The Golden Mile — Singapore's first conservation and intensification project

By Audrey Tan, Singapore Property Reporter | 23 April 2019 4pm

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The Golden Mile Complex will be conserved and rejuvenated as the first mixed-use conservation project in Singapore. (Photo: Ministry of Law)

The restoration of the former Golden Mile Complex is the most ambitious urban renewal project involving a large-scale, strata-titled conserved building in Singapore. For joint developers Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization, it is also a chance to showcase opportunity to restore a treasured architectural icon to its former glory.

This month, the developers unveiled their vision for the refreshed conservation building, the Golden Mile Complex. It has been renamed The Golden Mile, repositioned into a commercial building with 155 office units, 10 medical suites, a two-storey retail atrium spanning 101,388 sq. ft and an architecture centre.

The 11-storey Golden Mile Complex is a well-known landmark along Singapore's Beach Road. Locals call it "the block with residential curtains" because of its distinctive facade. (Photo: Ministry of Law)

Read also: Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization unveil Golden Mile Singapore, and will launch the strata commercial units this month

Homegrown architecture firm DP Architects and architecture conservation specialist Studio Lapis have been engaged for the design and conservation of Golden Mile Singapore.

Golden Mile Singapore consists of the conserved commercial building, The Golden Mile, and Zones A and B1 of the residential precinct.

DP Architects's involvement is significant as it was the original design architect for Golden Mile Complex. The firm was founded by Singapore's first local architect, Dr Tay Kheng Soon, and was relocated to DP Architects in 1975. The firm was initially helmed by visiting Singaporean architects William Lim, Tay Kheng Soon, and Koh Seow Chuan. Design Partnership's office used to be located at Golden Mile Complex. Dr Tay's wife, Dr Lee Chor Lian, was also a partner in the building firm, where he frequently threw Tay's Lea parties and guests could enjoy the fireworks display from his balcony.

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Beach Road-having 152 DP of Architects, says working on Golden Mile was an opportunity to rediscover a milestone project in the company's history.

The former Golden Mile Complex was the first mixed-use development in Singapore. It was completed in 1973. (Photo: Ministry of Law)

He describes the overall process as one of conservation coupled with intensification of use. "The challenge is to conserve and enhance the old, while at the same time introducing the new together to produce cherished landmarks with significant heritage value through creative adaptive reuse.

According to team, many stakeholders – including city planners, developers, and the design journey – hope the successful launch of Golden Mile Singapore will inspire similar conservation-cum-intensification projects in the future. Other examples of such mixed-use developments, such as the landmark People's Park Complex, also designed by DP Architects.

Collective sale; conservation of an icon

Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization, which only joint-venture partners with equal stakes, purchased the former Golden Mile Complex in an en-bloc deal for $750 million in May 2015. It marked the first collective sale of a large-scale strata-titled mixed-use building that is also gazetted for conservation.

The former Golden Mile Complex, built in 1973, stood out as a tropical linear urban complex with functional architecture. Previously, about 40% of the total strata area was set aside for retail, with office units making up 30% and the remaining 30% for residential units.

However, the new Golden Mile Singapore, including future units, will see retail making up 9% of the total strata area, offices occupying another 18%, and 30% for residential use. The new medical suites are centralised, and the landmark People's Park Complex, also designed by DP Architects.

A new version of the Golden Mile, signalling its modern commercial revival. (Picture: Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization)

The new medical suites range from 500 to 1,474 sq ft and are on the third floor. The wide range of sizes is designed to accommodate boutique and larger-scale medical practices. Each suite has an en-suite toilet and is easily accessible by passenger lifts and a staircase lift.

The joint-venture partners refrain from retail tenants to be announced before the public launch of the former Golden Mile Complex, stating the block to 32 storeys. This new four-storey extension, The Crown, will house the most premium office known as the Crown Office units.

