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New plan to manage city's growth spurt

(27-04-2008)

As the nation prepares to cheer the day North and South finally reunified in 1975, city officials discuss a plan that will map a new stage of development for the economic hub. **Mai Suong** reports.

The country's largest city is about to get even bigger, with a re-zoning plan that will amalgamate HCM City with dozens of surrounding areas in all four directions into a super urban zone.

The master plan, submitted by the city's People's Committee to the Ministry of Construction last March, runs until 2025, and will see the current HCM City as the nucleus of a HCM City urban zone that will be expanded outside the city limits and the Thu Thiem new urban area.

The master plan calls for more than just extending the city limits on paper, but for massive restructuring and infrastructure development to ease the chaos of the city. Part of the plan includes provisions for four main corridors with major roads and highways to better link the various parts of the city.

As the city works to incorporate the abundance of industries and services sprouting with development, the plan also sets out to try and bring order to the chaos. The plan calls for specialised centres, such as tertiary education and science research centres in Viet Nam National University HCM City area (part of it in Thu Duc District) in the city's southern urban areas, District 9 and Nha Be, Binh Chanh, Cu Chi and Hoc Mon districts.

Accompanying the growth in industry comes an attached investment in social services. The People's committee has kept this in mind, with plans for institutions such as hospitals, medical and pharmaceutical research centres to be built in districts 2, 9, 7, and 12 and Thu Duc, Binh Chanh, Binh Tan, Nha Be, Can Gio, Hoc Mon and Cu Chi districts.



Promising horizon: A corner of HCM City on the bank of the Sai Gon River. With natural advantages of climate, geology, as well as an enthusiastic population of young people, HCM City is projected to become one of the region's future economic tigers. — VNA/VNS Photo Hoang The Nhiem



For old times sake: Local residents gather in public areas to cheer the day in 1975 which saw the defeat of the US-backed regime in Sai Gon and the country's ultimate reunification. — VNS Photo Thanh Vu



Leading figure: HCM City has been maintaining high economic growth rates for many years. The city is currently contributing 20 per cent of the entire country's GDP. — VNA/VNS Photo Van Khanh

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Preservation and more

With all the construction projects, some thought has also been put into conservation, as plans call for the preservation of landscapes and historical and architectural heritage, including the current city's central areas in districts 1 and 3, District 5's Cho Lon area, and Binh Thanh District's Ba Chieu area.

To deal with the increasing population, plans call for new blocks to be built with building density in mind, saving land for public services and green space.

The Binh Quoi-Thanh Da urban area should also be developed, according to the plan.

In the additional inlaying areas of the city, the plan gives priority to the development of new large-scale urban and residential areas.

These areas include a 5,000ha science and technology urban area in a part of Thu Duc District and District 9, with plans for a hi-tech park, a National University HCM City park and an ethnic minority cultural and historical park.

A tourism and ecological urban areas in part of Hoc Mon District and District 12 will be set up and several new urban areas in Binh Tan and Binh Chanh districts will be created near industrial parks. Southern urban areas and new residential areas in District 7 will also be expanded.

In the outlying areas, two new large-scale urban areas will be the focus, including the northwest 6,000ha urban area in Cu Chi and Hoc Mon districts and the 1,600ha urban area in Hiep Phuoc Port.

Other new urban areas will be developed in Hoc Mon, Cu Chi, Binh Chanh, and Nha Be districts.

By 2025, the city urban zone will have 52 industrial parks and export processing zones specialising in hi-tech industry.

Details

The detailed proposal for the HCM City urban zone consists of current HCM City and other urban areas in Dong Nai Province's Bien Hoa City, Nhon Trach and Long Thanh districts; Binh Duong Province's Thu Dau Mot Town and Di An District; Tay Ninh Province's Trang Bang District; and Long An Province's Duc Hoa, Ben Luc and Tan An districts.

In the east, the corridor along the HCM City – Long Thanh – Dau Giay Expressway will link to urban areas in Dong Nai Province's Bien Hoa City and Long Thanh and Nhon Trach districts.

In the south, the corridor will connect the urban areas along Nguyen Huu Tho Road and Hiep Phuoc Port.

The northwest corridor along National Highway 22 will connect to

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urban areas in Long An Province's Duc Hoa District, Tay Ninh Province's Trang Bang District and Binh Duong Province's Thu Dau Mot Town.

