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EDITORIAL

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MANILA BAY RECLAMATION
— This aerial shot taken on Saturday, Aug. 19, 2023, shows the extent of one of the reclamation projects that is being undertaken in Manila Bay. On Aug. 11, 2023, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ordered the suspension of 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay, pending a review by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and to ensure that these are compliant with all applicable laws and regulations. (Mark Balmores)



A 'deep dive' into reclamation: Where have all the sunsets gone?

By JOHANNES L. CHUA

In one of the hotels along the fringes of Manila Bay, the added "value" of having a sunset as your front-row view while sipping a cocktail is now gone. You can still see its hues from afar, but the world-famous Manila Bay sunset — that distinct mandarin-orange sun marking the end of a day — is nowhere to be found.

The once-calming crash of waves has surrendered to an eerie silence. Instead of the soothing

A 'deep dive' into reclamation: Where have all the sunsets gone? 1◀

body of water, you now face an endless stretch of sand and stone rising like a great wall, mimicking a fortress where we are not welcome. This is now the reclaimed land, which is quietly — and swiftly — transforming a portion of the Manila Bay. This gray landscape used to be a seascape just a few months ago.

Unbeknownst to the majority, portions of Manila Bay's waters have been converted into reclaimed land.

Now, how about the sunset — that one which is part of our collective memory as a Filipino? The sunset will never disappear, but reclamation casts a wide shadow. It's possible that there will come a time when Roxas Boulevard — if all these reclamation projects will come into fruition — will just be among the many boulevards of broken dreams, a lonely stretch of road far from the nostalgic sunsets of yore.

Suspension of projects

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has suspended all 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay. This number, however, is disputed by the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA), which said that there are only 13. Regardless of the precise number, there is a public consensus that these projects will truly alter the seascape — or more appropriately, the landscape — of a broad area.

It should be clear that these reclamation projects are not suspended indefinitely, but rather "suspended, pending review."

"We are here at that point where the President has issued the suspension of reclamation projects in Manila Bay... (we) really have to look into, number one, the environmental impacts and also the social impacts of these activities," said DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga.

reclamation since there are a lot of factors to consider, especially the environmental implications. Experts advocate for meticulous assessment. This encompasses comprehensive environmental surveys; vulnerability assessments for liquefaction, flooding, and subsidence; analysis of hydrodynamics, and the safeguarding of marine ecosystems — all requiring an exhaustive and transparent investigation.

What now?

The country should take comfort in the fact that the DENR Secretary, an academician herself, has said that all the 22 projects will undergo "assessment

"On the part of the DENR, we are looking into the compliances, the conditions under which the ECCs (Environmental Compliance Certificates) and area clearances were issued," she said.

Deeper perspective

According to reports, the ECCs of these reclamation projects under scrutiny were issued during the previous administration. At that time, there was nary an uproar about these projects, which progressed under the radar. No one noticed as the world was glued on Covid-related issues, and the government had its hands full.

To gain a deeper perspective, I asked a retired urban planning expert involved in reclamation projects during the administration of President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Requesting anonymity, he explained that reclamation itself is not inherently problematic. He recalled witnessing the approval of some reclamation projects during his time, many of which now serve as productive lands.

What we have to critically look for, he said, is the rigorosity and accuracy of all the compliance and requirements submitted by companies undertaking reclamation. He said that the PRA, which is under the Office of the President, has a list of stringent requirements that each company has to comply with. Acquiring the DENR's ECC is not an easy task either; certain companies even engage foreign consultants or collaborate with overseas entities known for their sustainable practices to meet the demanding standards.

The "noise" regarding these reclamation projects started in the past few weeks, initiated by the devastation caused by typhoons that submerged extensive areas of Bulacan. Provincial leaders implored

the President to look into the reclamation projects in the Manila Bay as they attribute the floods plaguing Bulacan recently to these developments.

The gravity of the situation prompted Senate Majority Leader Joel Villanueva, a Bulakenyo, to announce that he will resign "if it is proven that reclamation didn't worsen Bulacan floods."

During a Senate hearing, Villanueva presented this observation to Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Secretary Manuel Bonoan: "since the commencement of these reclamation projects, both past and present, flooding in Bulacan has intensified, submerging towns and cities underwater for days." Historically, floodwaters easily flowed toward Manila Bay. But with the reclamation projects "blocking" the path, floodwaters flowed instead into homes and buildings during typhoons.

The US Embassy sounded the alarm that one of the companies doing reclamation projects have ties to blacklisted companies from China. These companies, the US Embassy claims, are implicated for their role in constructing artificial islands in disputed waters.

Reclamation history

Reclamation is not new. It is said that reclamation has been constantly happening throughout the world over thousands of years, from the moment people settled along river deltas.

According to the urban planning expert, reclamation is not good, nor is it bad per se. It is what we do with reclaimed land and its effect on its surrounding environment and communities, plus its cultural and socio-economic impact that must be looked into.

