

Office building to rise at Greenhills Center

By Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson

ORTIGAS LAND Corp. is developing an office building within the Greenhills Center in San Juan City, as the company bets on a rebound in office space demand after the pandemic.

GH Tower is part of the redevelopment of Greenhills Center as a “prime back-to-office location.” It will have a gross leasable area of 41,506 square meters covering 21 floors, with 15 dedicated for office space.

“We envisioned it to be a hybrid building to attract both traditional, multinational, and business process outsourcing (BPO) companies. It is a new office location within our Greenhills estate. We are hoping this kind of set-up will indeed attract multinational corporations,” Ortigas Land Head of Office Business Unit Trina R. Chan said in a virtual briefing last week.

She noted Ortigas Land had been receiving many inquiries about office spaces within the Greenhills Center.

“That made us think about it and consider it in our masterplan. Greenhills, being at the center of a lot of businesses, could attract traditional accounts. The floor plan of GH Tower is flexible enough,” Ms. Chan said.

The project is on track to be completed in May 2023.

GH Tower will have sustainable and eco-efficient features, including a rainwater collection system, 100% double-glazed glass ratio to allow in natural light, and energy-efficient LED lights, among others. The sixth floor will have a hotel-like lobby that provides a direct connection to the Greenhills Mall, as well as green and open spaces.

“We were even thinking the sixth floor could be a co-working space, but we will have to wait and see if this will be a location if they would be interested in setting up their businesses. We will see and observe if there will be a good demand for the Greenhills location,” Ms. Chan said.

CBRE Philippines Country Head Jie Espinosa said in a virtual briefing that there are many “encouraging signs” of recovery in the local office sector.

“The information technology and business process management (IT-BPM) industry continue to exhibit healthy growth, not just in Metro Manila but the province as well... This quarter compared to the same period last year, the increase we’re getting is so much higher. A lot of this is pent-up demand that were supposed to come in last year, but stalled because of the Omicron variant,” Mr. Espinosa said.

“We think we will see a more impactful number in terms of demand and transactions in the market,” he added.

Ortigas Land partnered with real estate brokers CBRE Philippines and JLL Philippines for the project.

Baguio moves to avert urban decay with stricter permits

BAGUIO has started implementing stricter screening rules for business and building permits to address the mountain city’s problems brought about by rapid urbanization over the last three decades.

“We have to know the state of our city now so we can plan forward,” City Planning and Development Coordinator Donna R. Tabangin said in a streamed briefing posted on Saturday in response to complaints over delays in permit applications.

Ms. Tabangin said the city, one of the most popular tourist destinations in northern Philippines, has been “in the red” in terms of solid waste, forest cover, road network, and

water supply, among other aspects of urban management.

She was citing a 2019 study by the National Economic and Development Authority, which warned that Baguio City is headed for “irreversible urban decay” by 2043 if no steps are taken to mitigate the problems.

“Urban decay means the city will give up on us, the city cannot sustain our activities,” Ms. Tabangin said.

“Without corrections, we will reach that irreversible urban decay by 2043... or even earlier, we don’t know how nature will get back at us.”

Based on a recent audit conducted by the local gov-

ernment, there are 51,000 buildings of different sizes in the city with a land area of 57.5 square kilometers.

The urban planning official said 80% or about 40,000 of these structures were constructed without a building permit from the local government.

In late February, Mayor Benjamin B. Magalong announced that the city government is assessing the capacity ceiling that it will impose on daily visitor arrivals as coronavirus restrictions are lifted as well as a long-term policy.

“To determine the threshold for tourists, we are now monitoring and looking at how far we can go in terms of the number of tourists to be allowed

vis-a-vis the traffic situation, crowd movement and capacity and our ability to still implement physical distancing and other protocols,” he said.

The city government said the tourist capacity evaluation will also serve as “springboard for more concrete actions to achieve sustainable tourism where other negative effects of over-tourism like destruction of the environment, culture and quality of life of the people are also addressed.”

Baguio, dubbed as the summer capital of the Philippines, had a population of 366,358 as of the 2020 government census, up 45% from the 2000 headcount. — **Marifi S. Jara**

Amid an ongoing war, a lavish hotel will soon open at Britain’s Old War Office

LONDON — From his office at No. 10 Downing St., Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain places urgent daily calls to Ukraine’s wartime leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Next door, in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, officials draw up new sanctions against the Russian oligarchs who have turned London into a turnkey haven to hide their assets and house their extended families.

Yet just across Whitehall, a billionaire property developer is close to completing an extravagant conversion of the Old War Office, an Edwardian-era monument to Britain’s imperial past. The new property will be a five-star Raffles Hotel, with lavish residential apartments that would until recently have catered to the same ultrawealthy Russians who have abruptly fallen out of favor.

“We had a glut of Russian inquiries about six weeks ago, none of which materialized,” said Charlie Walsh, head of residential sales for the project. “The Russian market would have been quite

significant. For obvious reasons, that has been completely nonexistent. Thankfully, from that point of view, as well.”