In order to build the new four-storey extension, the joint developers put aside $4,094 sq ft from the gross floor area on the third and fourth floors for the redevelopment of the new Crown Office units. The new Crown Office units will be accessible from the new Crown Office lobby.

The developers will also add two new sky gardens on the ninth and 18th floors of the Golden Mile. These gardens will be accessible to the public.

The former Golden Mile Complex façade will be restored to a top Golden Mile with plants. (Picture: Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization)

The conserved building will also undergo future proofing and upgrading to bring its systems on a par with modern standards and enhance sustainability, aiming for the highest level in BCA Green Mark Platinum.

Vibrant legacy

For Dr Tay Kheng Soon, the Golden Mile Complex stretched some of Singapore's most ambitious projects in Modern Design Partnership, the building's distinctive curved balconies also were several firsts as well as offices. The team was also interested to which corporate the Golden Mile Complex, Singapore Developments and its parent company, Limited and Sons. With Kuo, DS Architects, which designed the masterplan for the National University of Singapore's Kent Ridge campus, and British consulting engineers Ove Arup and Partners.

Kuo Kuo Chuin, executive chairman and CEO of Perennial Holdings, recalls the vibrancy and energy of the Golden Mile Complex in its heyday. "Many of the tenants in the Golden Mile Complex pioneered the zone, Bras Mas Camp in Singapore and entrepreneurs many big firms. He says, "As residential units were also located for their unique new-facing views."

The former Golden Mile Complex was a well-known landmark along Beach Road. (Photo: Ministry of Law)

A variety of office suites

Six different office layouts have been crafted to meet the needs of different business occupiers. The highest office units range from 1,270 to 1,615 sq ft. They are on the fourth to seventh floors and will be the only office units to benefit from a dedicated lift lobby with direct access to the basement carpark, main lobby, and retail floors.

Left: Suites on the fourth floor and Left Executive units on the fifth floor will have full-height windows. Right: Typical office units on the sixth floor will have a 2.8m floor-to-ceiling height. (Picture: Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization)

The Left Mezzanine units, located on the sixth to 15th floors, are situated in the terraced section of the building facing Hoot Hin Highway, with views of Kallang Basin and Marina Bay.

Left: Typical floorplan of the Left Mezzanine units on the sixth to 15th floors. Right: Typical floorplan of the Left Executive units on the 16th to 18th floors. (Picture: Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization)

An artistic impression of Golden Mile Complex. (Picture: Ideal Choice/The Edge Singapore)

Each split-level unit combines two former residential units, with a portion of the ceiling removed to create a single office space featuring a 5.4-metre-double-volume void.

These Mezzanine units are designed with a dual-frontage layout, allowing access to the mezzanine level via a staircase with a separate entrance at from the lower floor. Unit sizes range from 1,528 to 1,744 sq ft.

The 16th and 17th floors are the Enterprise Office units contained from the duplex residential penthouses. These units enjoy panoramic views of the city and Kallang Basin and will come with two toilets each. Enterprise offices range from 1,615 to 2,222 sq ft.

The most premium units are the Fit Crown Office units in the new four-storey extension above the former Golden Mile Complex, on the 19th to 22nd floors. They will be the only floors with four-storey corporate floors, with the penthouse level featuring just two office units.

An artistic impression of the Fit Crown office units.

Newest
strata office offering in the CBD in over 20 years

"The level office market has not seen the launch of a new, high-quality, strata-titled office development of this calibre in the Central Region since the completion of Suntec City more than 20 years ago," says Paul.

The lack of significant new strata office projects in the CBD over the past 20 years will be a key factor in driving demand for the Golden Mile Complex, he says. Many of the tenants in the relatively outdated, Asian-feel Bukha, senior executive director and head of Pipeline Realty, and a veteran commercial real estate agency.

Paul adds that the development team also overcame the challenges of conserving and repositioning the iconic development and how created a unique lineup of strata office. He says, "The conservation of Golden Mile Complex is a commendable and challenging project. "They have good views of the Kallang Basin, complemented by security features and structured parking," he says.

