



## LUXURY IN SPACE, A NEW MEANING

**Architect Arosh Gamage,** explores the possibility of designing affordable spaces, with cost effective, energy efficient, environmentally friendly approaches, while giving priority to the architectural beauty of space.

By **Roshini Wickramanayake / Zeena Marikkar**

Just at the beginning of the year 2000/2001, condominium projects were new to

Battaramulla. Though Colombo by then was inundated with medium rise condominiums, the trend had not caught up fully in the salubrious suburbs. Eco-Condo, termed to mean Economical Condominium is a medium rise project, built a few years ago in Battaramulla. This project saw the developer exploiting the needs of a specific category of buyers, and addressing these with the involvement of an architect. The main target group was clearly identified as Young families with

good corporate jobs, who were just starting out on their own. They couldn't afford large spacious apartments or personalized houses, but aspired to a luxurious, efficient living style. Battaramulla was a haven to fulfill the needs of this category of buyers and was selected as the location for the project by the developer. The area, with reasonably priced plots, was exclusively residential with large trees surrounding it. This was also convenient in terms of access to other services; super

markets, filling stations, banks, clothing stores ....etc., which have spilled beyond Colombo to tap emerging townships.

The architects challenge came in the form of providing "designer homes", within the means of each family, while giving ample profit to the developer. The initiative was to take a calculated decision to incorporate the elements the buyers would readily associate with exclusiveness. Electronically operated doors to avoid intruders, above average sanitary

ware & fittings, air conditioning for where it was essentially required, teak door & window frames, mainly because it was obtained cheap and the Aluminium glazed sliding doors are the only items that have been used to suggest luxury. The cost incurred here was compensated with broader strategies for cost cutting technology and sustainability. This was done, all the while ensuring pleasing spaces and aesthetics. All of the units were pre-sold and the resale value was unexpectedly high within a year, by which time

concominiums were gaining popularity in the area

Although more compact, and smaller in scale, the project in Kalubowila built a year later, had similar beginnings and followed a similar approach throughout planning design and construction.

The Architect, a lecturer in nature studies and sustainable principles, highlights that it was the inspiration from nature, 'Doing the most with least means', that lead to these designs

The construction cost was Rs.995.00 and Rs. 1050.00 per square foot, for Battaramulla and Kalubowila in the years 2001 and 2002 respectively, a comparatively lower cost by any means.

The Eco-Condo, Battaramulla is set out on a 20 perch block and consists of 12 units, each 850 sqft on three storeys. The walk-up apartment at Kalubowila is on a 9 perch block having 4 units each of 750 sqft and a ground floor office. All these, parking and common roof top facilities are comfortably arranged in limited

land with innovative space manipulation. The structure is of simple column and beam with a few loads-bearing walls. External walls and the boundary walls are of rough plastered brick masonry which aims to reduce heat dissipation into the building. Most of the internal walls are block work four inches wide, and gives more usable floor area to the living spaces. The remaining load bearing walls are left un-plastered. This gives an ethnic feel to the space the 'in thing' in design. The column grid is positioned to align with the







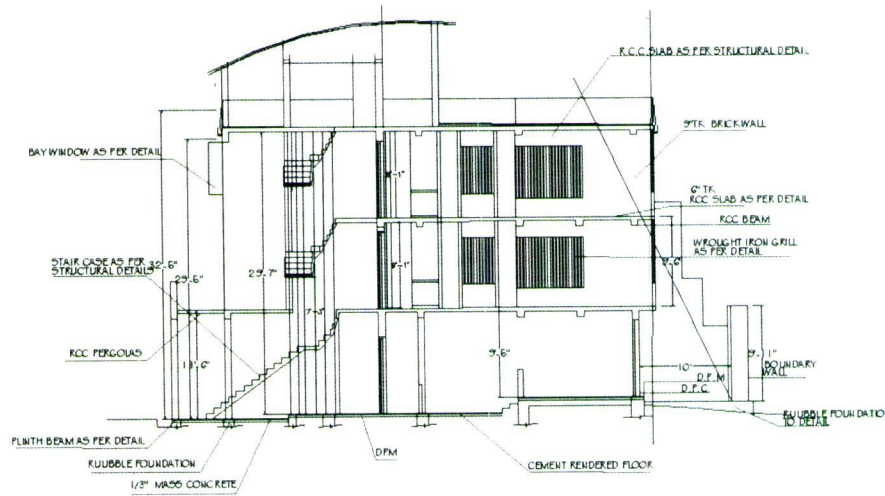
material chosen, has allowed for a pleasing soffit finish cutting down largely on construction time. Floors & pantry tops are cut cement, the re-emerging trend - tiles are used only where it is necessary. All tile layouts had been done to the exact measurements of the site allowing minimum wastage. While emphasizing on a cozy affordable domain, the design allows calculated social interaction, essential and pleasant to the busy living style

of the occupants. Taking into account that these families have little transitional time from work to home and vice versa, usually commuting to Colombo for work, school etc. Community living for them would be a "good morning", an evening smile, a weekend barbeque or kids play.

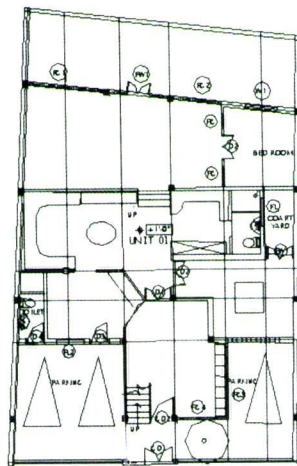
The ground floor and the roof top are common for all units and are left for community interaction and services in both the projects. The ground floor houses the car parks with car washing area and ancillary

service. These spaces allow the daily greetings of the occupants, with the rear space bringing in sun light and greenery to cheer users. Built in seats and landscaped pockets enhances the intimacy, of the otherwise sterile car park. Lobbies on each floor are semi public spaces that allow a closer interaction of occupants living on a single floor. Sunlight filtered in through small niches, cuts away the gloom in these lobbies. The rooftop is reserved for evening gatherings. This space is kept open and

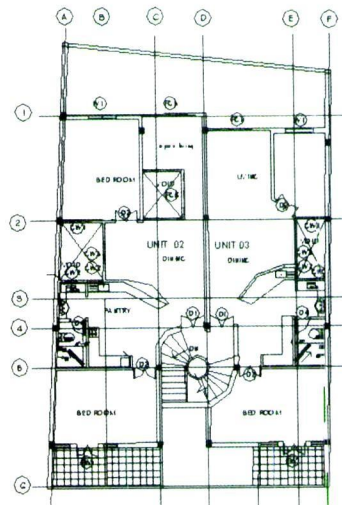
flexible with a small pantry area under the cover of the water tank. Mobile shades put up by the occupants, work just as well for occasional parties or gatherings on the roof top occupied with changing hues of the sky. The transparent timber & iron spiral stairway, A special feature in the Kalubowila condominium, winds up connecting all dwellings utilizing minimum space. Its transparency hints at interaction among the dwellers while giving a softening effect to the solid structure.