It is hasty to just say "yes" to

through trans-disciplinary work, which will get inputs from social scientists, communities, experts, and academicians."

"A Community Impact Assessment will be carried out by a scientific team including scientists, oceanographers, geologists, climate scientists, etc. that the DENR will be organizing this month," she said, citing the mandamus issued by the Supreme Court to rehabilitate Manila Bay to the point "where people can actually swim and fish."

"This is an order we take seriously," she stressed.

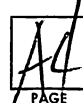
For now, we wait and see, trusting that our authorities will do their best with the national interest in mind.



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The Manila Times



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Editorial

Review reclamation's impact on shipping, trade

THE authorities reviewing the reclamation projects in Manila Bay should also study how they will impact the shipping industry, particularly the trade passing through Manila's ports. Thus far, environmentalists and fishing advocates have led the resistance against reclamation. The economic impact may also lead to higher operating costs for shipping lines, which will likely be borne by consumers.

Those added costs may be substantial, given that some 70 percent of all the country's trade passes through ports in Manila. As such, the government should not easily dismiss the potential effect on commodity prices. Remember that the Philippine economy is consumption-led, meaning rising costs of goods could slow down the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate.

Total external trade, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, was valued at \$21.6 billion in 2022. And as many know, Manila's ports also serve domestic trade. Metro Manila is the heart of the Philippine economy, contributing 36 percent to GDP.

Proponents and defenders of reclamation have pointed out that Manila Bay has an area of 200,000 hectares and that only 5,000 to 6,000 hectares are to be reclaimed. In other words, only 5 percent of Manila Bay will disappear. The problem, of course, is the location of that small area.

Proximity to Manila's ports may require cargo ships to move farther out into the bay, as they wait for their turn to unload and load their vessels. In other words, reclamation around Metro Manila will diminish the space in the bay where all ships can move around. That will likely bump up fuel costs, add to turnaround times and perhaps compromise maritime safety.

Moreover, the government should commission technical studies on how reclamation might affect shipping channels and other passageways. And if those become narrower because of reclamation, shipping lines may need a pilot to guide their vessels to and from the docks. That, too, will add to costs.

Moving more cargo business from Manila to other ports, like Batangas in the south and Subic Bay in the north, may not be a viable solution to the problems that reclamation could create. The bulk of consumption happens in Metro Manila, and wherever goods are brought to Luzon, they will have to be delivered to markets that are close to buyers. Put another way, using Batangas and Subic Bay will likely increase the transportation costs of commodities bound for Metro Manila.

Economic study

Fortunately, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has already said it will review the ongoing and planned reclamation projects. Additionally, several lawmakers want to investigate them, including reports that the projects are linked to a Chinese construction firm that was tagged by the World Bank for fraudulent business practices.

Meanwhile, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announced a suspension of the reclamation projects, although some worry that he has not yet made that official. Indeed, the environmental impact and economic blow to fisherfolk deserve attention. But the authorities should also check on the welfare of consumers, who are the main drivers of GDP growth.

Reclamation is not without merit if done properly and only after an economic cost-benefit analysis. Metro Manila is relatively small in land area, and the space for new developments is either nonexistent or limited for the city governments. From that viewpoint, reclamation is a way to create wealth through land development.

On the other hand, Manila Bay's value should also be appreciated. Even though it is heavily polluted, policymakers should not give up on it. If the government wants to, the bay can be rehabilitated. That will benefit many sectors, not just the fishing community.

Even if, for argument's sake, Manila Bay is too polluted, it remains valuable for ships carrying most of the goods entering the Philippines. The economic toll, of course, is not necessarily more important than the environmental impact. The economic factor is simply another cause for concern that adds to all the other problems that may be caused by reclaiming parts of Manila Bay.

An accounting of the total economic costs is necessary, even while the DENR conducts its review.



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GROUP TO PBBM: STOP ALL MANILA BAY RECLAMATION

By Gabriellea Pariño

AN ENVIRONMENTAL group urged President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to issue an executive order to stop all Manila Bay reclamation projects to stop further flooding.

The Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan PNE), a local campaign center for the environment, said that while the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)'s process may temporarily halt the project, the President should also extend his support.

"We suggested that a cumulative assessment be made which the DENR has already begun by putting the projects on hold, but the President should bare his teeth by releasing an executive order," Aldrein Silanga of Kalikasan PNE said in an interview.

Silanga emphasized the importance of regularly cleaning waterways so that damage near the Manila Bay and other reclamation project areas will not worsen.

Silanga also lambasted businessman Ramon Ang for his earlier statements claiming that the New Manila International Airport (NMIA) projects have nothing to do with the bay area flooding.

"The project may cause flooding if the channels in which the waters flow out are blocked by the reclamation materials," Silanga said.

Reports by Kalikasan PNE have found that Mega Manila, Cavite, and Central Luzon will be the most affected by the flooding should the reclamation projects ensue.



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EDITORIAL

More green, less gray

Baguio City, the country's summer capital, is on a mission to protect its remaining "urban green spaces"—a movement that has taken root in other countries but not so much in the Philippines. As typical of developing countries, development here is still viewed as the construction of buildings and infrastructure to indicate economic growth. Construction activities, of course, create jobs and the resulting urban environment with its modern cities, skyscrapers, and technology attracts investors that, in turn, could bring in much-needed capital to put up new businesses and create more jobs.

But such development, if unregulated, will not be good for the environment and will impact public health in the long term. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources, in 2019, reported that only about 12 percent of the land area in the National Capital Region (NCR) is green space. The La Mesa Ecopark accounts for nearly half of that area, and the open space within the Ninoy Aquino International Airport takes up about one-fourth. Other substantial green spaces include the Rizal Park in Manila, the Quezon City Memorial Circle, and the Rainforest Park in Pasig, while the rest are in golf courses or cemeteries. The Arroceros Forest Park, known as the "last lung of Manila," has been constantly under threat due to "redevelopment" plans by different city government administrations.

Areas outside NCR would probably be better off in terms of green spaces but they are not immune to development activities. Many places have in fact seen the displacement of indigenous communities and the loss of natural zones due to infrastructure development, leaving fewer and fewer areas left for green spaces.

The lack of green spaces became very apparent at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when there was a lack of multifunctional, highly ventilated areas where people, especially those in the cities, could go to break the monotony of staying indoors while not putting themselves at risk of getting infected. This was probably the reason why the controversial dolomite beach became an attraction, a respite for so many people whose mobility was limited during the severe lockdowns—something that the previous administration took advantage of to push for a politically popular but environmentally unsustainable open public space. That is, however, not the type of green space that the country needs and the government should conserve and protect.

There are several local governments that are pushing for sustainable development, including Iloilo whose zoning ordinance integrates biodiversity, cultural heritage, urban design, and green growth. Then there's the previously mentioned move by Baguio whose city council recently approved on first reading an ordinance that would designate and preserve the city's remaining urban green spaces. The measure is noteworthy given that Baguio, despite experiencing the downside of tourism and development, is one of the places in the Philippines that still has pockets of green spaces in its mountains, forests, and parks—an essential part of the city's attraction and crucial to its survival.

The ordinance is meant to complement an ongoing scientific study on animal and plant life in the city. Recently, a group of biologists from the University of the Philippines Baguio discovered that biodiversity still exists within urban areas after they identified 18 bird, nine rodent, and 31 plant species in the Buyog watershed, a forest patch found between dense settlements in Quirino Hill and Pinget. Aside from preserving these species, Baguio officials acknowledge that urban green spaces enhance the city's livability, environmental quality, and the overall well-being of the city's residents, and can help combat climate change.

The World Health Organization recommends 9 square meters of open spaces per person but based on the Green City Index research, there is only an average of 5 sqm of open space per Filipino. Veteran environmental planner and architect Nathaniel von Einsiedel earlier pointed out that green space in Singapore, a smaller country, takes up 47 percent of its total land area. If Iloilo's and Baguio's endeavors are replicated across local governments, then surely the Philippines, with its vast land and natural resources, can do better than Singapore in allocating more green spaces even as it pursues its goals to become an industrialized country.

Development should not only come in the form of buildings and infrastructure that turn cities into concrete jungles. Genuine development should be about creating a livable world for everyone and that includes allocating green space that is essential for public health. Studies have shown that it can help lower premature mortality, lengthen life expectancy, help with mental illness, and lessen cardiovascular diseases. In the face of global warming, it can also help mitigate air pollution, and heat and noise levels. Isn't it time that the country's policymakers reset and rethink their mindsets about development from gray to green?



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Natl Hero Jose Rizal as father of PHIL's biodiversity?

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

IS it time to declare (National Hero) Jose Rizal as the 'Father of Philippine Biodiversity'?

The question was a proposition made by broadcast journalist Howie Severino during his talk at the Asean Biodiversity Heroes Forum in Malate, Manila, last August 12.

An award-winning broadcast journalist and documentary filmmaker, Severino, who considers himself a Rizal historian, has come up with several documentaries about the national hero that were aired over GMA television.

Severino talked about the national hero and his passion for the natural environment—the forest and the diversity of trees, plants, and animals, as well as the bounty of the ocean, including fish, seashells and other species.

Associating biodiversity with Rizal, he said young storytellers can make biodiversity a more interesting topic for their respective audiences, by associating it with history, heritage, and heroism.

Severino said: "You constantly have to experiment, to be resourceful and creative in your storytelling because you have too much competition."

It is important to humanize the stories, to stir public interest in biodiversity, he added.

