

TRANSIT SHELTER

EXPERT: KL PARK CAN SHELTER THE HOMELESS

It will provide a solid social structure for their reintegration into society, says associate professor

VEENA BABULAL
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

OPENING Taman Tasik Titiwangsa and other public parks as transit shelters for the homeless has been suggested as a way to address the problem of homelessness in the city.

In an academic paper co-written by sustainable landscape architecture expert Associate Professor Dr Osman Mohd Tahir and



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his student, the initiative would provide a solid social structure to help the homeless get back on their feet while rehabilitating them at the same time.

Osman, from Universiti Putra

Malaysia, said the concept was inspired by the successful implementation of such a project in Wichita, the United States.

He added that there was a need for people from all walks of life to integrate in public parks for the facilities to function as intended.

The paper suggested that those seeking shelter would be required to put in the hours for the park's general upkeep, a form of payment for the rent-free facilities provided.

The occupants would be trained by the park's operator to upkeep its facility by doing gardening, maintenance, as well as clearing the area of garbage.

Osman said this would reduce a park's maintenance expenditure, which was between 10 and 20 per cent of its development cost.

Taman Tasik Titiwangsa was picked as the location for the shelter due to its proximity to two transit centres in Jalan Pahang and Medan Tuanku.

He said this was to ensure that the occupants were not cut off from their past, social circles and jobs.

"The shelters, which are semi-permanent, would function like dorms. It should be segregated by sex and equipped with amenities, such as toilets or kitchens."

"They must have space for the occupants to cultivate a garden and subsist off the land," he said, adding the occupants should be allowed to stay at the facility up to a year.

Osman had earlier said support services, such as food, medicine, counselling and job matching, would be provided to the occupants, who would be vetted and selected by the park operator.

He said wardens should be hired by the operator to ensure that the occupants adhere to ground rules and curfews.

Although the occupants were free to do as they please at the facility, he said, they would have

to follow the operator's rules.

"They will be free (to do as they please), but there will be rules like they cannot use or possess substance, commit crimes or do anything against the house rules determined by the operator."

Although Osman said the facility's mechanisms had yet to be worked out, he hoped to collaborate with Kuala Lumpur City Hall and other agencies to make the project a reality.

The paper identified a small area in the park near a football field as a likely location for the shelter, which is expected to house around 100 homeless people.

Osman hoped that private companies would fund the project.

"We'll engage City Hall soon. We hope that it would serve as the project's gatekeeper and planner."

Upon the completion of the project, Osman hoped that such an initiative would be expanded to other cities, such as George Town and Johor Baru.



Taman Tasik Titiwangsa is picked as the location for the shelter due to its proximity to two transit centres in Jalan Pahang and Medan Tuanku. PIC BY SURIANIE MOHD HANIF