa, youngsters hanging out at quirky boutiques, and tourists soaking up another aspect of Singapore. People stroll freely and safely. Closed to cars, the streets come alive."

On Thursday, Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan endorsed the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) newly-launched "Streets for People" programme on his blog.

"Car-free Circular Road, Haji Lane and Ann Siang Hill during weekends have been a great success," Mr Khaw wrote. "We want to see more streets being turned into public spaces for community to enjoy."

The "Streets for People" programme, launched on Thursday, will support new community-initiated car-free zones aimed at transforming streets and back lanes into temporary public spaces.

During the operational hours of a car-free zone, access to the street is restricted to pedestrians and emergency service vehicles, while all kerbside parking is suspended, the URA said on its website.

The programme offers varying levels of support, including providing road closure essentials such as safety barriers and signage, and up to S\$5,000 of seed funding. The URA will also facilitate consultation with relevant government agencies.

Applicants of the URA's "Streets for People" programme must operate or reside within the area where the project is proposed and demonstrate that their project is supported by the community.

In the last two years, the URA has

been working with a range of stakeholders to implement car-free zones at various locations and have supported a number of external initiatives through its PubliCity programme. Launched in 2013, PubliCity aims to involve the community to celebrate good public spaces and to enliven public spaces through good design and programmes.

"The success of these projects is a reflection that the public appreciates an environment with fewer cars. We hope that through offering support to community-initiated projects, we will encourage more people to think about the trade-offs in land-scarce Singapore," the URA said.

Streets that have already been transformed to public spaces include

a back lane in Everton Park where a street festival was organised, car-free zones at Bussorah Street at Kampong Glam as well as Club Street.

Justin Frizelle, spokesman for the Club Street Association, told *The Business Times* that the pedestrianisation initiative has rejuvenated

the area with increased vibrancy, along with a range of challenges.

"The increase in consumer traffic in the evenings naturally comes with the challenge of managing both litter and noise. Such large gatherings of pedestrians also comes with stricter enforcement of safety regulations to ensure that there are always passageways for safety vehicles."

Rachel Liddington, a resident at Club Street, said that pedestrianisation has improved her personal safety, but added that the URA could further improve the programme by having clear signs explaining road systems and closures further away from the affected roads, giving drivers more time to respond accordingly.

For more information on the programme, visit <http://ura.sg/streetsforpeople>.

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Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan
