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What makes Jurong Lake District significant is not simply its scale but what it represents as a new model of mixed-use development across residential, office, commercial and leisure spaces, for how Singapore can grow in an era of land constraints, changing work patterns, and the need to create new economic opportunities beyond the traditional central business district, says the writer. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO

Can Jurong Lake District become Singapore's second central business district?

With Punggol in the east and Woodlands in the north, plans for the west complete a longer-term vision for Singapore.

Sing Tien Foo

For decades, Singapore's economy revolved geographically around a single downtown core centred on the Central Business District and the civic district. As the city grew, policymakers sought to decentralise jobs and commercial activity to regional centres to mitigate strain on the transport system and moderate peak-hour congestion.

Jurong Lake District (JLD) is the most advanced and ambitious expression of that vision, first revealed in 2008 as part of the Urban Redevelopment Authority's draft masterplan. The Town Hall Link site in the new JLD precinct, with a flexible land zoning designation, will be released for sale in July 2026, along with eight other residential sites scheduled for launch under the Government Land Sales programme in the second half of 2026.

This marks another step in the transformation of JLD into Singapore's largest mixed-use business district outside the city centre, and perhaps the country's most important urban development project in the coming decade.

A NEW WAY OF LIVING

How much hinges on Jurong's successful transformation cannot be overstated – as a strategic economic project and a test of whether Singapore can indeed create a second major employment node outside the downtown core that brings jobs closer to homes and boosts liveability in the west.

What makes JLD significant is not simply its scale but what it represents as a new model of mixed-use development across residential, office, commercial and leisure spaces, for how Singapore can grow in an era of land constraints, changing work patterns, and the need to create new economic opportunities beyond the traditional central business district.

The idea of decentralising commercial activity is admittedly not new. The 1991 Concept Plan envisioned four regional centres in Jurong East, Woodlands, Tampines and Seletar to distribute jobs and economic activity more evenly across Singapore. But Jurong East regional centre takes that idea one step further.

The Town Hall Link site is the first "white" site launched within the new 120ha Jurong Lake Central precinct in JLD, adding new mixed-use space on top of the commercial cluster around Jurong East MRT station. This white zoning sets the envelope based on the density of a development site, but gives developers the flexibility to curate the optimal mix of uses within that envelope and partner with the Government to shape the land into a choice location for businesses, quality housing and recreational facilities.

The Town Hall Link site illustrates the ambition behind JLD. As a mixed-use "white site", it gives developers the flexibility to combine 40,000 sq m of offices, 1,200 private homes, and 44,000 sq m of complementary retail, hotel, recreational and community uses within a single development.

The Town Hall Link site also sits at the intersection of four MRT lines – the two existing North-South and East-West lines, and the two new MRT lines, Jurong Region Line and Cross Island Line Phase 2, expected to open in phases – and a new bus interchange at the Jurong Gateway Hub.

A high level of connectivity, with major transport networks to the rest of Singapore, is vital in anchoring the JLD and the future Town Hall Link development as a gateway for economic activity in western Singapore. The district will be 30 minutes away from the Central Business District and 50 minutes to the future Changi Airport Terminal 5 by MRT.

Meanwhile, an extensive network of multi-level pedestrian linkages, dedicated cycling paths and bus-only corridors within the wider JLD will connect homes, offices, retail, recreation and public facilities. The goal is to create an environment where people can live, work and play within a 10-minute walk-cycle-ride without having to travel to the city centre.

JLD is not intended to replace or compete with the existing CBD. Rather, it reflects a growing recognition that future economic growth cannot be concentrated indefinitely in a single downtown core.

The traditional CBD at Raffles Place remains Singapore's financial centre. Land constraints and relatively high rental costs there have led to a disproportionately high concentration of finance and banking activities and make diversification increasingly important. By creating another major employment node outside the city centre, JLD can help distribute economic activity more evenly across the island, foster healthy competition among regional centres that host government, municipal and business activities, and bring jobs closer to where people live.

This ambition reflects the changing nature of business districts worldwide. Increasingly, successful commercial hubs are defined not solely by office towers, but by their ability to attract talent through quality urban environments, convenient transport links and lifestyle amenities. Many global cities, like London, New York, Tokyo and Hong Kong, have evolved from a single dominant CBD into polycentric centres – in the West End, Brooklyn, Shinjuku and Kowloon East – that combine business, residential and recreational functions. JLD represents Singapore's most ambitious attempt to apply that model at scale.