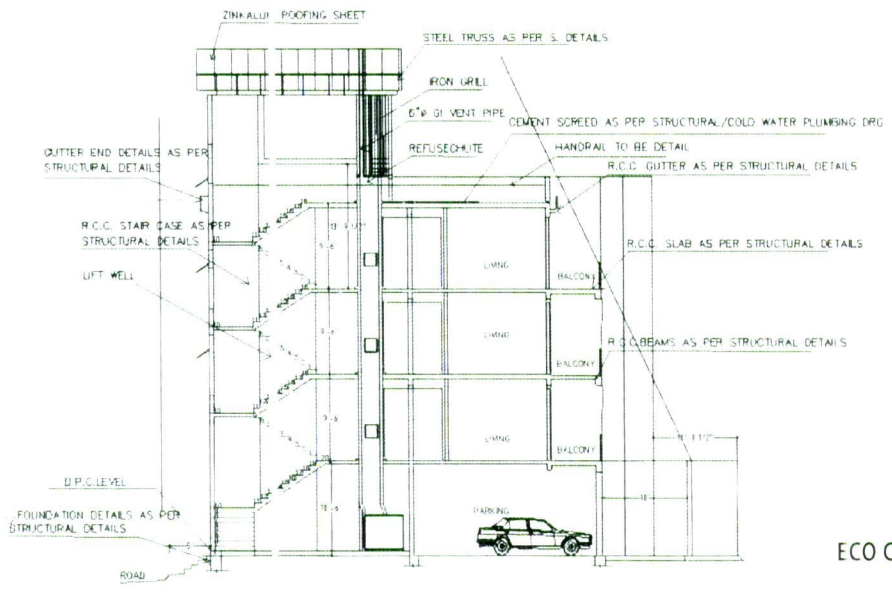
CONDOMINIUM- OFFICE - SECTION A-A



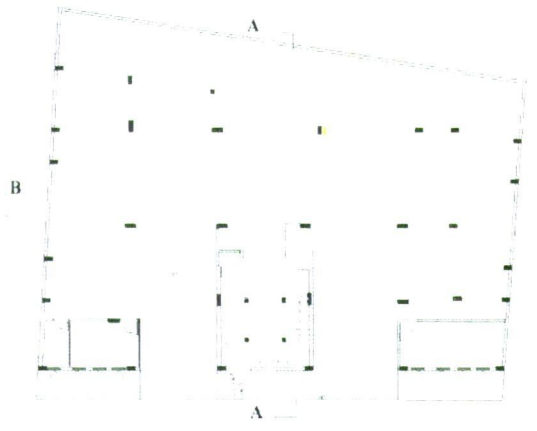
CONDOMINIUM- OFFICE - PLAN 1



CONDOMINIUM- OFFICE - PLAN 2



ECO CONDO - SECTION A-A

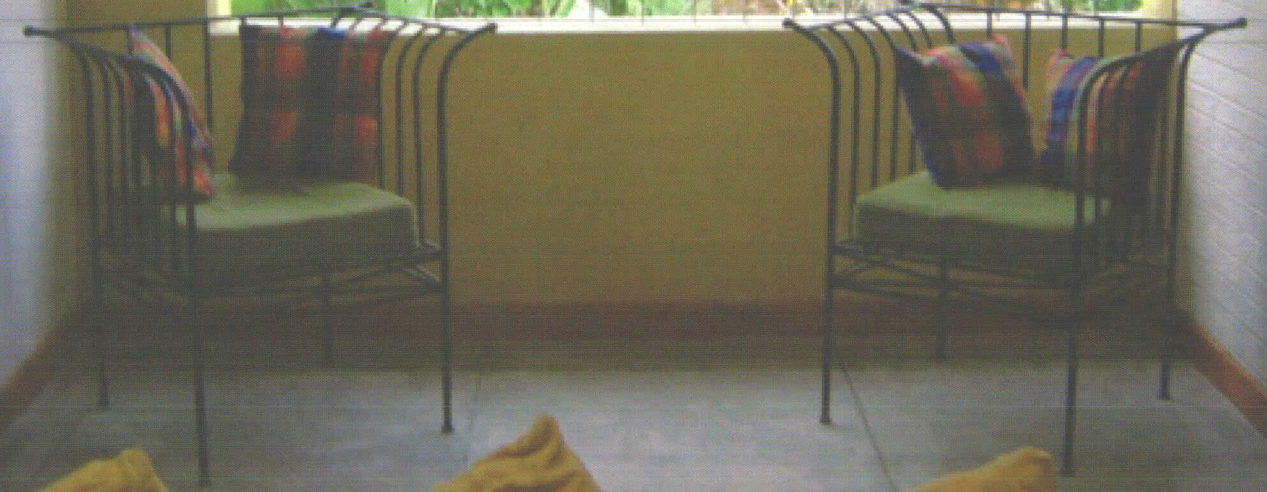


ECO CONDO - PLAN 1



ECO CONDO - PLAN 2









The common spaces provided here and the size of the units itself are deemed to be inadequate for when the families age and the children grow up. Nevertheless, there is always a higher resale value, for another generation of newly weds eagerly looking for beautiful affordable places to call their own.

Photography :  
© Nuwan Premaratne

Architect :  
Arosh Gamage AIA(SL)

Arosh manages her own Architectural firm and is a lecturer at the University of Moratuwa.

Eco- Condo/ Battaramulla  
Consultants :  
NCD Consultants  
Client :  
Star Trading Company (Pvt) Ltd  
Civil Contractor :  
Chandims Builders  
Project Period :  
Completed 2001  
Total Area : 7098 sqft  
No of Units : 12  
Area of Each Unit : 850 sqft  
Site Area : 20 p

Condominium- Office /Kalubowila  
Consultants :  
NCD Consultants  
Client :  
Mr & Mrs A.D Gamage  
Civil Contractor :  
OSANO Constructions  
Project Per od :  
Completed 2002  
Total Area : 5045 sqft  
No of Units : 04 ground Floor  
Office  
Area of Each Unit : 750sqft  
Site Area : 09 p

The writers are Practicing Architects and actively involved in teaching Architecture

What you need to know about getting what you are promised when purchasing a condominium. **Deepali Mody** Finds out.

So you want to buy a condo? Perhaps its being sold to you after the construction is completed; perhaps you want to get a good deal and purchase it while the developer is pre selling. What do you need to know so that what you get as the final product is what you were promised on paper?

**Firstly- What is a Condominium?**

A condominium is a property that is privately owned while sharing with other condominium owners many common spaces. That is buildings constructed on a single property that can be divided into separate units which can be individually owned.

**How are the limits of a condominium defined?**

The boundaries of a condominium and the common spaces are defined through a Condominium Plan. The Condominium Plan has three sections in it or what is known as schedules. These are :

i)A Plan and schedule that identifies the land and extent and also identifies each condominium parcel within the subdivided property giving its boundaries, floor area and

location within the building (i.e. which floor, assessment number)

ii)A plan and schedule that identifies common areas (common Elements) within the subdivided property

iii)A schedule that gives what share as a percentage, each units owns of the common elements.