Learning forum

ORGANIZED by the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) as part of the celebration of the 56th anniversary of Asean Day and International Youth Day, the event dubbed, "Asean Biodiversity Heroes Forum," aimed to encourage young communicators and storytellers to be an agent of change for biodiversity.

It adopted the battacry and the hashtags: "I write for biodiversity," "I speak for biodiversity" and "I create for biodiversity."

The interactive learning forum gathered development communication students from select state universities in Luzon and Mindanao and several storytellers from Asean neighbors with some ACB's Asean

Biodiversity Heroes to learn about biodiversity advocacy, experiences, challenges, frustrations, perseverance and the success that made the heroes in biodiversity protection and conservation.

Among the topics discussed during the forum were the interconnectivity of life, development communication, basic biodiversity reporting and storytelling.

Severino's documentary, titled "Rizal and the Creatures of Dapitan," originally aired on November 18, 2018, showcased Rizal and his passion for Dapitan's rich biodiversity.

Rizal: the achiever

WHILE in exile in Dapitan, Zamboanga del Norte, where Rizal spent his last four years before his martyrdom in Bagumbayan, now known as Rizal Park, the national hero made many projects that matter to the people of Dapitan—such as building a dam and irrigation system, a school and eventually, discovering new species.

In Rizal's school, which can be considered the first progressive school in the Philippines, he imparted to his young students his progressive ideas on topics, including agriculture, politics, governance, and even religion.

His schoolyard and laboratory were the forest.

Medicine man, artist

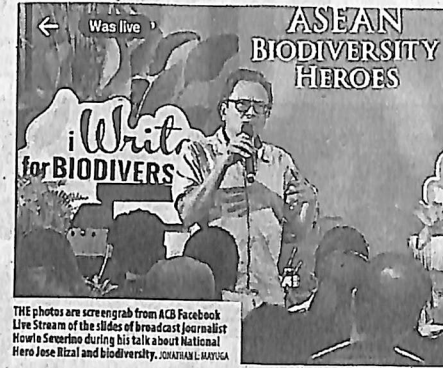
AS a physician and a teacher in Dapitan, Rizal explored the application of medicinal plants to treat his patients.

He also learned from the locals, while sharing his own knowledge, about the medicinal value of native trees and plants found around the forest of Dapitan.

His school and laboratory, according to Severino, was an 18-hectare land, which he acquired after winning a lottery.

While teaching about plants and animals, Rizal would walk around the forested area with his students and identify the species.

"Rizal collected hundreds of specimens of flowers, shells, insects and



THE photos are screenshot from ACB Facebook Live Stream of the slides of broadcast journalist Howie Severino during his talk about National Hero Jose Rizal and biodiversity. JONATHAN L. MAYUGA



reptiles and sent them to Europe to know more about them," he said.

By sending to foreign botanists the specimens that he preserved, he, in turn, received books and continued his education.

Most of the time, Rizal would sketch the species he discovered or found, and describe them with accuracy.

Passionate researcher

RIZAL, a visual artist, poet, journalist, and novelist, was a passionate researcher, who, during his time, was able to discover new species that were unknown to science then.

Some of the animal species, Severino pointed out, were named after Rizal by his colleagues who learned about his new discoveries between



July 17, 1892, to July 31, 1896.

A flying dragon was named *Draco rizali*; a rare kind of beetle, *Apogonia rizali*; and a frog, *Rhacophorus rizali*.

German museum exhibit

SEN. Loren Legarda, in her keynote address during the opening of the forum, said that specimens of the new species discovered through Rizal are being exhibited at a museum in Germany.

An advocate of biodiversity protection and conservation, Legarda vowed to work with concerned institutions in Germany, and through a loan, to have the specimens brought to the Philippines and be showcased at the National Museum of Natural History, in recognition of Rizal's work.

In her speech, Legarda said there's a bit of Rizal in every young Filipino,

urging them to emulate the national hero in their pursuit of science and in communicating the importance of protecting and conserving the species and their habitats for human survival.

A naturalist, a Filipino

SEVERINO said Rizal may even be the first Filipino botanist, or naturalist, who discovered new animal species and had the honor of having the species named after him.

"Europe is where he studied and developed his political ideas. But Dapitan is where he applied much of his learnings, as a doctor, as a teacher and even as an engineer, an ecologist and naturalist," he said.

"There were a lot of foreigners who came to the Philippines to study the Philippine environment, ecology and nature. But it is hard to think of anyone before Rizal who studied and love nature the way he did," he said.

More importantly, he said Rizal articulated in the way he lived and not just what he wrote his vision for the Filipino—enlightened, progressive, civic-minded, a believer in freedom and human rights, a lover of nature—"which I think we can take to heart and emulate until today," Severino said.

