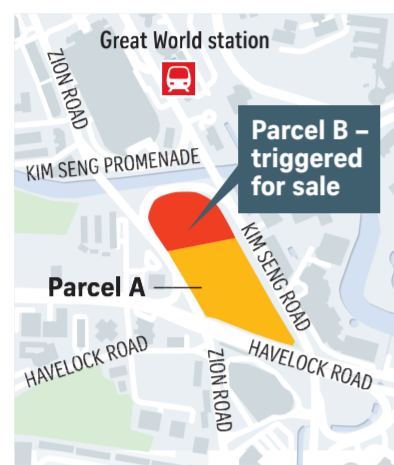


Zion Road GLS site draws \$730m top bid despite lacklustre bidding

Site location

Residential units only
Serviced apartments and residential units



Source: URA STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Tender by unit of Great World mall owner within market expectations, say analysts

Grace Leong
Senior Correspondent

A 99-year leasehold plot in Zion Road drew lacklustre bidding interest, but it attracted a top bid of \$730.1 million from a unit of Allgreen Properties, which analysts said was within market expectations.

The plot, known as Zion Road Parcel B, was on the Government's reserve list, but it was released for sale after the Urban Redevelopment Authority received an application committing to a bid not lower than \$604.6 million.

The tender for the site closed on July 18, with the top bid coming in at 20.8 per cent higher.

This \$730.1 million bid from developer Allgreen Properties – which owns the nearby Great World mall – works out to a land

rate of \$1,304 per sq ft per plot ratio (psf ppr).

Reserve list plots are released for sale only if a developer offers a minimum price that is acceptable to the Government and if there is sufficient market interest.

The tender launch of Parcel B, which can yield 610 new private homes, comes on the heels of the sale of an adjacent site, Zion Road Parcel A.

Parcel A was the first Government Land Sales (GLS) site to pilot a new class of long-stay serviced apartments.

The \$1,304 psf ppr bid for Parcel B comes at an 8.5 per cent premium to that of Parcel A, which was awarded in April to a City Developments-Mitsui Fudosan joint venture for \$1.1 billion, or \$1,202 psf ppr.

Analysts attributed the higher bid for Parcel B to the absence of a

requirement to provide long-stay serviced apartments, which rendered this project less complex and risky.

But Ms Chia Siew Chuan, JLL's head of residential research for Singapore, said bidding interest for this site was tepid due to concerns over potential competition from other recently awarded GLS private housing sites in the vicinity.

Including the long-stay serviced apartments from Zion Road Parcel A, River Valley Green parcels A and B, about 2,740 new private homes are due to be developed in the area.

"Another 470 units could be added if the River Valley Green (Parcel C) plot on the reserve list is triggered for tender," said Ms Chia.

Another factor that might have affected bids was a requirement to build a public park, and to include a pedestrian side gate and covered walkway to link the future project to a planned covered linkway along Kim Seng Road. These would add to development costs, she added.

The Zion Road site is one of three residential plots, including those in

Canberra Crescent and De Souza Avenue, whose GLS tenders closed on July 18.

Analysts noted measured bidding interest for all three sites, but the 375-unit Canberra Crescent site in the suburbs drew slightly more interest because of potential upgrader demand from the Sembawang, Yishun and Woodlands Housing Board estates.

A tie-up between Kheng Leong and Low Keng Huat (Singapore) submitted the top bid of \$279 million, or \$793 psf ppr, for the Canberra Crescent plot.

This bid is 23.1 per cent above the \$644 psf ppr awarded for nearby GLS site Canberra Drive Parcel A in March 2020. It is also 22 per cent above the \$650 psf ppr bid for Canberra Drive Parcel B.

Knight Frank research head Leonard Tay cited pent-up demand and limited new private home supply in the area, as two nearby condominium projects that are under development – The Commodore and The Watergardens At Canberra – are already fully sold.

Meanwhile, Ms Chia pointed out the Canberra Crescent site attracted just three bids, below the average number of contenders for residential sites in 2023.

Analysts say the measured bids reflect developers' reduced risk appetite given market challenges such as elevated costs, increased risks, and a slowdown in new home sales.

This is especially after new home sales for the first half of 2024 posted a record half-yearly low of 1,916 units on July 15, below the previous floor of 1,977 units in the second half of 2008, according to CBRE.