**Common Elements include**

The structure of the building such as foundations, beams, columns, car parks, recreational spaces, fire escapes, corridors, stairs, tanks, sumps, generator rooms, transformers rooms and so on. Ajithaa Edirimane in her invaluable book on condominiums<sup>1</sup> however has this to say about the validity of condominium plans in Sri Lanka:

*Currently, Land registrars maintain registers only of particulars given in the First Schedule registering the Condominium units. The common elements are not registered but only a note of the share value as attributable to the respective condominium unit is recorded in connection with the registration of the said unit. Ideally, details of Common Elements should also be registered as these constitute the co-owned property of the condominium owners. (pg16)*

**What is Pre-Selling?**

It is common practice worldwide for developers to pre-sell their

# SO YOU WANT TO BUY A CONDO ?

condo units in order to reduce their own capital investment in the construction of the project. The buyers of pre-sold condo units face some risks as well obtain some benefits

**RISKS?**

- # Verbal Promises and Sketch Design Plans from the developer may show common areas (such a multi purpose hall, play areas, green space) for the use of the residents which may not be provided later.
- # Spaces promised for the Exclusive Use of a particular unit (such as parking) may also not be provided.
- # There may be variations in the square footage of a unit from what is measured as-built after the completion of the building.
- # Services and facilities may not be provided as promised.

**BENEFITS?**

- # Generally the buyer is given a considerable reduction in price when the money is paid at the pre-construction stage
- # The buyer may also have the option of paying in instalments as the construction progresses.

**THE ORDER OF EVENTS**

Builder/ Developer want to construct a Condominium

Obtain Preliminary Planning Clearance from the UDA

Finds an Architect to design the Condominium on chosen property along with all Engineering and Construction Drawings and Bill of Quantities

Obtains Building Permit from Municipal Council or relevant local authority

Surveyor Makes Provisional Condominium Plan

# The buyer can request customization of finishes within his own units.

**So How Can one Remove the Risks of buying a Pre-Sold Apartment?**

In regards to this Ajithaa Edirimane recommends the Use of a Reservation Agreement.

*In the USA... Reservation Agreements are used for pre-selling Condominiums. Sale of Condominiums are however prohibited in the absence of a registered master deed (i.e. a deed registering a condominium property).....*

*Developers secure prospective purchasers with the payment collected in installments deposited in an Escrow Account kept under the custody of an escrow agent. (pg162)*

**How does a Purchaser get a Loan for a Pre-Sold Apartment?**

This question is answered when Ajithaa Edirimanne writes the following:

*In Sri Lanka, the apartment ownership law was amended to*

CMA Certificate is obtained

The processing of the application follows the following steps

- 1 CMA Engineers review the application submitted with the required details
- 2 CMA engineers prepare a checklist based on the information provided
- 3 The condominium plan that has been prepared by the surveyor is checked and certified by the CMA
- 4 The certificate committee meets to review the application and decision regarding approval is made

*protect prospective purchasers of non-existing condominiums and to assist financiers by introducing a concept called "Provisional Condominium Property" which is a condominium property based only on paper but having the recognition of law through registration. This is intended to be valid collateral for financiers, without which, obtaining funding from financial institutions will be a major hurdle for prospective purchasers (pg 164)*

A developer or buyer seeking loans from a financial institution would therefore need to show a certificate from the CMA for the Condominium property.

**What is the Provisional, Semi and Final Condominium Property?**

The Provisional Condominium Plan is a document created before the construction has commenced in order to define the condominium property. A project that is incomplete, but has some completed condominium parcels that are habitable can obtain a COC for these completed Parcels and register as a Semi Condominium Property. When the building is finally completed, COC can be obtained for the remaining

5 The certificate is issued Provisional Condominium Plan is registered with Land registry and CMA Bank Loan can then be obtained

Condominium Buyer found who pays a advance to the Builder/Developer

The buyer should make sure that a CMA certificate has been obtained. He should ask the developer for a copy of the provisional Condominium Plan and ascertain what provisions have been made for the disposal of solid waste (garbage), sewage, whether adequate electricity supply will

completed parcels and Registration as a Condominium Property obtained with the final condominium plans prepared by the surveyor. This makes it possible for deeds for each parcel to be transferred to the owner of completed parcels even if the building is not constructed. Deeds of declaration can be prepared for either semi, provisional or final Condominium Plan.

**What is a Deed of Declaration?**

A Deed of Declaration (DOD) is what is used to CREATE a Condominium property and transfers the rights of ownership of a condominium parcel to the owner. The DOD has many documents attached, of which, the main one is the Plan of Subdivision in the form of a Condominium Plan for Semi, Provisional or Condominium Plan. A DOD is used for transferring ownership only in the case of condominiums.

**What is the Condominium Management Authority (CMA) ?**

Earlier known as the Common Amenities board it was reconstituted as the Condominium Management Authority. The Common Amenities Board in earlier times

be provided, if water supply is adequate and if enough storage capacity has been provided in underground sumps and water tanks in case of water cuts. Also ascertain what parking facilities are being provided and whether this will be an accessory parcel to the condominium being purchased or a common element etc.

Building is partially or fully completed

COC is obtained from Municipal Council/Relevant Local Authority

Semi / Condominium Plan is prepared by surveyor

physically looked after the apartments under them. The CMA simply acts as a body taking care of the interests of the individual owners through management Corporations. The CMA is headed by the Chairman and the General Manager. It has a 'Certificate Committee' the members are from the UDA, Municipal Councils, the SLIA, IESL, Survey Department, NWS&DB, the Fire Department, the Chairman and the GM. The CMA is managed by a board which also has members from the UDA and the Municipal Councils, NHDA, NWS&DB and the treasury.

**Why Obtain a CMA Certificate?**

The CMA provides a "Certificate for Common Amenities and Common Elements of the Building/ Buildings of Condominium Properties." This Certificate issued by the General Manager of the CMA certifies that:

The common amenities provided for the welfare and benefit of the occupants of condominiums are satisfactory; and Arrangements made as regards the control, administration, maintenance and management of the common elements are satisfactory.

CMA Certificate is obtained Condominium is Registered with Land registry as Semi/Condominium Property

Deed of Declaration is prepared by Lawyer This has to be prepared within 18 months of the first sale of a parcel or within 3 months of the final completion of the building Owner of Condominium property obtains final deeds.

This **CMA Certificate** is essential in order to obtain the Registration of a Provisional, Semi or Completed Condominium Property with the Land Registry which in turn is essential in order to obtain loans from financial institutions.

