

Chinatown traders wary about relocation plan

Lee Lam Thye market vendors in KL feel two-storey building nearby may not be conducive for business

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TRADERS of Lee Lam Thye market in Chinatown, Kuala Lumpur fear that a move to relocate them will adversely impact their business and livelihood.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) plans to build a new two-storey market complex nearby for them.

This was revealed during an engagement session with the affected traders, Kuala Lumpur Hawkers and Petty Traders Association, DBKL, Bukit Bintang MP Fong Kui Lun and Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, whom the market is named after.

During the briefing, DBKL said the proposed building would house market traders now operating at the intersection of Lorong Bandar 22 and Lorong Galeri Lee Lam Thye.

"The market traders will be relocated to facilitate beautification works for Lorong Galeri Lee Lam Thye and the lane off Jalan Tun HS Lee under the first and second phases of the project.

"This also includes upgrading of the pedestrian walkway, removing obstacles as well as restoring and beautifying the old lanes.

"DBKL plans to maintain some of the features of the market.

"The third phase is the construction of the two-storey market complex which is expected to start in 2025," said a DBKL spokesperson.

The proposed market complex will be located at the site of the old Madras Cinema that burnt down in 1978 along Lorong Bandar 22, and is just a stone's throw from the current market.

Back in the day, it was a popular cinema that mainly screened Chinese movies.

The site is currently being used as a parking lot from 9am onwards after the Pasar Karat traders vacate it.

An illustration by DBKL displayed at the engagement session showed the top floor of the proposed two-storey complex will house traders from Lee Lam Thye market while the bottom floor will function as trading space for about 114 Pasar Karat traders as well as a parking lot.

The proposed project will affect about 100 market traders.

Uncertain about relocation

Curry noodle vendor Choy Kah Uen said he did not want to move.

"We have been here for a long time and regular customers know where to find us.

"The lot offered at the market complex is smaller compared to the current lot that we are operating from.

"If we want to preserve the culture of Lee Lam Thye market,



An arch bearing Lee's name in Chinese leads to the market which was renamed after him in recognition of his efforts to save it in the 1990s. — Photos: LOW BOON TAT/The Star



Location of the proposed site for the market building.

then we should be allowed to stay here," he said.

Curry laksa vendor KF Chin said he was uncertain about the project.

"If I am given a nice lot to operate from, then I might move. So far, I am content with my current location at the market," he said.

A butcher who only wanted to be known as Chan expressed indifference about the project.

"If the local authority wants us to move, I would just follow.

"After all, what power do I have to go against it?

"A two-storey building won't be able to meet customers' parking needs as there is a lack of parking in the area now," said the trader.

Kuala Lumpur Hawkers and Petty Traders Association chairman Datuk Ang Say Tee said that after the project's completion,

DBKL would designate stalls for them which would be able to house all the traders.

"Stalls will be categorised according to meat, seafood, vegetables as well as cooked food.

"There will also be a dining area for customers, as well as other facilities such as toilets and basic amenities such as electricity, water and sewerage system.

"The Lee Lam Thye market has a long history but hasn't been upgraded, in comparison to the surrounding structures and establishments.

"We welcome DBKL's plan to upgrade the area but there are still a lot of things to smoothen out," he said.

Ang said the association was gathering feedback from stakeholders to be presented to DBKL.

"There are several problems we see with the proposed project.



Chin says he is uncertain about the move as he's happy with his current location.

"Firstly, although the two-storey building will be able to cater to all the traders, there will be insufficient parking for customers.

"So, we are hoping DBKL will consider building a four-storey market complex to address the lack of parking," he said.

"The plan to beautify the lanes that the market is currently occupying is good but we are concerned that vagrants and the homeless would end up there as this would create a bad impression among tourists.

"The authorities need to conduct frequent monitoring and patrolling there," he said.

During a visit to the site by *StarMetro*, it could be seen that the clearing of illegal structures and preparations for beautification works had already begun.

Notices by the DBKL Licensing and Business Development Department had also been issued to traders who had erected illegal structures, to remove or dismantle them.



The two-storey market complex will be built at the parking lot next to the Lee Lam Thye market.

"Failure to adhere to the notice can result in demolition or confiscation of such structures," stated the notice.

Temporary relocation

Ang said since beautification of the lanes would be conducted before the construction of the building, traders would need to operate temporarily elsewhere.

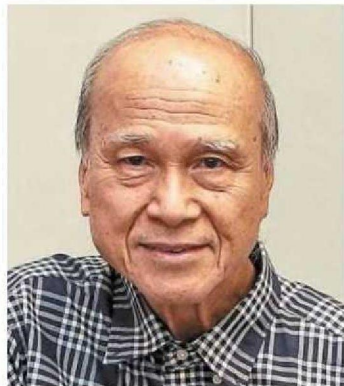
"There are some spaces at Lorong Petaling but we are still in the midst of discussing this with DBKL," he said.

Lee said he had met with Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Kamarulzaman Mat Salleh and the DBKL department concerned regarding the market complex.

"They reassured me that they would preserve the name of the market.

"There is an arch bearing the name of the market in Chinese characters and I hope they would retain that while beautifying the lanes," he said.

In the 1990s, the market was at risk of being closed due to



Lee hopes the arch of the market and its name will be retained.

hygiene issues and the traders appealed to Lee, who was then Bukit Bintang MP, to intervene.

Lee stepped in to help about 200 market traders.

The market was then renamed the Lee Lam Thye market to commemorate his contributions to local commerce.

Lee said he was aware that the proposed project was a collabora-



The project will affect about 100 market traders.



Ang (right) talking to traders about the proposed plan to relocate the market.

tion between Think City and DBKL, but said he had not received any updates.

In a statement, Think City said

the project was part of the Madras Area Improvement Programme, to highlight the historical significance of Madras

Lane, Madras Cinema and the market.

As a part of the Petaling Street precinct, it is rich in history and heritage and possessed significant potential, the statement said.

The programme aims to rejuvenate the lane through elevating public spaces, adaptively reusing shophouses and introducing new businesses and content.

"Improvements to public spaces are scheduled to begin in the third quarter of this year.

"The project aims to connect the past and the future by revitalising the market area through street restoration and beautification.

"This involves enhancing the streetscape, improving public amenities and promoting cultural heritage through interpretive elements and community-centric activities."

According to the statement, the project goal was to create a vibrant, culturally rich environment that would enhance the area's liveability and economic vitality.