

App seeks to help construction firms save on costs

A NEW construction management app called Steer is offering a way for construction companies to keep a lid on rising project costs.

“Steer is a construction management software that bridges the information gap between construction sites and the head office, giving valuable insight into project progress and resource utilization,” Arup Maity, founder and CEO of Steer, said in a statement.

Launched in 2022, Steer makes it easier for contractors to manage projects, site staff,

consultants, architects and engineers.

Mr. Maity noted that studies have shown that almost every construction project is over budget or delayed, which is why they developed the Steer app.

“Construction projects, by default, are over budget and delayed — causing not only monetary but also reputation issues for main/general contractors. With Steer, companies can save up to 20% of the project cost by simply minimizing rework and reducing material waste,” Mr. Maity, who

is also CEO of QuickReach, Inc., said in a separate e-mail.

With the app, companies can also save time through digitizing management tasks which are mostly done on paper.

Steer also assists construction firms in getting better visibility and control over their activities and resources, “to manage costs more effectively and protect profits.” The Steer app and website has 30 modules covering Project Management, Site Resource Management, Safety Management, and Design Management.

The app also houses a management solution unavailable in most competing platforms which helps companies better manage material usage.

“On average, materials make up about 70% of the total cost of many construction projects. Rework and materials misuse, if not managed properly, translates to a lot of money down the drain, but it can be saved if you have Steer’s materials tracking & collaboration solutions in place,” Ram Macasaet, Steer’s digital success consultant, was quoted as saying in a statement.

Steer’s software is built on top of a no-code platform, which offers users a shorter learning curve compared to other software on the market.

“This substantially lowers the need for training and increases the success rate in implementation,” Mr. Maity said.

Steer is also a homegrown company, working with companies like CDCC-PHINMA, Big Ben Construction, NationStar Development, Mindanao Global, and Colliers Philippines.

Mr. Maity said that the company has just recently started to sell to companies abroad.

“Construction is one of the oldest and biggest industries in the world, but it’s also one of the least digitized... While there are a handful of solutions from global brands, the big challenges of contractors in APAC (Asia-Pacific) remain unaddressed,” he said.

Steer can be accessed online at www.steerplatform.com and is available on Android and iOS as Steer Mobile. — **A.M.C.Sy**

PPP Act a welcome development for livable cities push

THE proposed Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Act can eliminate urban development bottlenecks and amplify the push for livable cities, according to an infrastructure developer.

Patricia Janelli A. Davide, assistant vice-president for structuring and regulatory affairs at Aboitiz InfraCapital (AIC), said the measure can address difficulties in stakeholder management, which is a primary challenge for developers involved in PPP projects.

“It streamlines the process. You don’t have to refer to different laws and ordinances,” she told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of the Liveable Cities Philippines urban development lab on Oct. 26.

“With the [proposed] PPP law, you already have the BOT [Build-Operate-Transfer] Law and the JV [Joint Venture] guidelines all consolidated into one law, so there’s just one reference point and you’re not going around searching for what applies,” she added.

Congress ratified on Sept. 27 the proposed PPP Act, which seeks to harmonize the rules on PPP projects to expand private sector participation in infrastructure programs.

Congress has yet to transmit a copy of the measure to Malacañang for President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.’s signature.

The proposed PPP Code will govern all contracts between a government agency and private partners to finance, design, construct, operate, and maintain infrastructure or development projects and services.

“While most of the time, the funding really comes from the private sector, it’s more of access to rights of way and assistance in securing permits and licenses,” Ms. Davide said on the advantages of entering into PPPs.

“If the government is lacking in funds and technical expertise, that is where the private sector comes in and collaborates,” she added.

Ms. Davide said AIC has submitted some unsolicited proposals to the government but once the PPP Act is signed into law, the company has to resubmit these proposals.

“We’ll be back to square one,” she said.

Ms. Davide noted AIC’s push for livable cities and communities through its economic zone LIMA Estate in Lipa-Malvar, Batangas, which also houses LIMA Water, its water and wastewater business unit transitioning to renewable energy.

“There have been efforts in the last couple of years to make it one entire ecosystem and build it into a smart city,” she said of LIMA Estate.

LIMA Water recently implemented its solar panel project in the economic estate, following the integration of its water systems last year, in a push for sustainable development, AIC said in an Oct. 18 press release. — **Miguel Hanz L. Antivola**

SM’s Alfamart installs solar panels in distribution center

ALFAMART PHILIPPINES, the SM Group’s minimart chain, recently installed solar panels in its distribution center in Silang, Cavite.

In a statement, the company said 117 solar panels, equivalent to 55,370 watts, have been installed on the roof deck of the 30,000-square meter distribution center.

It noted the initiative seeks to reduce the distribution center’s reliance on the community’s power supply, while cutting power costs and carbon emissions at the same time.