To say the project has strange timing understates its sheer incongruity. Opening at a time of war in Europe, the OWO — as the Old War Office has been delicately rebranded — is an evocative reminder of Britain’s wartime history. In the midst of a crackdown on rampant foreign money, it is also a baroque example of what postwar Britain has become and what the government is belatedly trying to clean up.

Rarely has a building been both so emblematic and yet so out of step with the times — a bricks-and-mortar manifestation of how London has, and hasn’t, changed.

The crosscurrents are not lost on Walsh, who works for the Hinduja Group, an Anglo-Indian conglomerate controlled by the Hinduja brothers, which has holdings in automotive manufacturing, oil and gas, and healthcare. He is trying to sell the building’s rich

history to a superrich clientele without overdoing the warlike theme.

Instead, Walsh recalls the famous figures who worked in the Old War Office, including Winston Churchill and T.E. Lawrence, aka Lawrence of Arabia. He confides that John Profumo, secretary of state for war in the early 1960s, entertained his 19-year-old lover Christine Keeler in his wood-paneled office, which will be the centerpiece of a hotel suite. Their fling exploded into the “Profumo affair” after it emerged that Keeler had also had a sexual relationship with a Soviet diplomat.

Ian Fleming was in and out of the building during his time as a naval intelligence officer — a detail that is catnip to a salesman like Walsh, who hints that Fleming came up with the inspiration for his suave spy, James Bond, there. He shows a visitor the “Spies Entrance,” so-called because it is tucked discreetly at the rear of the building.

Numerous Bond films have used the Old War Office as a backdrop, most

memorably at the end of the 2012 film “Skyfall,” when a brooding Daniel Craig gazes at its domed turrets from the roof of a neighboring building — Big Ben looming in the distance, framed by fluttering Union Jacks.

“Hate to waste a view,” Bond says, in words the developer has manifestly taken to heart.

The OWO is full of jaw-dropping vistas, with suites that look out to the Horse Guards Parade across the street or south to the Houses of Parliament. There is a three-story Champagne bar overlooking a courtyard and a glass-roofed restaurant. Two of the penthouse apartments have rooms built into the turrets.

All that splendor — the wood paneling, the intricately carved marble fireplaces, the original mosaic floors — isn’t cheap. The 85 apartments start at £5.8 million (\$7.6 million) and go up to £100 million (\$132 million). Walsh has sold about one-quarter of the units and said he was confident he would sell half

by the time the OWO opens at the end of this year or early in 2023.

Though he does not say so explicitly, Walsh is clearly relieved that Russian buyers have been sidelined. The threat of sanctions, which could lead to their assets being frozen, spares him a difficult choice. He insists that more stringent “know your customer” regulations in the last few years have made it “nigh on impossible for dirty money to come into these new projects.”

That seems optimistic: Transparency International, which campaigns against corruption, estimates that £6.7 billion (\$8.8 billion) of dubious foreign funds have poured into British property since 2016, including £1.5 billion from Russians accused of corruption or links to the Kremlin. A new law aims to make it harder for wealthy foreigners to disguise their ownership of real estate or use it to launder money.

Despite this crackdown, and the complications of Brexit, Walsh predicted that London would remain

an alluring destination for the super-rich. Two years of pandemic — of “not being able to exercise their retail therapy,” he said — had generated pent-up demand for multithousand-dollar-a-night hotel rooms and multimillion-dollar apartments.

The Old War Office, which was completed in 1906, is not the only London landmark that is being converted into a luxury hotel. The Admiralty Arch, which sits between Trafalgar Square and The Mall, is being turned into a Waldorf Astoria. The former US Embassy on Grosvenor Square, a midcentury-modernist classic designed by Eero Saarinen, is being converted into a Rosewood Hotel.

For critics, private takeovers of public buildings have gone too far, particularly in the case of Admiralty Arch, a majestic edifice that has languished for years as a construction site, blighting the view toward Buckingham Palace. — © 2022 The New York Times

Rates, from S1/1

of 3.8% of the gross domestic product in 2022, if realized, will be the largest since the 5.3% in 1997 during the Asian Financial Crisis.

Despite the uncertainties caused by the war, MUFG on Friday raised its growth

outlook for the Philippines to 6.5% from 6% previously, noting consumer spending amid more relaxed restrictions could boost recovery. However, this remains below the 6-7% target set by the government. — **Luz Wendy T. Noble**

IRR, from S1/1

He also signed into law RA 11647, which amends the Foreign Investment Act in order to make the Philippines more attractive to foreign investors.

“We share this administration’s thrust to propel the country’s economic recovery post pandemic through the enactment of game-changing economic liberalization laws,” JFC said. “Prompt issuance of IRRs for these laws would hasten the realization of gains expected from the passage of these liberalization laws, to the benefit of the public.”

Foreign business groups have been pushing for the passage of these measures, along with RA 11595 or the amendments to the Retail Trade Liberalization Act, to attract foreign capital needed to drive Philippine economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The rules enforcing it were released last month.

