

## Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 106

Last week the Chaguanas Borough Corporation hosted a public consultation to facilitate the preparation of a master land-use plan for the development of Chaguanas into a city.

There were very important presentations from Caribbean Housing Limited, Centre City Mall, the Housing Development Corporation (HDC), e-TeCK, and the Town and Country Planning Division (T&CPD). When these were finished there were several interesting observations from the floor, including, “What was the context within which all these activities were going to take place?”

The plan presented by the T&CPD was one prepared in 1991, nearly 17 years ago. Therefore, decisions and investments are continuing to be made by public and private organizations and individuals in the absence of adequate understanding of the impacts of these activities on each other, or an appreciation of how and where these activities fit into the behaviour and function of the city which we would like to have.

These organizations and individuals naturally view their ideas and proposals with an eye to their own requirements. They all have a general interest in national improvement, but their individual priorities are can be diverse and often conflicting. But some public agency has to pull together all the proposals and plans, contributions from stakeholder involvement, and technical analyses. It seems that the Ministry of Local Government is seeking to do just that, with the recent setting up a town planning unit. The unit intends to secure consultants to prepare master plans for each of the regional corporations and boroughs.

Now onto the juicy stuff! It always amazes me that the media usually slips out almost right after the Minister’s speech, and they

often miss the contributions from attendees. There were at least three such at the consultation.

Robert Ramsamooj was an invited speaker, under the title of Developer. He boldly shared that none of the seven multi-storeyed buildings that he owned in Chaguanas, including some four- and five-storeys, had statutory approvals. He even admitted that one of those buildings that he owned was Gaston Court, the very building that the consultation was being held in and hosted by the Local Authority. Sitting at my table and directly in front of the speaker was Ms. Carole Smart, retired Director of Town and Country Planning. She had her head bowed during these startling revelations.

Mr. Ramsamooj went on to give his reasons for discontinuing the approval process. It certainly surprised me to learn that the Guardian Life building was also his—I find it difficult to believe that such a mega business institution would lease an unapproved facility. Nevertheless, his purpose for all these disclosures was to seek forgiveness, and receive the requisite approvals. He emphasized that he is one of the few developers in Chaguanas who gives back to the community. He asserted that he continues to permit many NGOs and religious organisations to use Gaston Court for free. He boasted that he is nearly about to open a conferencing facility that would seat 7,000 persons.

If asked, I would say that my position is quite simple—there cannot be one law for some and another for others. Contempt and disrespect for others should not be tolerated, either by the authorities or by the public. Why, as stated by another attendee, would it take T&CPD some 18 months for a simple dwelling house approval? Civil responsibility must be

observed by individuals in both the public and private sector.

I recall nearly 20 years ago during my stay in India, walking down the main street in my town and observing most of the roadside retail shops with the entire front of their buildings completely demolished. What happened is that earlier in the day the statutory authorities in conjunction with heavily armed police and army officers descended on the contraveners of the building setback, and the law was enforced. As it turned out, many of the owners had to sleep in their store or shop that night in order to secure their goods.

Next, a young woman spoke on behalf of the residents of Park View. She complained that the owner of the development had recently illegally enclosed the approved open space, thus eliminating the residents from their right to use the park, in order to convert it into additional higher-value real estate development. The matter is before the court. The developer would have received many years of income from this change of land use before the case is determined. And what is so complicated to determine?

Finally, someone stood at the floor mike and suggested that Ministry of Works and Transport should discontinue constructing earthen ramps at interchanges, as it is a waste of valuable space. They should instead replace them with steel structure ramps, so that the open space beneath could be used as taxi stands. Responses on this from readers would be especially welcome.

In closing, I would like to make an initial comment on the executive rapid jet. There are now at least three transport projects in the category of fast service and fast investment decision: rapid rail, fast water taxi, and rapid jet. The only

thing slow is citizen involvement in the decision making. If respect is to be expected, it must be shown.

e-mail: [info@ccost.org](mailto:info@ccost.org)