Biodiversity hero

THE journalist said the national hero indeed did many things, and that the underappreciated aspect of Rizal is that no Filipino before him had the kind of interest he had in nature and the environment, particularly Dapitan.

"While there are modern scientists who may lay claim to be the father of Philippine biodiversity, the fact remains that Rizal was the first to have new species named after him," he pointed out.

"By recognizing Rizal's contribution to biodiversity, we achieve a number of things. By associating biodiversity with Jose Rizal, we elevate biodiversity by making it more central to the identity of and the founding vision of the Philippines," he said.

"We elevate biodiversity from being

a fringe interest or being second fiddle in terms of global concerns to climate change," he added.

According to Severino, while climate change is a big problem and will rearrange civilization, the loss of biodiversity, another mass extinction, can actually lead to the extinction of the human species.

"To me, it is more an existential threat, even more than climate change," he said.

He added that by portraying Rizal as the father of biodiversity, the country will complete his memory and honor his contributions in the last four years of his life.

It should be noted that Rizal is also recognized through his statues in some European countries.

Severino said he wished that Rizal be recognized as a naturalist—or as the father of Philippine biodiversity—in the same breath that he is loved as a martyr, a hero, a poet, an artist and a novelist.

Significant contributions

FOR her part, ACB executive director Theresa Mundita S. Lim said Rizal has made significant contributions through his works in Dapitan to biodiversity conservation, long before the word "biodiversity" was even invented.

"He was ahead of his time in protecting nature and the environment. However, data on his works, such as the specimens he collected, are still fragmented and are scattered across various references and sources," Lim said.

She explained: "There's a need to compile all information and undertake additional research, and consultations among Rizal historians and biodiversity experts to ensure that there are no other candidates, and to establish a solid and unquestionable basis to officially bestow the title of 'Father of Biodiversity' on Gat Jose Rizal."

Finally, Lim said: "The ACB stands ready to support processes to move this forward."



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND HIGHWAYS PHILIPPINE COMMISSION ON WOMEN NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS AUG 14 2023

JOINT ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER No. 2023-0021

SUBJECT: Guidelines on the Creation, Use, and Management of Parks and Public Open Spaces for the Promotion of Physical and Mental Health and Social Well-being

I. BACKGROUND

Literature has long established the link between health and the benefits in investing in safe and sustainable green development... A 2013 World Health Organization report on urban planning, environment, and health stated that green spaces can positively affect physical activity, social and psychological well-being, facilitate social cohesion, improve air quality, reduce exposure to noise pollution, and potentially reduce public health inequalities.

In view of the foregoing, it is the role of the national and local governing bodies to enable the promotion of physical wellness and the promotion of mental health and well-being by ensuring the availability and accessibility of healthy and safe public open spaces.

These guidelines likewise provide the minimum standards for constituting healthy and safe parks and public open spaces to guide administrators and developers in maximizing its physical, social, psychological, cultural, and environmental benefits.

II. OBJECTIVE

This Order aims to provide guidance and standards for the creation, promotion, use, and management of public open spaces to support the physical and mental health and well-being of Filipinos.

III. SCOPE AND COVERAGE

This Order shall cover all users, national and local government administrators, and other relevant stakeholders involved in the development, administration, and use of parks and public open spaces.

IV. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

A. Public open spaces - is an umbrella term which shall refer to land spaces provided by the national or local government units, designated as parks and intended for physical activity, leisure, and recreational use by the public. Public open spaces may also include privately-owned land spaces that are made publicly accessible. These include the following:

1. Blue, green, and urban spaces as public spaces characterized by surface or setting:

- a. Blue spaces - shall refer to public open spaces with water elements ranging from natural and man-made ponds, aquariums, to coastal and riparian zones and public beaches.
b. Green spaces - shall refer to public open spaces with natural surfaces or natural settings: green open spaces include, but are not limited to, trails, forest parks, natural wildlife areas, community gardens, nature parks and reserves, zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens.
c. Urban spaces - shall refer to open-space areas reserved for parks and other open spaces, including plant life, water features, and other kinds of natural and man-made environments generally considered open to the public, including streets or roads, public plazas, theme parks, water parks, and other amusement parks.

2. Active and passive spaces as public open spaces characterized by activity:

- a. Active open spaces - shall refer to public open spaces intended primarily for formal outdoor sports or organized physical activities; active open spaces include sports complexes, basketball courts, tennis courts, playgrounds, etc.
b. Passive open spaces - shall refer to public open spaces used primarily for leisure, unstructured physical activities, passive recreation or informal play; passive open spaces include neighborhood parks, gardens, linear corridors, conservation areas or heritage sites, nature reserves, and parks.

3. People's streets as public open spaces - shall refer to streets, roads, parking lots, or bridges within the community that are prioritized for use by pedestrians, bicycles, and light mobility devices, closed for motor vehicle through-traffic, and are designed only for physical activities, leisure, and recreational use by community members exclusively on a specific schedule.

V. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The adoption and implementation of the provisions of this Order shall be guided by the following principles:

- A. Equity and Inclusivity. Public open spaces shall be designed and developed with cognizance to the needs of all individuals, especially vulnerable population groups within the community. Developers, administrators, and enforcers shall make use of participatory/consultative approaches, gender mainstreaming strategies, and universal design principles, among others to make public open spaces accessible to all individuals regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and/or socio-economic status.
B. Whole-of-society and Whole-of-government Partnerships shall be fostered between relevant National Government Agencies (NGAs), Local Government Units (LGU), civil society or non-government organizations, people's organizations, professional groups of urban planners, landscape architects, etc., academic institutions, and private sector for a collaborative and issue-oriented approach in the creation, promotion, use, and management of public parks and open spaces.
C. Co-responsibility. Public open spaces developers, administrators, and enforcers shall lead the proper creation, management, and maintenance of public open spaces. All users, visitors, and community members shall likewise have the responsibility to abide by the relevant public open space policies and rules to ensure sustainability and guarantee a healthy, safe, and enjoyable experience for all.

VI. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- A. Public open spaces shall ensure equitable access of all people, regardless of age, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, political affiliation or belief, ethnicity, disability, and/or socio-economic status.
B. In order to maximize the physical, psychological, social, cultural, and environmental benefits of public open spaces, development of relevant spaces and infrastructure shall be guided by the minimum standards set out in Section VII-A of this Order.
C. All public open spaces that are required to strain development and building permits shall undergo the DOH Health Assessment Review Process pursuant to DOH-DILG Joint Administrative Order No. 2021-0001, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Environmental Impact Statement System pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 1516.

VII. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A. Minimum standards for the creation, promotion, operation, and use of healthy public open spaces

- 1. Open and accessible
a. Recognizing that public open spaces are essential to the core functioning of a community, all such spaces shall be designed and developed collectively within the network of other essential destinations and establishments.
b. All public open spaces shall be easily accessible by foot, wheelchair, bicycle and other forms of active or light modes of mobility, and public transit.
c. All public open spaces shall ensure safe routes going to and from its premises by mandating strict vehicle speed limits in roads connected to or surrounding the public open space, and maintaining park visibility during daylight hours and proper lighting at night; provided, that such lighting do not compromise the diurnal cycle of plants and animals present in the public open spaces.

d. In communities where public open spaces are limited, existing lands or recreational areas in schools, museums, malls, government-owned buildings, or other similar properties may be opened up for such purposes through shared use agreements between the relevant entity and the local government.

2. Child, elderly, persons with disabilities, and persons with limited physical mobility or other disabilities, in accordance with Batas Pambansa Big. 344 Implementing Rules and Regulations, other relevant laws and issuances.

3. All public open spaces shall be sensitive and responsive to the needs of all its users, especially the children, elderly, and persons with limited physical mobility or other disabilities, in accordance with Batas Pambansa Big. 344 Implementing Rules and Regulations, other relevant laws and issuances.

4. Sidewalks, walking paths, pedestrian and/or crossing infrastructure, and other accessibility facilities shall be provided at grade. Materials that are tactile, not slippery when wet, well-lit, and that can provide high contrast shall be used in the development or enhancement of such spaces.

5. All signage, contents, or messages for way-finding shall be made visible with appropriate visual design, text and language (e.g. in Braille or in Filipino, as appropriate), and placed in conspicuous areas at suitable height for children and people in wheelchairs.

6. Properly maintained public furniture, outdoor gym equipment, rest areas, benches, shades, maps, and other similar features and amenities that are easily located shall be provided for the elderly, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and families with children.

7. Public open spaces shall, as applicable, provide appropriate sanitary and properly maintained breastfeeding and changing stations for mothers with infants or children.

8. A mix of open and well-ventilated enclosed spaces shall be provided, if possible, to allow users to select the kind of environment to experience, especially for persons with special needs such as those with autism and other neurodivergence, as well as those who are deaf or have hard of hearing, who may prefer more enclosed or secure facilities with less sensory information.

9. Senior citizens, persons with disability, and pregnant women shall be provided with an express lane, or otherwise given priority.

10. Pets may be allowed in public open spaces, such as national parks, subject to strict compliance with prescribed protocols and the park's existing rules and regulations for visitors bringing their pets.

11. Safe spaces for all stakeholders, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics

A. All public open spaces shall adopt a zero-tolerance policy against acts of gender-based violence and public spaces sexual harassment such as unwanted and unwelcome sexual actions or remarks, wolfwhistles, catcalling, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, and homophobic slurs, physical or verbal advances that threaten one's personal space, or such other acts as provided in Republic Act (RA) No. 11313 or the "Safe Spaces Act"

B. Interior security mechanisms to prevent and/or address such incidents shall be instituted in all public open spaces, which include installing of closed-circuit television (CCTV) and clearly visible warning signs with functional hotline or reporting line against gender-based sexual harassment, and designating appropriate anti-sexual harassment officers to assist and provide support to the victims, as applicable.