**How do you obtain a CMA CERTIFICATE?**

In order to get certification from the CMA the builder is required to provide information regarding the project, including the following:

- Building Plan with Amendments if any approved by the Municipal Council/Relevant Local Authority
- Provisional/Semi/Condominium Plan
- Title certificate/ Title deed issued by the Registrar of title
- A proposal for the management system
- Implementation plan of the total construction Drawings on
  - a-Water system,
  - b-Waste water system
  - c-Sewerage system
  - d-Storm water system
  - e-Solid waste management syst;
  - f-Electrical system
  - g-telephone system
  - h-elevator system
  - i-Fire system

Labeling of parcels in a condominium property follow certain standards. All units are first denoted with the building number or letter, then with the floor on which the unit is situated and finally the unit laid out in consecutive numbering. Using this system a unit in building A on the 5th floor and being parcel no 4 would be labeled A F5 P4 Common Elements are denoted CE1 CE2 and so forth for the entire property. Even if there are many buildings on a single piece of land the Common Elements are jointly owned by the owners of the Parcels in ALL the buildings as a percentage share. There will be only ONE Management Corporation for the entire property

j-Any other relevant system. These should all be certified by a qualified person as specified in the apartment Ownership Law no 11 of 1973  
For the obtaining the Final Condominium Certificate all qualified consultants must issue a certificate stating that work was carried out as per standards and design requirements specified.

- Financial Report/ Cash Flow
- Mortgage details
- BOI Agreement
- Contractors details
- Consultants details
- BOQ
- Sales Details
- Contractors All Risk Policy and Workers Compensation policy
- Soil Investigation Report for structures more than 3000 sq ft
- Testing details ( e.g. Concrete Cement block)
- Details of actual progress
- Sales agreement
- Quality Control System
- Photographs
- Specifications and Standards
- For the Final Certification Manufacturers and installers Warrantees and Guarantees must be provided for the generator, Lift, Water proofing system, Main pump, Spare pumps

This certificate can be processed within 32 working days providing the application is in order. The Certificate is valid for one year, after which it needs to be renewed.

#### What are the Powers of the CMA?

• The CMA has the powers to assume the duties of the management Corporation that has neglected or failed to perform its duties

• The CMA can act as an arbitrator to resolve disputes that arise between the Management Corporation, owner, purchaser or mortgagee.

As clarified by Ajithaa Edirimane;

*The term 'resolve disputes' has not been defined under the Act. The Act is also silent on whether the decision of the board will have the same force as that of an arbitration award. For this reason, it is rational to assume that the dispute resolution method vested in the Board by statute, is a process of mediation or conciliation rather than arbitration yielding a binding answer.(pg 84)*

• The CMA will monitor the progress of the projects on a quarterly basis. The General Manager of the CMA has the right to intervene and take steps to safeguard the interest of mortgagees or buyers who have already paid an advance to the developer if he/she is of the opinion that the developer is not carrying out the construction of the project in terms of the implementation

plan filed with the Provisional Condominium Plan.

#### How does the CMA implement these powers?

The developer is required to send a progress report to the CMA every three months which is assessed by the CMA. However there is no standard format formulated as yet for the progress report and the evaluation of the progress. Perhaps these are things that the CMA will be able to formalize as more experience is gained. The Engineers at the CMA step in and offer guidance on projects where they feel progress is not at an acceptable level.

The benefits to the developer, buyer and mortgagee of registering a property with the CMA are fairly clear. Registration of the project as a Provisional Condominium Project with the Land registry and the CMA will ensure that there is some legal recourse in case of non delivery of promised facilities.

Regarding Amendments to the Provisional Condominium plans, the CMA discourages any changes being made. Changes can be made to areas not affecting common elements by re-obtaining building approval for the amended plan from the relevant planning agency and by

submitting the amended condominium plan. Where changes need to be made to common elements, written consent from all affected owners will have to be obtained.

In regards to the registering of the Management Corporation of the condominium property after completion of the project Ajithaa Edirimane says:

*It is interesting to note that there are no provisions in Act No. 39 of 2003 making it mandatory to notify the CMA of the registration of the Condominium or semi-condominium property and the consequent establishment of a management corporation. This is in spite of the mandatory regulation to obtain a Certificate from the CMA in respect of the common elements for the purpose of registering the sub-divided building as a condominium or semi condominium property.(pg49)*

Before purchasing an apartment it is recommended that the buyer ask the developer if the management corporation that has been formed is registered with the CMA to ensure that the property is under the jurisdiction of the CMA.

#### How is a Provisional, Semi or final Condominium Property Created?

The new Act no 39 of 2003 allows the registration of Condominium Properties that are yet to be built on. A Provisional Condominium property is a piece of land that has registered a Provisional Condominium Plan and a Deed of Declaration with the Land Registry.

All application whether it be for a Provisional Condominium Plan, Semi Condominium Plan or the Condominium Plan should be made in triplicate. The original and duplicate are sent to the land registry and the triplicate is sent to the General Manager of the Condominium Management Authority. Some of the information that needs to be provided in this application includes the following:

- Preliminary Planning Clearance (in case of Provisional Condominium property, a COC for completed units for Semi Condominium properties and Condominium Properties).
- The Condominium Plan (either provisional, semi or final)
- Preliminary Planning Clearance (in case of Provisional Condominium property, a COC for completed units for Semi Condominium properties and Condominium Properties).
- The Condominium Plan (either provisional, semi or final)
- Condominium Certificate from the General Manager of the CMA
- Implementation Plan for the

construction of the building if it is for a provisional or semi Condominium planning clearance, as well as a financial report confirming the cost of the construction from a qualified quantity surveyor, civil or structural engineer.

- A description of the common elements
- The percentage of each undivided share in the common elements assigned to each unit of the property
- A statement of purpose for which the building and each condominium unit is intended and restricted as to its use.

This is not a full list of the documents required but this can be obtained from Act no 39 of 2003, section 5 (a), (b) and (c). The Condominium Property is considered registered when the application has been signed and sealed by the Land registrar and cross references made in all relevant title registers.

#### Conclusion:

The CMA has been set up to protect the interests of the owners of condominiums and to ensure that they are adequately managed and maintained by the Management Corporation set up for the purpose. Currently the CMA is also in the process of convincing the residents of government built condominium housing units to form management corporations that will be

able to collect funds and handle the maintenance and administration of the flats.

The CMA should be careful to ensure that they do not become yet another road block for developers and builders by unnecessary bureaucracy and back log of applications. The CMA will have to look carefully at how it handles and processes application and put in very efficient systems for evaluating applications as well as providing clear and unambiguous guidelines for applicants to follow.

Finally it needs to be stressed that all too often in Sri Lanka, organizations such as these which are set up to help the general public, end up as a hindrance, because those who work in them see themselves in a position of power, with a mandate to make life difficult for any applicant. Care must be taken that the CMA, which has so far done an admirable job, does not slide into this trap.

#### References:

*Edirimane, Ajithaa, Understanding the Concept of Conominiums – A handbook on the Law and Practise based on the apartment ownership Law of Sri Lanka, 2006*  
ISBN – 955-99852-0-5 *Apartment Ownership Act no 39 of 2003*

#### Acknowledgements:

*I would like to thank all those below who gave of their valuable time and insight into this subject and helped clarify many matters*  
Mr. Saliya Wickramasinghe – Registered Liscenced Surveyor  
Mrs J Vasa, Attorney-at-Law  
Mr R L Wijeratne, Engineer CMA  
Mrs Nayana Palpita, Engineer CMA

#### Disclaimer:

*This article is not to be considered as legal advice. It is only an overview for the general readership of this journal.*

The writer is a Practicing Architect and a lecturer at The Colombo School Of Architecture.