Alfamart is aiming to finish the second phase of the project with an additional 100,000 watts by December 2023.

“As Alfamart continues to expand and reach out to different areas, we are cognizant of our impact on the environment and the community. We are committed to integrating sustainabil-

ity in our operations as we continue to serve communities,” Harvey Ong, chief operating officer of Alfamart, said.

Alfamart is keen on replicating this initiative in its new stores.

As of September, there are 1,590 Alfamart stores in the country.

“The solar panels are designed to power the operations of Alfamart’s back offices despite changing seasons of the country. Any excess of generated electricity is utilized by the 24/7 operational warehouse,” the company said.

Alfamart has four distribution centers in Bulacan, Cavite, Pampanga, and Laguna, where electric forklifts and electric movers are used in their operations.

Alfamart Philippines is a joint venture between SM and Alfamart, which operates over 21,000 minimarts in Indonesia.

Co-working firm WeWork’s troubles darken outlook for embattled office market

LONDON — The troubles faced by co-working titan WeWork are darkening the outlook for the world’s largest business hubs, where rising office vacancies are already heaping pressure on investors set to refinance big-ticket mortgages next year.

Media reports on Wednesday suggested the New York-listed

flexible workspace provider — once privately valued at \$47 billion — was weighing a petition for bankruptcy next week.

Backed by Japan’s SoftBank, WeWork aimed to revolutionize the office market by taking long leases on large properties and renting the space to multiple

smaller businesses on more flexible, shorter arrangements.

But like other landlords, it has struggled to persuade some customers since the pandemic to swap working from home for the office at its 650-plus locations worldwide — a trend that has shaken confidence in the sector.

Global office vacancies are expected to climb, hurting rental prospects in cities like New York and London, eight industry executives, investors, lenders and analysts said.

Some leveraged property investors could struggle to earn enough rental income to service rising debt costs, they said.

“The loss of any tenant, especially during a time of relatively slow office leasing, will have a negative impact on office building cashflows and values,” said Moody’s Analytics’ Commercial Real Estate Industry Practice Lead, Jeffrey Havvy.

“This will add to the negative sentiment in the marketplace and make fi-

nancing harder, especially those buildings that need to refinance in the next 12-18 months,” he said. — **Reuters**

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Maharlika, from S1/1

She said it is notable that the MIF “remains active in the public eye.”

Economists earlier told *BusinessWorld* that the suspension may be aimed at allowing the President to have greater say on the choice of the Maharlika Investment Corp.’s top executives.

They also flagged the original IRR’s lack of guidance on how foreign or local private investors can participate or invest in the fund.

Despite the suspension of the rules, Mr. Marcos last month vowed the MIF will be operational before the end of the year.

“We are still committed to having it operational before the end of the year,” he said in his departure speech before leaving Manila for a meeting between Southeast Asian and Gulf leaders in Saudi Arabia in October.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno had pitched the investment opportunities in the

MIF during a meeting with top Saudi business leaders in October.

“To achieve this, Maharlika aims to attract capital from both domestic and global equity investors, including large funds here in the Middle East seeking to diversify its portfolio in fast-growing emerging markets like the Philippines,” Mr. Diokno was quoted as saying in a statement last month.

Investments in the MIF would be used to ramp up the implementation of the country’s high-impact infrastructure flagship projects estimated to be worth around \$153 billion.

“The fund also presents exciting opportunities for green and blue investments, ESG (environmental, social, and corporate governance) linked fixed-income instruments, and cutting-edge technologies with the advent of artificial intelligence and cloud computing,” he said. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Railway, from S1/1

Asked if the Mindanao railway can be financed through the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF), Mr. Diokno said this was a possibility, but it would not be fully financed by the sovereign wealth fund.

Aside from the Mindanao railway, the government has also pulled its request for ODA from China to fund the P50-billion Subic-Clark railway and the Philippine National Railway’s P142-billion South Long Haul railway.

“The negotiations have been slow. It’s not moving, so we have to explore other sources,” Mr. Diokno said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. last year ordered Transport officials to rene-

gotiate loan deals with China that began during the Duterte administration in 2018. However, these loan agreements were “withdrawn” after China did not act on the funding request.

Despite the delays in funding, Mr. Bautista said they still expect to complete these railway projects by the end of 2028.

“We need to get the funding first; funding is one of the challenges because we already have the design. Due to the delays, we may need to get approval for the change of cost because maybe it will be higher, we’ll study that. We are working on it,” he said. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose and Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsan**

Sukuk, from S1/1

Last month, the Philippine government raised \$1.26 billion from the first retail dollar bond sale under the Marcos administration. This was much higher than the minimum issue size of \$200 million but below the \$1.6 billion raised during the Philippines’ maiden retail dollar bond auction in 2021.