Foreign chambers said the Philippines would benefit from the capital, technology and increased competition that come with these economic reform measures, adding that this would bring more jobs and better products and services.

“The members of the JFC express strong support for the full implementation of these new laws and pledge our efforts to bring the reforms to the attention of appropriate firms in our member countries in the United States, Australia-New Zealand, Canada, Korea, Japan, and Europe and encourage these firms to invest in the Philippines,” they said.

John D. Forbes, American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Inc. senior adviser, said in a Viber message the group is waiting for public consultations on the implementing rules.

“We appreciate being invited to comment on the draft implementing rules and regulations, which is a good universal practice in all countries, to obtain views of the private sector before new rules become final. During these public consultations, we often make suggestions. When the IRRs are final, we can better propagate the new reforms abroad to potential investors,” Mr. Forbes said.

Lars Wittig, European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines president, said in Viber message the group is hoping the rules would follow “the spirit of the law” and that there “will be no bureaucratic or other layers to complicate and discourage foreign direct investments in the Philippines.”

“We look forward to the business community and other relevant stakeholders participating in the consultations of the implementing rules and regulations to ensure that all possible inputs are taken into consideration as the measures are implemented,” he added.

In a Viber message, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick T. Chua said the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) would be the lead agency in drafting the rules.

“We will announce (the start of the consultations) when available,” Mr. Chua said, without giving details.

The amended Public Service Act allows 100% foreign ownership will be allowed in key sectors such as telecommunications, airlines, railways and shipping, which were previously covered by the 40% foreign ownership limit set by the Constitution.

Changes to the Foreign Investment Act allow international investors to set up and fully own domestic enterprises, including micro, small and medium enterprises in the country.

Foreign nationals can now set up these companies with a minimum paid-in capital of \$100,000, provided they meet certain conditions.

The JFC statement was signed by the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Australian-New Zealand Commerce of the Philippines, Canadian Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry of the Philippines, Korean Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines and Philippine Association of Multinational Companies Regional Headquarters, Inc.



INVESTMENTS CORPORATION

Notice of Annual Stockholders’ Meeting

April 27, 2022 at 2:30 p.m.

To all Stockholders:

The 2022 Annual Stockholders’ Meeting of SM Investments Corporation (the Company) will be held on April 27, 2022 at 2:30 p.m., with the proceedings livestreamed and voting conducted in absentia through the Company’s secure online voting facility. The agenda of the meeting is set forth below:

AGENDA

1. Call to order
2. Certification of Notice and Quorum
3. Approval of Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Stockholders held on April 28, 2021
4. Annual Report for the Year 2021 (Open Forum)
5. Ratification of the acts of the Board of Directors and the Management from the date of the last annual stockholders’ meeting up to the date of this meeting
6. Election of Members of the Board of Directors for 2022-2023
7. Appointment of External Auditor
8. Approval of Merger of SMIC and Allfirst Equity Holdings, Inc., with SMIC as surviving entity
9. Other Matters
10. Adjournment

Attached are the rationale for the above agenda items for reference. The Board of Directors has fixed the end of trading hours of The Philippine Stock Exchange, Inc. (PSE) on March 28, 2022 as the record date for the determination of stockholders entitled to notice of, participation via remote communication, and voting in absentia at such meeting and any adjournment thereof.

Stockholders who wish to participate in the meeting via remote communication and to exercise their vote in absentia must notify the Corporate Secretary by registering at <asmregister.sminvestments.com> and submitting supporting information listed there on or before April 18, 2022. All information submitted will be subject to verification and validation by the Corporate Secretary.

Stockholders who wish to appoint a proxy may accomplish the attached proxy form (which need not be notarized) and submit the same to the office of the Corporate Secretary at the 10th Floor, Six/NEO, 5th Ave. cor. 26th St., Bonifacio Global City 1634 at least seven (7) business days (or until April 18, 2022) before the annual meeting, as provided in the By-laws. Validation of proxies will be conducted on April 20, 2022 at the Office of the Corporate Secretary.

Successfully registered stockholders can then cast their votes in absentia through the Company’s secure online voting facility and will be provided access to the live streaming of the meeting. For the detailed registration and voting procedures, please refer to the “Guidelines for Participation via Remote Communication and Voting in Absentia” appended to the Definitive Information Statement to be posted on the Company’s website and PSE EDGE.

A copy of the Audited Financial Statements of the Company for the period ended December 31, 2021 shall be posted in the Company’s website <www.sminvestments.com/asm2022> and PSE EDGE on or before April 21, 2022. Hard copies of the audited financial statements shall be provided upon written request of any stockholder.

For complete information on the annual meeting, please visit <www.sminvestments.com/asm2022>.

Taguig City, April 1, 2022.

BY THE ORDER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ELMER B. SERRANO
Corporate Secretary
SM INVESTMENTS CORPORATION



For more information, scan QR Code to Access the 2022 SMIC ASM Page.