C. Smoking, vaping, drugs, and alcohol-free

A. All public open spaces, especially those frequented by the youth, families with children, and persons with co-morbidity, shall strictly enforce a "No Smoking and No Vaping Policy." No designated smoking or vaping area shall be established within the premises of the public open spaces.

B. Selling and advertising of tobacco or vape products within 100 meters from any point of the perimeter of the public open spaces frequented by minors shall not be allowed, in accordance with EO No. 264, 2017 and EO No. 106 x. 2020 providing for the establishment of smoke-free and vape-free environments in public and enclosed places.

C. Drinking, selling, and advertising, especially to minors, of alcoholic beverages or other drinks with alcohol regardless of level of alcohol content shall not be allowed in public open spaces including food courts, food parks and farmers markets, in accordance with Food and Drug Administration Circular No. 2019-006 on Guidelines in the Commercial Display, Selling, Promotion, and Advertising of Alcohol.

D. All public open spaces shall remain drug-free in compliance with RA No. 9165 or the "Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002," as amended, and other existing relevant policies.

12. Accessible, sufficient, and easily located sanitation facilities for personal hygiene, handwashing, and toilet use that provide privacy and security for its users shall be provided and kept properly maintained.

13. In public open spaces with amenities or concessions for food and drinks, facilities for toilet and personal hygiene must not be connected directly or situated close to the public open spaces, and applicable standards for safe food preparation and safe drinking water shall at all times be observed.

14. Pocket parks or parklets and other urban green spaces of relatively smaller scale, and that do not have a publicly provided sanitation facilities, shall ensure that as an alternative, a conveniently located handwashing station, toilet, and restroom is accessible within 100 meters from its location.

15. Eco-friendly, sustainable, and non-polluting

A. Development or enhancement of public open spaces shall, under all circumstances, destroy, diplicate, and/or contaminate existing natural habitat of local wildlife, forests, or agricultural domains.

B. Development or enhancement of public open spaces shall consider greening strategies, and non-polluting landscape design features, such as green architecture, appropriate lighting requirements that prevent light pollution, permeable landscape surfaces, etc.

C. Public open spaces with water facilities like ponds, aquariums, fountains, or other related structures, shall be designed to consume water efficiently and sparingly, and use harvested rainwater whenever possible.

D. Proper waste management measures such as installation of visible signage and trash bins for segregated garbage in conspicuous locations, implementation of scheduled garbage collection and disposal, and careful management of face masks and other personal items, shall be observed by the park administrators. Bringing and use of recyclable and reusable materials for food and drinks, where applicable, shall be promoted at all times to reduce wastes.

16. Climate and disaster resilience

A. Public open spaces shall be developed with the aim of mitigating or reducing hazards and risks around its area.

B. All identified public open spaces shall be suitable for use in accordance with the results of the LGU Climate and Disaster Risk Assessment (CDRA).

C. Should the public open space be affected by any climate or disaster risk as identified in the LGU CDRA, an alternate area shall be considered. If an other area are available, necessary mitigation and retrofitting in order to accommodate, manage, prevent, and eliminate the risks shall be employed.

17. Promotive of local culture, arts, heritage, creativity, and biodiversity

A. Programming of amusements, attractions, and activities in public open spaces, especially those within the purview of the local governments, shall consider and accommodate the needs and cultural identities of the social groups in the community.

B. Programming in public open spaces shall aim to promote cultural sensibility, cultural and artistic expression, cultural education and values, tangible and intangible heritage conservation and safeguarding, among others.

C. Public open spaces shall, where applicable, protect, feature, and highlight native species of animals, insects, trees, and flora or vegetation.

D. Public open spaces shall, where applicable and subject to appropriate planning and design, practice edible landscaping in support of existing urban agriculture programs and similar initiatives.

18. Functional park management, enjoyment, and maintenance

2. Likewise, resources at the local level shall be mobilized to support and maintain public parks and open spaces, in line with relevant provisions of RA No. 7160 or the Local Government Code of 1991. The LGUs shall include as part of its local development plans the creation of healthy public open spaces or improvement of existing local public open spaces that are aligned with the provisions of this Order.

3. New financing mechanisms may be explored, including but not limited to public-private partnerships, benefit allocations, community fund-raising, or donations, to support the establishment of new or enhancement of existing public open spaces.

4. Privately-owned and managed open spaces may implement reasonable fees for the maintenance of their respective facilities.

C. Monitoring and evaluation

1. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the implementation of this Order shall be integrated in existing relevant government or M&E mechanisms at the national and local levels. For this purpose, standards and indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of healthy public open spaces shall form part of the Healthy Communities Program of the DOH and its corresponding recognition mechanism for local government units.