The south and south-west corridor along Nguyen Van Linh Road will link to Binh Chanh District's centre and the Tan Kien and southern urban areas.

Urban zone

As part of the plan, the current city's centre, which consists of districts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 and part of Binh Thanh District, and the urban areas in Thu Thiem (737ha) will form the main nucleus of the proposed urban zone to 2025.

Other major centres will also be created in four directions, including an eastern 280ha area along the HCM City – Long Thanh – Dau Giay Expressway in District 9's Long Truong Ward.

There will also be a northern 300ha centre in the northwest new urban area, a western 200ha centre in the area bounded by National Highway 1 in Binh Chanh District's Tan Kien Commune, and a southern 98ha one in southern urban areas' Park A.

The city's People's Committee has also proposed a 50ha sub-centre in the north of Hoc Mon District and another, also 50ha, in the south of Nha Be District. — VNS

Saigonese talk good and bad sides to city's changing face

by Quynh Hoa - Thu Huong - Van Dat



Ly Lan, 51, celebrated writer

I was born in 1957 in Sai Gon (former name of HCM City), so I was 18 at the end of the American war. At that age, I was mature enough to see the evidence of the terrible destruction caused by the war and its heartrending consequences. This ugly war still haunts my mind.

Today, Sai Gon has become a much more bustling city, with most of its residents struggling to earn a living. I also must work pretty hard for many hours every day. I think the city's residents not only live for today but for yesterday and tomorrow as well.

As a writer, as I observe the city's fast-paced life, I realise that life changes and everything always keeps moving on. So I refuse to dwell on the question of HCM City's present life and its current values. I hope that many city residents will start to have a more polished manner and HCM City will become better organised. However, it won't be a surprise to me if the city still remains as youthful, stirring and chaotic as it is today.



Tran Thi Kim Thoa, 27, editor at the HCM City Cinema Magazine



I have been to many large cities, both within Viet Nam and overseas, which helps me to identify the unique characteristics of HCM City. First and foremost, the city's size, vigour and multi-cultural aspect have turned it into a mini-Viet Nam. You can meet many people who have migrated from the northern, western or central regions of the country. You can also enjoy these regions' specialities at almost every corner of Sai Gon. It can be said that wherever you come from, you will never feel like a fish out of water.

To me, the city is very close to my heart, not only because it's where I grew up but also because of its special hustle. For instance, I really love the bustle all over the city every year as Tet approaches. These things are very simple, but they add a lot of colour to the city's unique beauty.

However, there are still problems for the city to solve. For example, despite its modernity, litter can be seen right in the city's heart. And daily traffic jams caused by a weak public transportation system make travelling a real nightmare. The gap between the rich and the poor is increasingly visible. My only wish now is that the current high inflation can be controlled soon so that city residents can be freed from the heavy burden on their daily expenses.



Nguyen Vinh Vu, 33, chairman of Hong Ha Construction Management and Investment Consultant Joint-Stock Company

I was born in Ha Noi and moved to HCM City for university and decided to settle down here. More than 15 years has passed. The city has been developing a lot, and from the viewpoint of an architect, I saw that the most developed part is the city's infrastructure. It is expanding incredibly, with more and more buildings and luxurious places, more cars and more people, and they look stylish.

However, what makes me a little sad is that the young people are now more materialistic. They will be the owners and leaders of the city, but the way they live and enjoy life makes me worry about the future. But this doesn't mean all of them have the same lifestyle.

I have had a chance to work with young architecture graduates in my business. They are very ambitious, but have a low commitment. Labour demand is really high in the city but young people are working towards external values rather than internal ones.

I feel behind when I see fashion and the way teenagers are now enjoying their lives. I don't understand the game shows on TV and am shocked with fashion trends on the streets. I understand that's the way life has to be, but for the generation that's older like us, it is still a shock.

Lam Que Binh, 23, administrative assistant at VSL Viet Nam company

I was born into a family of Chinese origin. I'm a Vietnamese but my great-grandfather is Chinese. My hometown of HCM City, though it is only 300 years old, is a melting pot of many cultures. French-style buildings are the thing I love the most in the city. However, I think the city is now developing into a kind of new Singapore, which I don't prefer.



As a young Saigonese, personally I think the residents don't care much about politics, which really contrasts with young Hanoians. They consider politics an impractical thing and often laugh at anyone showing any interest in such topics. What's more, localism has begun to spread among a small portion of teenagers. They dislike people migrating from other provinces.

