

'Taman Manggis was intended as a hawker site'

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Official documents under the former Penang government has revealed that there were no plans for a phase II of the Taman Manggis public housing project, as claimed by state Barisan Nasional leaders, who had alleged the matter was officially minuted in a 2003 state executive councillor meeting.

Political secretary to the chief minister, Ng Wei Aik (right), who confirmed the documents made available to Malaysiakini, has urged BN to produced the 2003 minutes if they continue to harp on the state's purported neglect to build the units in Taman Manggis.

He claimed that instead, in 2002, local Umno leaders insisted that parts or whole of the 1.1 acre plot be used as a hawker's centre, a request urgently expressed in an official letter to then Chief Minister Koh Tsu Koon.

Then Umno Tanjong division secretary Noor Rahim Abdul Wahab had issued a protest letter addressed to Koh, now a federal minister, to demand a hawker center at the project site, since there were no plans for one.

According to the letter dated Feb 18, 2002, the initial plan was to build 19 hawker stalls within Taman Manggis, along Jalan Zainal Abidin, where the state Umno headquarters is situated.

But Noor Rahim said he was made aware that the developer had applied for exemption to provide the hawker center with the excuse that the land would be used to build government quarters.

"We protest the state government's plan of not building the facilities for hawkers according to the original plan," Noor Rahim had said in the letter to Koh, which was received on Feb 20, 2002.

"This does not comply to the decision made by the Penang Municipal councillors a year ago (2001)," Noor Rahim added.

Land too tiny

Noor Rahim had also reminded Koh that such a site was needed to prevent illegal hawking, and that former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohammad said it was necessary to organise such places to keep the environment clean and beautiful.

The two-page letter was copied to the then Housing Development and Cooperative chairperson Abdul Rashid Abdullah and Penang Municipal Council (MPPP) president Mahadi Mohd Ibrahim.

Meanwhile, the MPPP, via a letter dated March 14, the same year, had informed architect Farid H Kamal, based in Lorong Kinta, to earmark a space for a hawker site as this had been decided at its meeting on Feb 25.

Current MPPP president Patahiyah Ismail (left), who was then former building director, had ticked off the architect - in two letters - for the delay in kicking off its work on the hawker site.

"The situation has become quite pressing as certain quarters have lodged their complaints to the chief minister and the council," said Patahiyah, in a letter dated Apr 19, 2002.

When asked about the issue, Ng produced a site plan showing that the four lots 306, 305, 313 and 314 - currently vacant - have been earmarked for "future development", without any specifics mentioned.

Ng said the architect who build the Phase I of the Taman Manggis project had then also expressed his opinion that the parcel was too tiny and had surrendered it back to the state government.

"The BN should do their homework. However, they prefer to mislead the people. What can we do?" quipped Ng, who is Komtar assemblyperson.

'Use of neighbouring unit's facilities constitutes trespass'

Ng was also told that state BN Youth had refused to accept the excuse that the plot was too tiny for housing, and that if a building was erected, the occupants could share the neighbouring unit's facilities such as parking, garbage bins, surau, playground and hall.

To which, Ng exclaimed. "That is like trespassing into another property".

"These facilities cannot be shared because the existing project has its own management. They have a different land and building owner. How can you simply enjoy other people's facilities?" asked Ng, who is also state Dap Socialist Youth (Dapsy) chief.

Completed in 2005, the 18-storey Taman Manggis flats in phase I comprise 320, 650-ft units, equipped with a public hall, surau, kindergarten, store, janitor rooms and a management office, among other facilities.

The issue came to light when state BN Youth Oh Tong Keong (left) accused Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng of selling land belonging to the poor to a private developer to build a medical centre in 2010.

Lim, the DAP secretary-general, clarified that the land was too small, saying a bigger plot (7 acres) in Jalan SP Chelliah had been earmarked for about 1,320 units of public, low and medium cost units.

He added that other sites the state has identified for affordable housing projects are Teluk Kumbar, Bukit Mertajam, Ampang Jajar, Kampung Jawa, Butterworth and Juru.

The state BN then offered to acquire the land for public housing for RM450 per sq ft, and have paid one percent of the amount to the state, which then demanded that the buyer pays in full within 30 days, by Nov 5.

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