

Penang NGOs set for public dialogue on environment

MalaysiaKini.com

July 31, 2012

By Susan Loone

NGOs in Penang are keenly awaiting a public dialogue on Saturday with Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, at which the state of the environment will be discussed.

Penang Forum representative Lim Mah Hui said "many changes" have taken place since Georgetown was awarded World Heritage City in 2007 and Pakatan Rakyat took over the state government the following year.

He said Guan Eng has promoted the concept of Georgetown as an international, intelligent and liveable city.

"As citizens of Penang, we would like him to spell out more clearly his vision of an international and liveable city," said Mah Hui, who is also the Penang municipal councillor overseeing environmental issues.

"The new government has promised to be more open, transparent and consultative and we acknowledge there has been a significant improvement in this direction."

Mah Hui thanked the chief minister for making the time to attend the dialogue, themed 'Vision of an International Liveable City'. It will be held at the Caring Society from 2-5pm, and admission is free.

Mah Hui said that, in recent months, there has been much publicity on hillslope development, demolition of buildings with historic or architectural value, and continued construction of high-rise buildings in established or low-density residential areas.

Reclamation of land, worsening traffic congestion and dissatisfaction among communities have also been highlighted.

"All of these are related to the issue of planning and approval process by the state and local government, and Penangites have expressed their concerns over this," he noted.

Liveable city rating

In April, Guan Eng had announced that Penang had, for the first time, beaten Kuala Lumpur for two consecutive years as the country's most liveable city.

He quoted research by ECA International Location Ratings, saying that Penang had maintained its position as Asia's eighth most liveable city, while Kuala Lumpur had dropped from ninth to 10th spot.

When contacted, Penang Real Estate and Housing Developers Association chairperson Jerry Chan agreed with the rating, saying that Penang has the "seven good Cs" which have made it such a liveable city.

"We have a diversity of culture, choice and cuisine; our cost is competitive; we have good connectivity (transport, Internet, banks); we have a coastline that makes us different from other states," he said.

"We also have care - which means good healthcare - and we have a government that cares.

"A foreign tourist would never be out of place in Penang as the state has many cultures and languages, and a vibrant heritage."

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