#### Terms - What They Mean,

##### Condominiums and cooperatives:

Two forms of multiple-ownership that differ from each other in several major aspects. When you purchase a condominium, you become the title holder to the apartment or townhouse and also own an interest in the common elements of the building or complex. These common elements include grounds, exterior walls, stairways and elevators. When you purchase a cooperative apartment, you

become a shareholder in the corporation that owns the building. The stock that you purchase represents the ownership of your apartment in addition to your proportional share of the common elements of the building.

##### Duplex:

The term simply means a two-storey unit

##### Triplex:

An apartment with three levels.

##### Flats:

This type of apartment or

condominium occupies an entire floor of a building. For example, a two-flat is a two-storey building with one unit per floor.

##### Low rise, Mid Rise or High Rise:

Depends on the no of floors stacked vertically  
Low Rise : Ground + 2  
Intermediate Rise + 2 to 7  
Mid Rise : Ground +7 to 11  
High Rise : Over 12 floors

##### Lofts:

The term implies apartments, condominiums or even offices that have been carved out of

existing, older commercial buildings such as warehouses, factories, hospitals, schools or office buildings. A benefit of such conversions is that they preserve the architectural character and heritage of a city's aging industrial and commercial districts.

##### Row houses:

Row houses are the forerunners of today's town homes. The facades form a continuous row, but the structures are divided vertically internally so there are common walls between buildings.

##### Town homes:

Town homes often are condominiums, but share vertical walls with the neighbor on either side. Town homes typically have a garage on ground level and either a patio or balcony. Exterior walls, roofs and sometimes garages are designated as common elements.

##### Railroad Flat:

An apartment with all rooms organized in a linear sequence, which requires passing through one room (Bedroom) to get to the next (Kitchen, Bath).

##### Studio:

A one or two room apartment, where living and sleeping areas are combined as a single room. The kitchen is either a separate room or set in a wall off the living area. This type of kitchen is usually referred to as a "Pullman Kitchen", after the Pullman railroad cars.

##### Tenement:

A building with many apartments of which most open into an airshaft.

##### Walk Up Building:

This term refers to any building that does not have elevator service. It can apply to a brownstone, townhouse or a post-war 3-6 story building. These apartments can also be situated over storefronts located on the avenues or on side streets.

##### Chawl:

A common lifestyle among lower income families in India this is a one room space accessed from a Common balcony corridor which has a small kitchen at the rear. The

large room in front is used as both living and sleeping area. Toilets are common at the end of the corridor.

##### Penthouse:

The top most house of an apartment block. This usually has the complexity of a house on ground level. Private terraces, double height spaces, voids etc. Larger in area to the other apartments at lower level, penthouses also generally have luxurious finishes and embellishments.

Condominiums are booming business for developers and contractors, and investors see it as a secure place to put their money. Condominium buyers are by and large expatriate Sri Lankan and those looking for investment opportunities in the country. However Condominiums could be the answer to the much needed housing for city dwellers that currently live in sub standard housing or commute great distances to come in to work in the City. They could also contribute to a truly Urban Life style for the residents of Colombo. With his many years of experience at the UDA, it would be interesting to get Prasanna's views on the condominium developments taking place in Colombo.

POTENTIAL FOR URBANISATION

What would be your thoughts on densifying the city of Colombo vs Urban Sprawl that is currently happening in the Suburbs in terms of infrastructure requirements and the viability in terms of resources used?

**Urban Spaces need density to achieve efficiency** More people need to occupy a given service area where all the infrastructure is provided. This will lower the cost per person in the area as you don't need to spend on spreading your infrastructure out.

How Can Condominium Developments contribute to the Urban Lifestyle?

**Mixed developments need to be encouraged** where people live close to where they work. Urban neighborhoods need to provide a mix of services as well as accommodation for those providing those services. A self sufficient neighborhood would have to include banks, schools, clinics as well as



DEEPAI MODY INTERVIEWS

ARCHITECT PRASANNA SILVA TO UNCOVER MORE ABOUT THE CONDO BOOM IN COLOMBO

mechanic garages, janitorial services, IT services, offices and shops, recreational areas and parks. This will cut down on the requirement for transportation as these places can be reached by foot.

Colombo already has high density cores such as Kotahena, Grandpass and Hulstorf. What do you feel are the biggest problems faced in these areas?

These High density areas in Colombo are concretized. There are not enough recreational or green spaces. There are no detailed guide plans for the urban blocks. Standards in PUBLIC OPEN SPACE requirements should be met within each urban neighborhood. There are standards that recommend a hierarchy of open spaces depending on the size and accessibility of a neighborhood. For instances you can have pocket parks within a small neighborhood while large parks can be provided in center cities where there is good public transportation and large number of users. In neighborhoods such as say Wellawatte, people are only putting up buildings and there is no balanced development.

**Public spaces are needed**

**from private businesses and builders to develop existing underutilized green and blue areas such as canal banks and beach fronts**

POTENTIAL FOR HOUSING SOLUTION

How can condominiums contribute to housing lower income groups? Are they a viable lifestyle for these income levels? What are the problems they encounter and what sort of solutions can we find for them?

People can change and adapt to different life-styles. People would like to live in a large house but the convenience of proximity to services can make apartment living a very attractive option. If you take the case of Sahasrapura, it is often cited as an example of failed housing for low income groups who were shifted there from shanties. However in my opinion it is not a failure due to the form of the housing but rather due to the lack of proper maintenance and the selling of apartments in order to make a profit by the people who were given these apartments. Since all of the facilities that would have been spread out over the area of the

shanty town such as roads, lights, drains and pipes have now been concentrated into a single apartment complex, the total area of maintenance has been considerably reduced. **The problem is the authorities designated to maintain these buildings are not doing so.**

When infrastructure is centralized then the body that maintains these should also be efficient. This is a problem that we are trying to solve with the CONDOMINIUM MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY (CMA). We are now looking at problems such as how to collect funds for long term maintenance and management of the building. When a builder applies for Condominium approval, a detailed proposal needs to be submitted by him on how the association intends to manage the buildings, and collect funds. What are the guarantees and warranties for the building and a checklist for maintenance. People are now thinking out solutions for all these problems.

**They are now going to realize that they are not living on the ground. They need to contribute and share in the maintenance of the building.**

**What forms of housing do you think is most suitable for different income groups within the Urban Context?**

We have done projects ranging from 40 units per acre to 320 units per acre which is too high a density. I would recommend an average density of 120 units per acre for housing complexes. To achieve these densities we cannot have detached type of housing. Rather we should go for housing units placed on top of each other freeing up the small open space that each unit would have had for large common areas which are more usable. Upper income housing generally has no need for spaces for social interaction while lower income communities are very interdependent and need more community spaces. Ideally cluster units would be more suitable than walkups or apartments.