2. The conduct of monitoring and evaluation activities related to specific provisions of the policy shall be the responsibility of the relevant actors (i.e. NGAs and/or LGUs) in charge of its implementation.

3. The status of the implementation of this Order shall be presented regularly to relevant agencies and other interested bodies, as applicable, to inform their respective planning and implementation.

VIII. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The Department of Health (DOH) shall:

1. Review, develop, and continue to update the set health and safety protocols based on most recent evidence available, and issue succeeding updates through appropriate policy issuances.

2. Provide technical assistance in developing inclusive health standards, protocols, and guidelines on the creation, promotion, and use of healthy public open spaces; and

3. Lead the overall monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the policy; in particular, monitor and evaluate relevant data and indicators on health and its risk factors in relation to the promotion and use of public open spaces.

B. The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) shall:

1. Promote among LGUs the adoption of national policies, programs, and standards on the creation, promotion, and use of healthy public open spaces;

2. Encourage LGUs to create or designate areas as healthy public open spaces within their respective jurisdictions; and

3. Ensure that law enforcement agencies implement applicable safety policies, rules and regulations in public open spaces, including the full implementation and localization of RA No. 11313 or the Safe Spaces Act.

C. The Department of Tourism (DOT) shall:

1. Develop and/or encourage in relevant attached agencies (e.g. Immigration Administration, National Parks Development Committee, TIEZA, etc.) to promulgate and implement guidelines for the operations of tourist attractions or other public open spaces within its area of jurisdiction;

2. Assist in the promotion of recreational activities being conducted in public open spaces within its area of jurisdiction; and

3. Provide technical assistance in the programming of supervised appropriate and culturally-relevant activities in public open spaces, where applicable.

D. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) shall:

1. Provide relevant environmental standards and technical assistance for the development and enhancement of public open spaces, especially green and blue spaces and lines;

2. Facilitate and process the application for environmental impact assessment of infrastructure or development projects related to public open spaces or such other spaces within the scope of this Order, as applicable; and

3. Monitor and evaluate environment-related data or indicators relevant to healthy public open spaces.

E. The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (MSUD) shall:

1. Provide necessary technical assistance on environmental, land use, and urban planning and development in support of the creation of public open spaces;

2. Monitor the development of public open spaces relative to the preparation and implementation of comprehensive land use plans and zoning policies of local governments units to ensure that public open spaces follow the urban design parameters set in Section VII. A.

F. The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) shall:

1. Include in its progress a special initiative to create healthy public open spaces in selected national roads and bridges;

2. Develop and promulgate guidelines and technical standards for creating healthy public open spaces in selected national roads and bridges or sections thereof by reviewing their use to pedestrians, bicycles, and light mobility devices; and

3. Coordinate with LGUs for the creation of more public open spaces in cities and municipalities through the re-purposing of selected national and local roads and bridges for the exclusive use of pedestrians, bicycles and light mobility devices.

G. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) shall provide necessary technical assistance for instituting safety mechanisms in public open spaces to address assault response to gender-based harassment on streets and public places, pursuant to Republic Act No. 11313 or the "Safe Spaces Act."

H. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) shall provide necessary technical assistance and support over public open spaces considered as heritage sites, and on promotion of arts and culture initiatives held on all public open spaces that uplift and empower communities, promote physical and mental health, and celebrate the people's diverse culture and heritage, subject to availability of funds, proper evaluation per requirements of existing grants system and government auditing rules and regulations.

I. The Local Government Units (LGU) shall:

1. Review its existing urban, land use, environmental, and/or tourism plans to inform the creation, promotion, operations and use of public open spaces;

2. Provide necessary resources and infrastructure for provincial, city, municipal, or community public open spaces;

3. Incentivize the development of pocket parks and parklets in the community;

4. Ensure the proper implementation of the minimum public health standards in public open spaces;

5. Properly maintain and maintain provincial, city, municipal, or community public open spaces located in their jurisdiction;

6. Coordinate with the relevant NGAs in carrying out the provisions of this Order; and

7. Ensure immediate and widest dissemination of these guidelines to all units and sectors within their jurisdiction.

IX. REPEALING CLAUSES

Other related issuances not consistent with this Order are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly. All other existing issuances which are not affected by this Order shall remain valid and in effect.

X. SEPARABILITY CLAUSES

Should any provision of this Order or any part thereof be declared invalid, the other provisions, insofar as they are separable from the invalid ones, shall remain in full force and effect.

XI. EFFECTIVITY

The Order shall take effect fifteen days after publication in a newspaper of general circulation and/or upon acknowledgment of a copy thereof by the Office of the National Administrative Registrar of the University of the Philippines Law Center.

Signatures and stamps of officials from the Department of Health, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and Philippine Commission on Women.