

Residents: Hands off gated communities

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PETALING JAYA: Residents are unhappy over Petaling Jaya City Council's (MBPJ) stand on gated and guarded communities.

They are also upset because a public forum with MBPJ representatives was called off after many of them had made time for it.

"Since residents were upset that the forum was cancelled and wanted their opinions heard, we decided to have a roundtable meeting cum dialogue organised by our hosts, Damansara Utama state assemblyman Dr Cheah Wing Yin and the Damansara Jaya Residents' Association," said Elizabeth Wong, Bukit Lanjan state assemblyman.

The heads of residents' associations, Rukun Tetangga representatives and residents from different parts of Petaling Jaya turning up in full force at the session held at the Damansara Jaya Residents and Owners Association (DJROA) hall.

The dialogue was on MBPJ's decision to do away with illegally set up gated and guarded schemes set up by residents associations and Rukun Tetangga. On Jan 19, MBPJ said enforcement would be postponed until April 1 because of Chinese New Year celebrations. Notices to remove obstructions such as boom gates, cones and signboards are expected to be sent out on March 1.

An irate participant asked whether MBPJ could guarantee security if it insisted on enforcing the removal of gated and guarded schemes which had brought down crime in their neighbourhoods to almost nil. Even though some residents associations have gone overboard in the use of barriers, the council should exercise discretion and keep residents' welfare uppermost while making decisions, he said.

Most of those present called for amendments to be made to by-laws and guidelines governing gated and guarded residential areas.

Many of them felt that each residential area was unique and so MBPJ should be flexible, study the practicalities of implementing the guidelines in each area and have dialogues with residents associations to work out the best solutions for respective neighbourhoods.

Another resident who did not want to be named said he was upset that while the Federal Government required the consent of only 51 per cent of residents for setting up gated neighbourhoods, the MBPJ was asking for 85 per cent.

"I can't fathom why. We are trying to make our neighbourhoods safer and we are paying for ensuring security. We understand the police are shorthanded. We are not blaming the police or saying that they are not doing their jobs.

"The main thing is the crime situation is so bad we have to take measures to protect our homes and families. So local councils should come up with guidelines which are geared towards helping us to achieve this goal.

"It is hard enough to do this on a voluntary basis and get people to join the scheme. We need the MBPJ's consent as no one wants to break the law," he said.

S. Rajan, a member of the SS5D Kelana Jaya Rukun Tetangga said: "Security is very important to us as it involves our homes, and families. Our members are doing a fine job patrolling on foot and using cars.

"We are law-abiding tax-payers and we need to sleep without having to worry about our safety. Some of us have to get up at 2am or 3am for community patrolling and some homes do not have able-bodied people to join in the patrolling.

"So, certain exit roads should be closed and guarded to ensure security. But we failed to get MBPJ's approval when we applied last year.

"The council gave excuses such as rubbish lorries won't have easy access when roads are closed. There are many places where there are roads with dead ends and Alam Flora is still managing to carry out its work there. So. I don't see any major problems when certain exits in housing estates are closed for security purposes," he added.

Another resident suggested that a task force consisting of councillors, representatives of residents' associations and people who had experience to come up with appropriate guidelines which MBPJ could review and adopt.

Present at the dialogue moderated by Michael Soon, ex-MBPJ councillor and representative of Dr Cheah who is recovering from an accident were Wong, PJ Selatan MP Hee Loy Sian, Kelana Jaya MP Loh Gwo Burne, Bukit Gasing state assemblyman Edward Lee, Seri Setia state assemblyman Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, and Petaling Jaya councillors Tang Fui Koh, Chan Chee Kong and Richard Yeoh.

Wong said: "It is clear that the people want amendments to be made to the law governing gated and guarded neighbourhoods.

"They are also asking for more money to facilitate and defray the cost of running gated communities. They feel that the RM5,000 allocated annually to residents' associations to build guard booths, buy motorcycles and other equipment is insufficient.

"Many think that there have been too many dialogue sessions with MBPJ and not much has been done to address the problem. We have to start looking at innovative policies or by-laws and local government acts that can be utilise to promote security in residential areas.

"The Federal Government has a set of laws and guidelines but it is up to the local councils to decide what to implement and how to implement them. One of the reasons why the crime rate has gone down is the effort made by residents to police and put up barriers and boom gates, and hire guards. So, this has to be facilitated.

"MBPJ has made the proposal to have auxiliary police to patrol housing areas, as one of the safety measures. Residents are complaining that the proposed number of auxiliary police are not enough.

"But, I am looking at it this way. Gated and guarded schemes are one of the tools for promoting public safety but there is a need for other tools. If there are, say, 200 auxiliary police to help police officers, as long as the guards at the gated communities are not removed, this is fine," she said.

"Residents, residents' associations, councillors and MBPJ have an intrinsic relationship and they have to work together to resolve this issue. The ball is now in MBPJ's court," Wong added.

Loh said: "I find it baffling that regulations for gated and guarded communities are outdated especially the road transport act pertaining to such neighbourhoods.

"Laws are created for the benefit of the people. If a law no longer serves the people, it is obsolete and should be changed. When the people want amendments to be made, the laws have to be updated according their needs," he said.