**Would you be able to share with us any experiences that the UDA, NHDA or other government agency has had in these types of housing and their level of success or failure and your ideas on improvements to these designs**

Some of the successful government projects that I can give as an example would be Manning Town, which has center courtyards. However there are some safety and security concerns here as the design is inward looking while the outside spaces are ignored and have become dead spaces that are unsafe to use. Perhaps these courtyards should have been linked in some way. The Bambalapitiya Flats are a very successful example. Maligawatta flats were designed with a lot of green area and even has an urban forest. However over the years there is a lot of encroachment and there is no proper management as there has been no proper planning for funding to manage the building.

## POTENTIAL FOR GOOD DESIGN

**How can one implement balanced development in urban neighbourhoods?**

In many cities they implement what is known as GUIDED DESIGN PLANS (GDP's).

In this system professionals and qualified designers are given particular areas or city blocks to come up with urban design proposals or guidelines which are then available for anyone who wants to do a development in that neighborhood. Developers know beforehand what each block of land has been earmarked for and what the design guidelines for that land are.

Currently we have very general regulations and no system for checking the quality of a design that is submitted or if it is suitable for the context where the building will be located. Once you have a Guided Design Plan then the infrastructure requirements for the area can also be accurately determined and provided for.

**Can you give us an example of guided design in Colombo ?**

We currently have Guided Design Plans at the UDA for the Beira Lake and for Independence square.

**What are the potential snags in implementing guided design and how can they be overcome?**

One of the biggest draw backs is that there is no appreciation of design and architecture and people do not value these things in this country.

Of course all of these Plans need to be gazetted so that any change of government will not derail these proposals.

**How would one deal with private ownership of land that may be designated as open space in a guided design?**

You have things like betterment tax that the developers in that neighborhood would pay to the owner of the land that has been designated as an open area. One can also sell ones air rights to people developing properties around your land

**What advice would you give DEVELOPERS building Condominiums? How can they contribute to housing low income families?**

Currently Developers pay a service charge to the government which forms a fund that the government uses to construct housing. In a recent condominium development in Dematagoda, the developer was asked to contribute by providing low income houses behind the apartment complex that was constructed on Base line road.

Developments should follow the concept of compact cities where there are facilities for housing, working and recreation all within the same neighborhood.

For instance, if you take the Wanathamulla area, this has a large proportion of underserved settlements. However all of the residents here have access to jobs and services at Borella node. Better recreational facilities need to be provided. Another example would be the Narahenpita Hospital and education node. Here housing needs to be provided for all those who work in these sectors such as Doctors, Nursing staff, Janitorial staff etc. All categories of employees should be able to find accommodation as well as recreational facilities here. This node then would have to be serviced by a better transport link so that the general public can access these facilities. Ideally

this would be a loop that goes around the city in the form of a LRT line.

**Why are architecture and design always sidelined when it comes to public projects and preparation of urban designs?**

Architects should show more social responsibility and contribute to public projects. They cannot expect design leadership from government institutions when they have not contributed to these institutions. Architects need to join forces with government sector institutions as was done during the crisis faced during the Tsunami. Architects need to DO AND SHOW. They can contribute by showing people how a problem can be solved by the projects they do in the Private realm. I think the public needs to be shown what good design is.

**Finally, Is there any specific advice that you would like to give ARCHITECTS?**

Architects need to gain a better understanding of the social and economic needs of the country and become more familiar with the workings of the bureaucracy. A rapport needs to be established with the officials and decision makers in government and we need to empathize with the problems they face. We need to walk in their shoes so that the solutions we formulate are based on ground realities while upholding design values.

Prasanna Silva is currently the Acting Director General of the UDA and a Fellow of the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects.

## CAN COLOMBO COPE WITH GOING HIGH?

Archt. D.H.Wijewardene questions the adequacy of Greater Colombo's infrastructure to sustain the mushrooming condominium developments.

The way of living in cities and suburbs is undergoing a radical change due to socio-economic and security reasons. Especially, the middle and upper middle classes now tend to live in closed and secure neighborhoods. Living in Condominiums is becoming popular not only in Asia where land is scarce, but

also in Australia and New Zealand where availability of land is not a major constraint. High land prices, transportation difficulties and poor infrastructure facilities are also contributory factors. Colombo which has all the qualifying reasons for high rise living has embraced this trend on a large scale. It is amazing to note that "living in flats" which was not the most desired way of living a decade ago, has now become popular.

### Public Open Spaces

What is compromised when one

decides to live above ground? Obviously it is the garden space or the open areas. With a large number of Condominiums already constructed and over 3000 units on the way, it is timely to see what is available to the city dwellers and what action the authorities have taken to meet growing demand. Since Independence, creation of open public spaces has not been a priority and even available land has been converted for other uses. It is doubtful whether the most preferred public space in Colombo, the Galle Face Green

would be open to public even after its present improvements, for it's in a high security zone. The other green area easily accessible in Colombo is the Viharamahadevi Park. The state of this park in Colombo can only be described as "Horrible". The trees are dwindling, garden furniture is broken or occupied by beggars and children's amusement area is completely neglected and the area is a heaven for undesirable activities. With a large number of "Condos" that are coming up, there is no provision in any of the master plans to create or rehabilitate open spaces.

Chart 1 lists some of the open public spaces in Colombo and it clearly shows that the majority are "occupied" by exclusive clubs who reserve the space for their Membership. These areas are completely out of bounds for the average citizen. There are also many play grounds within Government schools but then again these areas are not accessible to the general public. So where can the common man relax? An indication of lack of such spaces is the use of Independence Square at Torrington, as a jogging ground! Sri Lanka might be the only country using a ceremonial location for such an activity.

Government planning authorities have completely ignored setting up of public spaces even when there are opportunities. Two large land parcels that the UDA offered to the housing developers, namely the land close to Borella cemetery and the former Spinning & Weaving Mills land in Wellawatta. These two sites are today being developed as luxury housing, preventing any common facility. These two plots could have been converted to public open spaces like Galle Face Green. The Wellawatta site would have been ideal for this as it connects two major roads and is located within a dense Condo area. Why cannot the planning authorities shift to this line of thinking? As a high

Facility	Location	User/Status
1. BRC Grounds	Havelock Road	Private
2. Nomads Grounds	Horton Place	Reserved for a project
3. Sinhalese Sports Club	Maitland Crescent	Private
4. Otters Club	Bullers Road	Private
5. Eighty Club	Independent Square	Private
6. Police Park Grounds	Thimbrigasyaya	Private
7. Medical Association Grounds	Borella	Govt Medical Officers
8. Sports Ministry Grounds	Independence Square	Sports Personnel
9. Campbell Park	Borella	Public
10. Viharamahadevi Park	Darmapala Mv	Public, but no free access
11. Hyde Park	Union Place	Public, but no free access
12. Saravanamuttu Grounds	Colombo 13	Private
13. Galle Face Green	Galle Face	Closed for improvements, but in High Security Zone
14. Sugathadasa Stadium	Colombo 10	Public, but no free access

Chart 1 - Parks and Grounds in the City of Colombo

official of the National Physical Planning Agency, once remarked, "it is because the Urban Development Authority, which is the "decision maker", operates on a 'Commercial Basis'. They generate funds for survival and this type of social benefit is set aside for obvious reasons". As a result whenever a large land parcel becomes vacant, generating money becomes the prime concern. What will be the future of Colombo which was once called the "Garden City"?