SL Capital (8), a subsidiary of Sustained Land, submitted a top bid of \$278.9 million, or \$841 psf ppr, for the 355-unit De Souza Avenue plot, which is close to Bukit Batok Nature Park and Bukit Timah Nature Reserve.

PropNex's head of research and content Wong Siew Ying said the top bid came in below expectations because the site is not near an MRT station and also faces competition from nearby projects.

These include The Botany at Dairy Farm, Hillhaven, and The Reserve Residences, and an upcoming new launch in Bukit Timah Link later in 2024.

ERA Singapore chief executive Marcus Chu said: "The highest bid submitted – \$841 psf ppr – is more typical of that of a suburban GLS site, even though this site is located in the city fringe."

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Mediacorp didn't get URA nod before redecorating conserved bungalow

BEFORE
The state property near Mount Faber which was rented by Mediacorp, prior to redecoration works that the broadcaster undertook.
PHOTO: SINGAPORE LAND AUTHORITY



AFTER
The facade of the rented state property, which was embellished for use as a set to shoot scenes for Mediacorp's upcoming series Emerald Hill.
ST FILE PHOTO

Ng Keng Gene
Correspondent

National broadcaster Mediacorp recently redecorated a conserved bungalow for filming without first getting necessary permission from the authorities, The Straits Times has learnt.

The works, which included the repainting of part of the building's facade, were done on a bungalow near Mount Faber that Mediacorp had rented to shoot scenes for its upcoming series Emerald Hill – a spin-off of the hit Chinese drama The Little Nyonya.

Mediacorp had also replaced the building's windows and embellished its facade with what looked like ornamental tiles.

The changes came to light after Mediacorp hosted a tour of the set for the media on June 7.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) then inspected the

site on June 18, following feedback from a member of the heritage conservation community.

While URA – Singapore's conservation authority – allowed the changes on the basis that they were "superficial in nature" and did not affect the building's original condition, it reminded Mediacorp that permission had to be sought for such works. The company has since complied.

But the broadcaster was otherwise not penalised for the work it had done without permission.

The two-storey bungalow, which belongs to the state, dates to around 1899, when it was built to house the manager of the New Harbour Dock Company, which managed Keppel Harbour. It was conserved in 2005.

As one of Singapore's more than 7,200 conserved buildings and structures, approval must be sought before changes or modifications are made. These changes also have to comply with URA's

conservation guidelines.

But a URA spokesperson told ST that the agency did not receive an application for the works Mediacorp had done on the building.

That said, the agency added that "the works can be allowed under the prevailing guidelines and no historic materials have been damaged".

URA's conservation guidelines detail what can or cannot be done with conserved properties, such as architectural features that need to be kept.

Mediacorp, which rented the bungalow from the Singapore Land Authority, had sought and received approval only to build a temporary shelter separate from the conserved building.

The broadcaster had earlier told media outlets that it had built an outdoor kitchen on the site.

The shelter must be demolished when approval for it expires in September.

When contacted, Mediacorp said

the company was "committed to revert any leased or licensed venue back to its original state upon expiry of the lease or licence", as part of its production process.

It did not answer questions about why it did not get prior permission for the works done to the building.

The Mediacorp spokesperson added that "all temporary embellishments will be removed upon the completion of filming", and that detailed pictures were taken of the building prior to the commencement of any works to serve as a reference.

Conservators who saw photos of the changes expressed concerns over the embellishments that were added to the building, such as those affixed to the building's Shanghai plaster finishes – including on the concrete bases of the building's four cast-iron columns.

Mr Ho Weng Hin, co-founder of architectural conservation consultancy Studio Lapis, said Shanghai

plaster – a cement-based finish that results in a textured surface – is very difficult to repair when damaged.

Architectural conservation academic Yeo Kang Shua added that the manner in which alterations are done would determine whether they are reversible.

For instance, the type of adhesive used for temporary attachments or embellishments, as well as any solvents used to remove them, could damage the surfaces they are attached to, he said.

Dr Yeo said the use of nails, staple bullets or screws could potentially also cause lasting harm to timber, while scraping off layers of paint without documenting them before new layers are applied means valuable historical data on buildings might be lost.

