

DABAWENYOS NEED MORE GREEN SPACES

IDIS position paper in support to the proposed 15% additional green space requirement

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, urge that each nation should provide universal access to safe and accessible green and public spaces, especially to women, children, older persons and persons with disability. It urges that cities should gear towards developing and implementing policies and programs that ensure sustainability which shall involve investment in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in participatory and inclusive ways. The United Nations and the World Health Organization recommend that every city shall provide a minimum of nine (9) square meters of accessible, safe and functional urban green space per person and can also be as much as the ideal fifty (50) square meters per person¹. While there's a minimum standard, it is imperative that cities aiming to be more livable will also establish extensive green spaces for its population.

The Davao City Zoning Ordinance states that project proponents, with project area of one (1) hectare and above, shall allocate ten (10%) percent of the total area for more green spaces to be planted with trees and ornamental plants and/or to be developed for water pond purposes; in addition to open space already required by law for projects which are of socio-economic and environmental significance and/or national interest (Section 13, Article XI, Zoning Ordinance). Davao City has allotted 1, 035 hectares as public parks and open spaces, which is only 3% of the estimated 36,000 hectares of the total urbanized area, which also means that it only has 500 square meters for every 1,000 population or 0.5 square meters per person. This target is way below the existing green spaces allocated by cities in neighboring South East Asian Countries such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Bangkok in Thailand, with at least five (5) square meters allocation per person.

The Davao City Zoning Ordinance was enacted to define and delineate land areas for specific use, such as, residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional including open space/easement zone and parks and recreation zone.

Thus, section 5 of the Zoning Ordinance states that “*an **open space/easement zone** which is a strip of land along the entire length of the banks of rivers, creeks and streams, shores of the sea, lakes and all waterways which are subject to the easement of public use in the interest of recreation, navigation, floatage, fishing and salvage*” are allowed to be used for the following: recreation, parks and playground, ecotourism project, tree parks, fishing and even navigation and

¹ <https://www.witpress.com/Secure/elibrary/papers/SDP16/SDP16031FU1.pdf>



floatage. Section 10 of the same ordinance in support of the above stated, explained that *“Parks and recreation is an area designed for diversion/amusements and for the maintenance of ecological balance of the community.”* The following are the allowable use for parks and recreation: parks and gardens, resort areas, outdoor sports activities, wildlife park, tree park, theme park and functional wetlands, easements and buffer areas.

In 2016, there was a move to amend the Davao City Zoning Ordinance particularly Article 13 thereof which requires an additional ten (10%) percent green space in development projects. It was proposed and argued that the green space requirement can be incorporated in the thirty (30%) percent open space dedicated for roads, chapels and other communal spaces as provided for by Presidential Decree 1216. However, the same proposed amendment was vetoed by then Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte citing that the said amendment was prejudicial to public interest and an exercise of legislative power in ultra vires. The campaign for the retention of the provision on additional green space was a victory for the environmental advocates much more for all the Dabawenyos who truly deserve it. The ten (10%) percent requirement is still in effect and is being implemented at present.

In 2017, IDIS and Sustainable Davao Movement partnered with the New York University in assessing the improvement and utilization of existing public spaces in Davao City. The study revealed that Davao City is “severely short of land for medium-sized public open spaces and completely lacks large regional parks which are valuable in interrupting the urban heat island effect and flood control”². The study also recommended that Davao should work on improving its existing parks and open spaces which can lower crime rates, lower levels of obesity, provides better general health, lowers urban temperatures and increase property values. The said study was supported by the City ENRO and Office of the City Mayor. *(Annexed to this position paper is the copy of the study briefer on the proposed urban green zones in Davao City)*

Fast forward to 2019, IDIS conducted a study which identified and mapped-out other available and possible green zones / spaces in Davao City. The study revealed that an existing 264.83 hectares of green spaces, majority of which are privately owned and idle, have a potential to be a privately owned, publicly accessible open spaces or POPOS. Also, the proposed green zones/spaces specified in the study are within or near areas that are highly residential and commercial zones providing the much-needed green space requirement for the benefit of the residents. Some are also within disaster mitigation zones which will also serve as buffer zones, protecting residents from impacts of flooding and other disasters.

² Geo-mapping and Modeling of Proposed Urban Green Zones in Davao City: An IDIS Study

The study concluded that Davao City's urban district still has the green space it needs to provide citizens with the 9 square meters per person standard set by the World Health Organization, but in terms of accessibility, less than half of Davao City's current urban green spaces are accessible to the public. The city needs to prioritize the protection and development of proposed green zones green public parks or public open spaces.

During the Local Zoning Review Committee meeting conducted last June 18, 2020, the City Housing and Land Use Regulatory Unit issued a resolution urging the City Council to increase the minimum green space requirement from 10% to 15% of the total land area of project developments regardless of size, exclusive of the area which may be required for water retention purposes. The said resolution was approved and endorsed by the Local Zoning Review Committee (LZRC) in which IDIS sits as a member.

With the above stated facts, Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability strongly supports the proposed amendment to the CLUP in order to increase the minimum green space requirement from 10% to 15% of the total land area of project developments that are of socio-economic and environmental significance and/or national interest, regardless of size, exclusive of the area which may be required for water retention purposes;

Definition of Green space – an area which is partly or completely covered by natural vegetation that is accessible and enjoyable by the public³

IDIS also submits the following proposals to be considered as allowable use in areas to be declared and/or developed as green space with functional design, partly or fully covered with vegetation and must be publicly accessible:

1. Plantable easements
2. Green strips, islands and/or rotundas
3. Retarding pond
4. Lagoons
5. Forest patches
6. Community gardens
7. Urban Wetlands

³ <https://www3.epa.gov/region1/eco/uep/openspace.html>

8. Off-site development of 5% green space – provided, that at least 10% of the total green space requirement shall be established in the area where the proposed project shall be developed. Provided, further, that a maximum of 5% of the total green space requirement may be established in areas declared and will be declared as an Urban Ecological Enhancement Sub-Zones (UEESZ) and/or urban green zones.

9. Vertical greening should not be allowed or considered to offset the 15% green space, especially for cases with pre-construction application with PALC and which the entire lot area is already paved. Such, practice should not be allowed since the purpose of the green space is for land use, to infiltrate rainwater, improve soil quality and to combat heat island effect.

12. Development, maintenance and reporting of established green spaces should be shouldered by the developer or establishment / building owner.

13. For properties that will be donated for green or open spaces purposes, donation should be made after the green space is developed. But the maintenance of such should be the responsibility of the LGU which shall be provided in the MOA or Deed of Donation.

Now more than ever we need more green spaces in Davao City with the following noted benefits to residents⁴:

- a) It reduces heat island effect which in turn can help reduce heat stress among vulnerable people especially during summer.
- b) It promotes physical and mental well-being and can reduce stress.
- c) It also serves as filters and absorb rainwater and urban storm water, hence, reducing the risk of flooding in the city.

According to the rules, the CLUP can be considered for amendment every five (5) years from its enactment to consider changes in general zones and every three (3) years from the enactment of this ordinance to consider amendments in major urban sub-zones including the marginal agricultural sub-zone. Davao CLUP was passed in 2013, thus amendments to some of its provisions are already allowed as of the present. We are of high hopes that the committee and all our local legislators will have an open mind and consider our proposal, as it will not only benefit the environment but all the Dabawenyos, of present and future generations as well. Let's make Davao City more liveable and sustainable, let's make it greener. LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN!

⁴ According to the National Benefits Hub of Canada