The dollar-denominated five-and-a-half-year bonds fetched a coupon rate of 5.75% and were awarded at rates ranging

from 5% to 5.75%, bringing the average to 5.509%.

This year, the government plans to borrow P2.207 trillion, consisting of P1.654 trillion from domestic and P553.5 billion from foreign sources.

The Treasury earlier planned to raise \$5 billion (around P283 billion) from global bonds this year. In January, the Philippines raised \$3 billion from its first US dollar bond issuance for the year. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsan**

Charting the future of holistic work environments

In the landscape of modern office spaces, there’s a transformative shift underway. The modern workforce, defined by their hunger for knowledge and driven by unbridled ambition, seeks more than just four walls and a Wi-Fi connection. They yearn for environments that stimulate growth, foster collaboration, and prioritize holistic well-being.

At the forefront of this transformation is SM Offices, the commercial property development and management arm of the renowned SM Prime Holdings, Inc. (SM Prime). Rather than just reacting to the change, SM Offices is a catalyst that recalibrates the very ethos of workplace experiences to resonate with today’s fast-paced and demanding world.

SM Offices sets itself apart with its visionary approach. Deep within the designs they have brought to life, which are renowned for their perfect blend of sustainability, disaster resilience, and strategic urban placements, is a holistic philosophy that aims at crafting nurturing environments that truly echo the aspirations and requirements of contemporary professionals.

Recognizing the paradigm shift in workforce’s expectations, SM Offices has interwoven the principles of employee well-being, satisfaction, and deep engagement into the core fabric of their developmental approach. It continuously prioritizes tenant-partners and employees by adhering to their needs after carefully listening and engaging with them.

As SM Prime’s Commercial Properties Group Vice-President Alexis Ortiga shared, SM Offices has begun providing employee-centric services that address various needs, such as ESG-sensitive office solutions, green outdoor spaces, sports facilities that promote health and well-being, and retail conveniences that make the transition from home to work seamless and fun.

SM Offices’ holistic philosophy is very much evident as well in their initiatives. For instance, in collaboration with the Philippine Mental Health Association, they recently held a wellness activity for their tenants in celebration of World Mental Health Day, wherein participants from various



The recent SM Offices’ “Spooktacular Halloween @ E-com” event brought together E-com tenants and their kids to create new cherished SM Offices Community memories.

companies kicked into high gear in a cardio-boxing session, enjoying the backdrop of a Manila Bay sunset.

SM Offices also held a gala event in celebration of the Halloween festivities. Beyond mere entertainment, this initiative has been designed to be a cultural get-together. Packed with puppet acts, magic shows, and a variety of games, it aims to transform routine office activities into cherished experiences that foster community bonding.

Even so, the vision of SM Offices extends well beyond these festivities as it keeps to heart its thrust for a well-balanced lifestyle. In line with living healthy and active routines, OneE-com Center boasts of basketball, badminton, and volleyball courts at the top floor, which are bookable online and readily available for the enjoyment of E-com tenants and employees in the Mall of Asia Complex.

SM Offices also begins to schedule eclectic night gigs at the illustrious Prism Plazas, blending harmonious music with an array of gourmet culinary delights, and “destress hours,” offering tranquil pockets of relaxation and rejuvenation amidst the demanding rigors of work.

“Our collaborations extend to other SM Prime affiliates, curating a unique suite of benefits designed to augment the workplace experience,” Mr. Ortiga added. “From exclusive privileges to tenant-partner appreciation events, our intent is unequivocal — to nurture a profound sense of community and mutual growth.”

In terms of expansion, SM Offices’ portfolio of properties continues to sprout in the metro. The recently-launched LEED Gold certified Mega Tower, an elegant S-shaped 50-storey skyscraper in the Ortigas Central Business District, stands as SM Offices’ tallest skyscraper to date.

Another structure launched a few months ago is the FourE-com Center’s South Tower in the MOA Complex. Pre-LEED Gold certified FourE-com Center, with its three 15-storey towers, spans an estimated 100,000 square meters of leasable area. Apart from the workspace, it boasts a range of dining options and a serene courtyard garden podium that serves as a plaza offering breathtaking views of Manila Bay.

The construction of SixE-com Center, likewise, is in full swing and is poised to be the latest addition to MOA Complex’s E-com Series by 2026.

Amid a dynamic blend of shifting needs and aspirations in the contemporary workplace, SM Offices stands tall, not just as a participant but as a visionary leader. Their harmonious meld of architectural prowess, unwavering commitment to sustainability, and a deep-rooted focus on employee well-being sets them apart.

“We don’t just build office spaces; we craft ecosystems where ambition meets opportunity, sustainability partners with growth, and every employee feels valued,” Mr. Ortiga said.