Based on industry best practices, Mr Ho said that false walls or "sacrificial layers" need to be constructed for new decorative finishes to be applied within the interi-

ors of conserved buildings, so that the historic fabric of the building will not be affected – it is not clear if such layers were used for the property's redecoration.

While URA approved Mediacorp's works despite the procedural lapse, both Mr Ho and Dr Yeo acknowledged that it is difficult for the authorities to regulate Singapore's 7,200 conserved properties.

In the absence of a regular inspection regime that covers all conserved properties, Mr Ho suggested that some form of minimal surveillance can be put in place.

For instance, by educating the public about conserved buildings and where they are located, members of the public could notify the authorities when they see inappropriate works being done.

Taken in the right spirit, this could lead to better upkeep of Singapore's conservation areas, said Mr Ho.

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More seniors undergo robot-assisted, minimally invasive spine surgery

Lee Li Ying
Correspondent

After a bad fall in late 2023, Mr Ng Beng Piau was in so much pain that he could not walk more than 300m.

His grandson Nicholas Goh, 34, said: "He likes to travel, but when he went on an overseas trip to China in November 2023, he couldn't even get out of the hotel."

After consulting a specialist at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in February, the 85-year-old man was diagnosed with compression of the spinal nerves, a condition common in elderly patients.

It occurs when nerves in the lower back are pinched due to various causes, including age-related degenerative spinal conditions or deformities, resulting in intense pain or numbness.

Mr Ng initially declined surgery after his friends warned him of the risk of spine surgery, especially at

his age.

Spine surgery is often perceived as invasive and risky. In standard open-spine surgery, surgeons make a large incision in the back, cutting through muscle and soft tissue. The technique means that the patients can take up to six months to fully recover.

But the recently developed robot-assisted minimally invasive surgery offers seniors with spine conditions like Mr Ng a better way to address debilitating pain and improve their quality of life.

Adjunct Associate Professor Jacob Oh, senior consultant and head of spine surgery at TTSH's department of orthopaedic surgery, said in a media briefing on July 16 that TTSH has conducted more than 120 spinal operations since acquiring the robot-guided spine surgery technology in 2021, the highest among the three public healthcare hospitals that have it.

Before the procedure, using MRI and CT scans, the robot-guided system generates a 3D model of the

patient's spine and allows surgeons to pre-plan their operation by deciding exactly where to place screws on the vertebrae.

When the patient is on the surgical table, the robotic guidance system is able to take an X-ray of the patient and merge it with the pre-operative CT scan to create a 3D model so it can pinpoint with accuracy the position, angle and depth at which screws should be inserted during the operation.

The robotic arm then moves into position, aiding the surgeon in inserting the screws.

This means that surgeons can make incisions as small as 1cm, reducing pain and recovery time for patients.

It also means there is a lower risk of complications like injuring the spinal cord.

Compared with the navigation-only method, where surgeons are able to view in real-time where their surgical probe is but still have to determine on their own the angle and depth for screw insertion,



Adjunct Associate Professor Jacob Oh showing the scars on the back of his former patient Ng Beng Piau, 85, who underwent robot-assisted minimally invasive surgery in April, and could walk about three days after the procedure.
ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

the robot-assisted operation offers more advantages for the patient and the surgeon.

Dr Oh said that according to preliminary TTSH data, robot-assisted spine surgery patients need to stay in hospital for up to two days less, have up to 30 per cent less blood loss, and have a 20 per cent shorter operating time, especially for cases where screws have to be inserted in multiple vertebrae.

In part due to the new robot-assisted technique, TTSH has seen

the percentage of seniors opting for spinal surgery jump from 28 per cent in 2018 to 43 per cent in 2023.

"Patients don't just want to live longer, they also want to be active and independent. Because of the advancement in robotic technology and minimally invasive surgery, our older and frail patients now have an option of going for surgery and no longer have to endure disability," said Dr Oh.

"Before, people would say it's not an option, because it can be risky,

But now, risks associated with spine surgery are reduced."

After assurances from Dr Oh and persuasion from his grandson, Mr Ng underwent his operation in April, and could walk about three days after the procedure.

He is now looking forward to a trip to Chiang Mai.

Commenting on his grandfather's recovery, Mr Goh said: "He is like a free bird now."

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