However, the UDA in its initial missions gave much emphasis to public open spaces in city planning. This is evident in the lay outs prepared for Sri Jayawardenepura which was to be the Administrative Capital of Sri Lanka. The open ground in front of new Parliament is one good example of these layout plans. Heavy usage of these grounds by the public is a proof of very high demand.

In Singapore where

ums are the prime method of housing, great care has been given for creation of open spaces. Most of the housing schemes are kept far apart and adequate garden spaces available within the schemes. Further it is very interesting to note that a "Nature Reserve" is created to serve several such housing estates where foot paths, water bodies, climbs, small exercise pavilions have been planned. No vehicles are allowed into it, but bicycle tracks are available. They are very popular among the Singaporeans and many actively use this especially during weekends.

Why cant our politicians and professionals who travel abroad frequently for conferences and meetings comprehend these concepts? His Excellency John Wills who was the Ambassador for the United States was the Chief Guest at the Annual Session of the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects in the year





14 Story Building

Station

they are linked to other community needs, like banks, malls etc.. This overall planning helps to cut down time spent on traveling. In Sri Lanka, the train stations are still housed in dilapidated old colonial buildings with absolutely no maintenance. Bus or train commuters have to walk long distances to get connecting facilities, in Wellawatta and Bambalapitiya where a large number of condominium developments are located, no improvement has been done or planned for the railway station or for bus terminals. Authorities just approve plans and ignore other related infrastructure facilities. Inevitably, it creates more and more congestion and inconvenience to the public. Nugegoda is another suburban hub where a railway station was built some time ago and inter link between transport systems have not been thought of. This could have been a very interesting planning exercise as the central super market is located in between the bus stand and the railway station. The biggest blunder in this regard can be sighted as the recent development adjoining Dehiwala train Station. Dehiwala the biggest suburban city with many high rise developments in the horizon has no bus stand and the only place that was available was

the large extent of land adjoining the railway station. Quite surprisingly this land has been given to a private developer who is now putting up a fourteen storey apartment block disregarding the need for a bus stand. This biggest development in the area is an isolated building and it does not respond to its surroundings. How can this gross violation of basic planning principles be approved by the authorities? In the absence of a public bus terminal the entire street has become a parking lot creating chaos during peak hours.

**Water**

Among other facilities, water supply is a prime requirement for development. Allowing large housing development without enhancing the supply could jeopardize existing systems. This is exactly what has happened in Colombo and its suburbs. Even prior to large scale housing developments, water has been in short supply in several areas such as Borella, Bullers Road, Wellawatta etc. But today Wellawatta and Borella have become prime areas of housing development and as a result, water supply has become a serious issue. All large housing projects have massive sumps and overhead tanks that collect and use large quantities of water. Individual house holders in the

vicinity sometimes have to wait till all these water collecting units are filled to get a proper supply. With the construction of nearly 3000 more condos in the near future and without any large scale water supply scheme the water scarcity can become an alarming situation. It is not only the distribution, but also new sources may have to be found as during the dry season the salinity levels of Kelani River tend to increase due to upwards flow of sea water.

**Electricity**

Supply of Electricity is a common problem faced by the entire country. When two large Development projects - the HNB Towers at Union Place and the Twin Towers in the Fort, were completed, the Ceylon Electricity Board simply said "we have no power to give you". The buildings were supplied electricity by generators. Today CEB supplies power to a building, only if the required capacity is available in the area. Even so only two 30 amp supply or a single 60 amp supply will be provided. A transformer will have to be provided if any additional power is required. As a result of these restrictions various overhead solutions are being offered by enterprising officials. The repercussions of these solutions

condomini2002. Ambassador Wills an Electrical Engineer who then became respected Diplomat, raised a very important and basic need with regard to the City of Colombo. He said that he and his wife were regular users of the "Galle Face Green" which is an excellent open public gathering space. But he indicated that as it is over crowded most of the time, it is very important that similar spaces be developed within the city. He further stated such open spaces will help Colombo's diverse communities

to meet each other leisurely. Architects, Planners and officials who were present on that occasion have not taken his point seriously because the "vision" today appears to be "build as much as you can and where ever possible".

**Public Transport**

Is there a relationship between the population of a city and its infrastructure? One would argue that it is a very basic question and the answer obviously would be "yes". But for Colombo and its

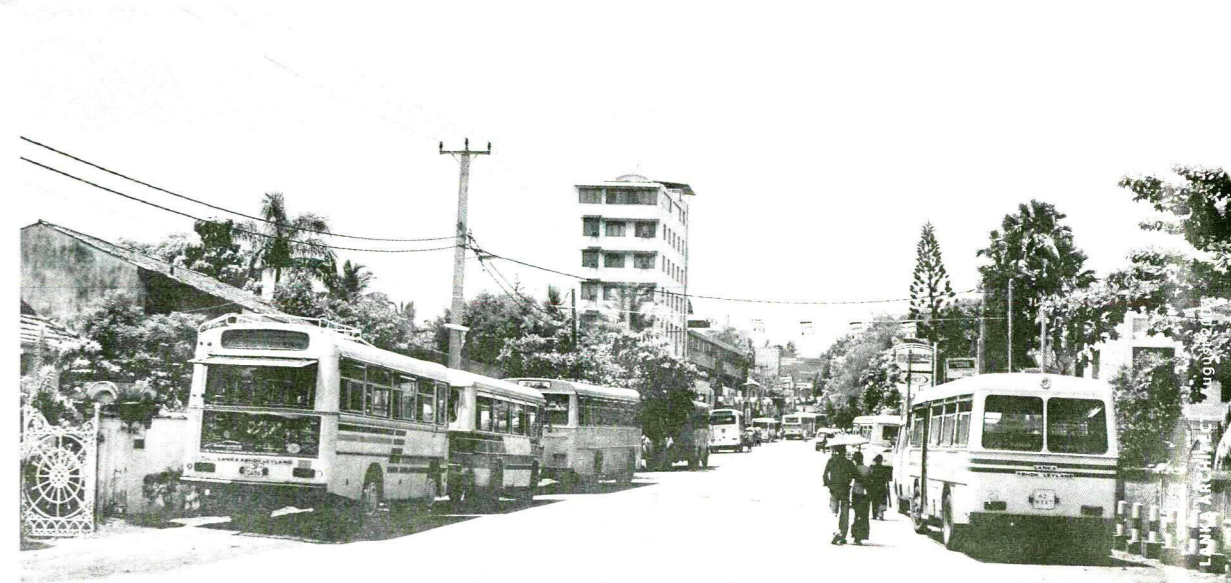
suburbs, the answer is "no". When considering major infrastructure developments, has a new transport or a new railway system been completed within the last decade? The answer is "no". We do not have a single highway, underground or an overhead transport network. Of course, the Baseline Road Development and the Marine Drive - an alternative route from Galle Road are the only road development work that has come up, but again both have not been continued according to original plans and

now are at a standstill due to political and financial constraints. The express way to the airport never saw the light of the day. In this perspective can there be any development? The city's infrastructure too needs to grow with the population growth and any development without it could only mean imminent destruction.