Apart from those problems, I think HCM City is a really good hunting ground for young people like me.



Nguyen Thi Tu An, 24, student at the sociology department, HCM City University of Social Sciences and Humanities

I wasn't born lucky with a disability in my legs and my family condition was not ideal to help me overcome challenges. My childhood was really tough since I had to struggle with society's prejudice and insults. Though I still got through all of it and set my foot in a reputable university.

I can see that the situation has improved a lot. I know from my experience of being discriminated against when I was a little girl. In the near term, my urgent duty is to complete my studies with good marks.

But I'm planning after my graduation that I will call for a project to help disabled people, especially women. I want to participate in the city's development. Other friends have their own plans to enrich or enlarge the city, but I have a plan to help people who are not lucky like me to get equal treatment and opportunities in the city's noisy life.

Nguyen Le Kien, 28, director of Railway Advertising Company

I set up my own business two years ago and I have many plans and initiatives. Things in the city are moving fast and I'm afraid I will fall behind and become sluggish. HCM City is an open market and it offers plenty of opportunities for young people to prove ourselves. In addition, it's easier for me to conduct all of my initiatives rather than propose them and wait for complicated procedures of approval from hundreds of top people in such a big company.



I'm pretty lucky to be born in the generation that is the link between people born after the country's reunification and those born when the country conducted its *doi moi* (renewal). I am very happy to see that the position of the Vietnamese people has improved.

The painful past is over. It's time for development. With the natural factors of climate, geology and an active young people, there is no doubt that the city will thrive to become one of the regional economic tigers soon.

However, I feel pretty worried about those people who were born in the 90s. They have good living conditions and their parents are far more overprotective than before. Many of them seem to live without ambition or plans as their lives are so good and they have nothing to worry about.



Nguyen Ngoc Thuan, 26, lab technician at TUV Rheinland LGA

I feel lucky to be born into a good family and that the country is at peace so that I can enjoy studying and my family and friends. Compared with previous generations or other young people in countries where war is occurring, I feel much happier.

I now have a good job as a lab technician in a foreign company. The salary is OK for me to live and support my family. Our country is changing and developing day by day. However, there are still many people who have to eke out a living doing hard jobs. The development gap in our society is becoming more distinct.

For the young generation, we cannot waste our time doing useless things. Learning foreign languages and computer skills are important. Soft skills are also required. I have witnessed dozens of young people who have failed to be recruited by my company because they lack English skills.

In my opinion the younger generation is more dynamic but is also more affected by foreign cultures. They don't save much time for their families due to the requirement of jobs.

Huynh Van Dan, 25, staff at Wella Viet Nam

I am among the dynamic young people who expect to make their own fortune. I am now working as an import-export staff for a cosmetics firm in HCM City. It is not a very interesting job but I have to do it to save money for further projects.



I am also taking care of my own orchid garden in my hometown in Long An Province with the expectation of expanding it in the future and opening an orchid service company. I hope to visit other countries, such as Thailand, to learn more about raising orchids and bring different varieties to raise them here. Not many people in Viet Nam have much experience in the orchid industry, which is a profitable sector.

My concern? There is now a wider gap between the poor and the rich. Young people of the nouveau riche often like to live their lives in a licentious way or imitate lifestyles from foreign countries. It's an unhealthy lifestyle affecting our generation. And there are still a lot of beggars on our city's streets, which affects the city's beautiful look and the tourism industry. I hope the Government will offer social welfare and help the poor more.

Dang Thanh Minh, 23, unit sales manager at Kimberly-Clark Viet Nam

I'm very pleased with my present life and my job brings me happiness and a good salary. I'm now a unit sales manager at Kimberly-Clark Viet Nam. My responsibility is to manage 14 salespeople, set up targets and perform strategies proposed by the company's management board.

I feel lucky to have graduated during our country's integration in world trade. However, I have to try my best to compete with staff from regional countries and overseas students.

As for my lifestyle, like most young people born after 1985, I am very ambitious and easy-going. We wish to become wealthy in a short period of time and have a high position in society. That is the reason we try to learn everything and get as much experience as possible to work in multinational corporations or even run our own businesses.

I think the dream can be realised if we try our best. Young people often like to have their own business, but my dream is to become one of the best CEOs in Viet Nam. Younger people, however, are spending less time with their families and more time at their jobs and relaxing and dancing. I do also. — VNS

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