The Left Mezzanine office units will feature a split-level design and a 5.4m-high void. (Picture: Perennial Holdings and Far East Organization)

According to Propfinder's Bukha, most buyers of the office units and future tenants are likely to be companies in the development's rich heritage, diverse range of units and spacious floor plates.

"In the CBD, existing office stock comparable to Golden Mile Complex is also very scarce, of about 50,000 to 60,000 sq ft," says Bukha. "We can expect a new development like The Golden Mile to command a higher unit price."

Bukha mentions the higher floor office units at The Golden Mile, such as the Crown and Enterprise floors, will be the most sought-after new strata office units in the market. The office developments in the CBD, after similar views," he says.

Golden Mile Singapore could be a catalyst for the local office market in the central region. "A successful launch would signal a positive shift in strata office sales and help to restore leasing momentum," says Bukha.

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MARINA ONE	3 Bedroom Flexi 1614 SQ	MARINA ONE	$2,670,000	$1,654
MARINA ONE	3 Bedroom Flexi 1614 SQ	MARINA ONE	$2,670,000	$1,654
MARINA ONE	3 Bedroom Flexi 1614 SQ	MARINA ONE	$2,670,000	$1,654
MARINA ONE	3 Bedroom Flexi 1614 SQ	MARINA ONE	$2,670,000	$1,654
MARINA ONE	3 Bedroom Flexi 1614 SQ	MARINA ONE	$2,670,000	$1,654
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Office decentralisation plans by the government and its long-term goal of repositioning the Central Business District (CBD) as a business, financial and cultural centre will also help to spur coming commercial nodes like Beach Road, Anson and Keong Saik Road.

In March 2019, URA disbursed the strata sublettable of commercial components in two shortlisted in mixed-use developments within the CBA or Orchard Road corridor.

The guideline on strata-sublettable of new commercial buildings does not apply to The Golden Mile. It makes our office units at The Golden Mile even more desirable and unique," adds Paul.

Curating the retail mix

While the strata office units and medical suites are available for sale, Perennial and Far East intend to keep the retail units in order to curate the shopping experience at The Golden Mile.

Paul recalls the vibrancy and eclectic retail mix that characterised the shopping atrium at Golden Mile Complex in the 1970s. However, as the retail units at the former Golden Mile Complex were strata-titled, ownership changed hands, and tenants likewise changed. "Over the years, the positioning as a prime mixed-use development has been lost."

An artistic impression of the retail atrium at Golden Mile Complex. (Picture: Ideal Choice/The Edge Singapore)

The developers are determined to recapture and elevate the building's status as a mall-cum-commercial development.

"We refreshed the retail mix with atrium well-being and food and light and casual restaurants in the space, evoking its original design of a "street shop-style" retail experience. "I believe the retail units will augment and complement the office and residential units," says Paul.

Momentum of rejuvenation

Mirin Wong, executive director of property research for East Organization, shares that the rejuvenation of Golden Mile Complex will be a key catalyst for the transformation and rejuvenation of the Beach Road precinct.

"When the Golden Mile Complex was first conceived, it was part of a broader redevelopment plan to revitalise the stretch of Beach Road," says Wong. "Over the past few years, that vibrancy has waned and received. In recent years, the energy has returned."

For instance, the mixed-use development Duo by Kingsford Group's Midtown, which opened its phase one last year, is transforming the other end of Beach Road and the Bugis area. The new condominium Pinetree Hill, which is also located along Beach Road, is another project that will complement it. Wong says Duo is now a hotbed for budding targeted for completion next year.

The redevelopment of Golden Mile Complex is also key to redefining the 50-year stream of uplifting the stretch of Beach Road, says Wong. "It is not just the preservation, rather of the landmark development but its contribution to the overall revitalisation of the precinct."

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