

Mixing rental and sold flats allows for integration amid increasing economic inequality: Desmond Lee

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SINGAPORE - When policymakers were mulling over whether to include rental flats in new projects under the prime location housing model, there were some who strongly advised against doing so, said National Development Minister Desmond Lee.

But he noted that providing amenities and opportunities for people to share and use together can enable those of different socio-economic statuses to mix and intermingle.

"My belief is that will provide the kind of social discourse that we really need to foster proactively in a society where you might see social economic divide beginning to strain and pull apart (communities)," he said during a panel discussion on Monday (Jan 24) at the Singapore Perspectives 2022 forum organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

The forum was held at Sands Expo and Convention Centre at Marina Bay Sands.

Mr Lee was responding to a question on how to ensure mixing rental flats with sold flats would have their intended effect of uplifting those of a lower income and encouraging integration.

"This is an area which is always fraught with challenges," he said, adding that there are some who believe separating those living in rental housing from the rest of the community would lead to the gentrification of certain areas in the country, and leave those of lower incomes in a downward spiral.

However, there are also concerns about putting those living in rental flats "in the company of people they perceive as being more successful", he noted.

"Will it be a plus? Will it motivate them? Will it demotivate them? Will it be a fraught experience? I think time will tell," said Mr Lee.

Recounting his experiences of visiting estates where rental flats and sold flats are co-located, Mr Lee said residents had a mixed experience.

"It's not all one way - not everyone welcomes it. But people also recognise that this is important for social mixing," he said, adding that some had also cautioned against mixing rental and sold flats in the prime location housing model when it was being designed.

He said experts, such as sociologists and social workers, advise that infrastructure is just one enabling piece for integration.

"So just living with people who may be of a different socio-economic status than you - that's infrastructure design. But you programme it well, you enable people to mix and intermingle."