In many countries, rail, bus and other public transport services have central commuter stations with inter change facilities where

PREVIOUS PAGE:  
15' diameter Crater was created due to decayed under ground service line, where will it happen next?

THIS PAGE, ABOVE:  
A Project that Paralyzed the Infrastructure Development - Dehiwala Railway Station. BELOW:  
The Station Road itself has become a bus stand

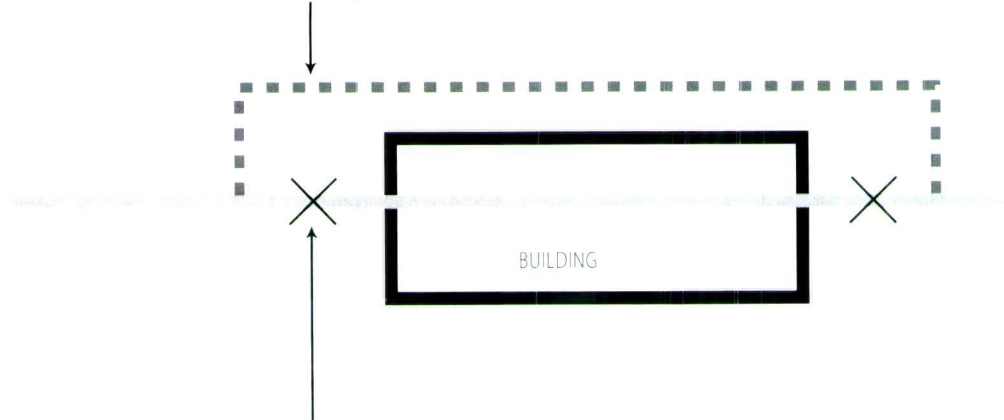


are disastrous because overloading a main circuit could burst the entire supply line.

**Sewerage**

The sewerage disposal system in Colombo has become the most over used service facility. As we all know, this system is over a hundred years old and there has been no effective improvement though there had been major cleaning exercises in the past. If one goes through the history, this is a very efficient system and one can find details of the layouts, pumping stations and exit points marked in the town sheets which are available with the municipal authorities. If an extension was made all the details like the length, manhole sizes and depth were clearly recorded for reference. Unfortunately during the last decade, these practices have not been properly followed and one has to physically visit the places to get the details. The most dangerous result of this is that various unlawful diversions, extensions and even blocking up is being done to the systems. The diagram shows an example of a typical diversion done at present. If one says that the Colombo sewerage is in its' last lap of existence, it is not over stating the facts. A clear indication of this is the large crater that immerged at the center of the Galle Road in Wellawatta area. The corrosion of a large service line due to natural reasons had caused the earth around it to get washed away, creating a cavity. With continuous torrential rain, the whole area sank creating the crater. This gives an alarming signal on the status of pipes that were laid many years ago. This finding must be read with the fact the sewer systems have been over loaded to an extent not imagined by its designers. The Colombo sewer system is the only central sewer system that exists in Sri Lanka and the other system, functioning at Ampara was abandoned after lack of maintenance and misuse. A central sewer system was laid for

Disconnection points, but reconnected after COC, allowing sewer to floor under the building



Diverted sewer line, (cannot function due to insufficient invert heights) Discarded after COC!





A narrow road with high rise Apartments. Two Vehicles can hardly pass through. Has there been any new sewer, water or storm water lines laid to cater for this new developments?

© 2007 Europa Technology Image © 2007 DigitalGlobe

Dehiwala Mt Lavinia, but only the area close to the sea is functioning at the moment.

**Fire**

Fire hazard is taken very lightly by officials in the city of Colombo. A decade ago when not many tall buildings existed, a Fire Escape was a compulsory requirement if a building was more than four stories high. But today there are condominiums with nine floors without a fire stair! The argument of fire services Department of Colombo Municipal Council is that as they have acquired a Telescopic boom truck which could evacuate occupants from the 9th floor. However, consider the Station Road, Wellawatta, a typical narrow road. It would take more than half an hour on a normal working day for a fire truck to arrive at the affected building. A similar situation was witnessed in Kandy where the firemen who were located on the other side of the road took several hours to reach the D S Senanayake Memorial Library when there was a sudden fire.

The fire hazard in many tall buildings especially in apartments in Colombo and suburbs are very high due to following reasons

- a. Inadequate, incorrect or out

dated regulations and guide lines

- b. Availability and usage of substandard materials and equipment
- c. No regular checking of systems and equipment
- d. Difficulty in accessibility

There are no standards imposed on import of fire equipment thus the market is flooded with inferior quality items. Developers/ Contractors grab them because of their price and innocent users live in these building without knowing the risks.

Some times expensive items are installed until the authorities inspect the site before issuing the certificate and removed soon after. It is said that this equipment can be hired for this purpose. If annual random checks are carried out with the knowledge of the users of the building this type of malpractices could be prevented. A fool proof checking system is essential for the safety of high rise living.

A major problem of fire fighting is the difficulty in accessing the affected premises. Colombo Municipality has approved many high rise apartments in narrow roads leaving building lines and street lines for future expansions. But does it serve the purpose? It does not, because until the road

is widened, reservations cannot be used. Therefore the practical reason for keeping a wide road is never met though the building is in its full use!

**Storm Water**

The storm water drainage has also become a concern to the city dwellers. The system has not been improved or maintained though new connections are given every day. During the recent rains a life was lost due to bad maintenance of drains.

The following glaring revelations were made by Mr. L.M.

Amarasinghe in his feature titled "Colombo Our Capital City" on 29 May 2007. It highlighted the negligence of our authorities in maintaining the storm water drainage system.

"The first incident was when the ground was being dug to lay the foundation for Liberty Plaza at Colpetty they found the underground tunnel that carried the water from the underground drains. It was closed up as the city administration was not interested in restoring the underground system to drain the storm water without causing problems to the people.

The second incident was when about two years ago it was seen how the underground drain system at the Eye Hospital junction was being closed up

and today the road surface at this point gets flooded even after a slight shower and the pedestrians and people waiting to board buses undergo much "inconvenience."

With more and more buildings that come up in the city, the negligence of storm water system could create more hazards for the city dwellers. What is shocking is that there is absolutely no light at the end of the tunnel except the usual directives given by the First citizen down wards to "restore the systems as soon as possible."

Can any sensible person approve high rise living without addressing the above issues?

The writer is a fellow member of The Sri Lanka Institute of Architects, and manages his own Architectural firm.

THIS PAGE LEFT: Station Road Wellawatta, a typical narrow road with high rise Condos, RIGHT ABOVE: Aerial photo marked with high rise apartments along Station Road, Wellawatta