WHAT MAKES JURONG NOTEWORTHY

Four factors differentiate JLD from other regional centres. JLD's first distinguishing feature is its scale and diversity. The district will eventually contain extensive office space, new housing and a wide range of supporting commercial and community facilities.

Around 20,000 new homes will be added alongside the existing J Gateway and J'Den private condominium developments, adding to the close to one million residents in the west region spanning Jurong, Tengah, Bukit Batok, Clementi, Choa Chu Kang and Bukit Panjang, and nearly double the existing population in the east and north regions. Higher population density could bring more vibrancy to the region, helping avoid the common pitfalls of traditional CBDs, which often become quiet after office hours.

JLD offers an opportunity to pioneer more sustainable urban development. The district is being designed around public transport, walking and cycling, with future developments linked by pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, including an elevated weatherproof network of walkways, and integrated with multiple MRT lines. A transit corridor with bus-only lanes, supported by wider footpaths and cycling paths, will also separate car and human traffic to allow safe, comfortable and seamless movement within the JLD.

Meanwhile, a planned 1,400,000 sq m of office space – almost a third of the CBD – will expand the existing commercial space in Jurong East by seven times. The space will anchor companies from the logistics, wholesale and retail trade, advanced manufacturing, biomedical, chemicals and energy, engineering, ICT, electronics and maritime sectors, and draw multinational and regional firms to set up headquarters in the area.

JLD will see a higher concentration of government offices, with JTC, the Building and Construction Authority, and Singapore Food Agency already anchored there. More agencies, including the Land Transport Authority, are expected to move there, which will help to further catalyse the development of the district.

Second, JLD plays a strategic role in supporting Singapore's innovation and industrial ecosystem, sitting at the nexus of several major centres of economic activity – including the new Tuas Mega Port, the Jurong Innovation District, the Jurong and Tuas industrial clusters, and two of Singapore's major universities, which provide a deep bench of talent to support research and development. That places it in a unique position to support future growth industries spanning advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, electronics and maritime services.

As Singapore moves up the value chain, JLD is expected to create around 100,000 jobs by the 2040s, about a third of the number of jobs in the downtown core, bringing employment opportunities closer to residents in the west region.

Third, JLD seeks to combine economic activity with leisure and quality of life. Unlike conventional business districts, the area is built around a major natural asset: Jurong Lake. The rejuvenated Jurong Lake Gardens, which opened in September 2024, and the Chinese Garden and Japanese Garden, together with the future Science Centre and other recreational attractions, will help create a distinctive lakeside destination. These amenities will not only serve residents, but also attract visitors from across Singapore and tourists.

Finally, JLD offers an opportunity to pioneer more sustainable urban development. The district is being designed around public transport, walking and cycling, with future developments linked by pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, including an elevated weatherproof network of walkways, and integrated with multiple MRT lines. A transit corridor with bus-only lanes, supported by wider footpaths and cycling paths, will also separate car and human traffic to allow safe, comfortable and seamless movement within the JLD.

Sustainability initiatives, including district-level energy and waste management systems, super-low-energy buildings, the use of low- and zero-carbon construction materials, and the extensive deployment of solar panels, will help position JLD as a living laboratory for greener urban solutions. The district is also being planned to support autonomous vehicles for both passenger and freight transport, while a growing network of EV charging points will facilitate the transition to electric vehicles.

A ROAD MAP TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Taken together, these features distinguish JLD from earlier regional centres as an attempt to create a complete urban ecosystem that integrates housing, employment, recreation and sustainability. The real test is whether it can become a place people genuinely choose to live, work and spend time in.

JLD, together with the Woodlands Gateway district, Seletar Aerospace Park and Punggol Digital District, will form a well-connected economic and technology corridor encircling the western and northern regions, each with a distinct economic focus.

The new Woodlands Gateway district, connected to the RTS Link station and Woodlands North MRT station, will serve as Singapore's northern gateway to the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone, supporting Singapore firms with manufacturing facilities in Johor. Meanwhile, Punggol Digital District, integrated with the Singapore Institute of Technology campus, will house digital clusters in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, robotics and fintech.

Connectivity among the clusters, the CBD, residential homes and the airport will be enhanced by the Cross-Island MRT line and the Jurong Region Line, when these are completed, reducing commuting time between home, work and leisure for residents in the western and northern regions.

It is a pity that the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail project, with its terminus previously planned in JLD, has been discontinued. With these exciting plans, it would have been a strong value proposition for both Singapore and Malaysia.

For now, the opening of the new Science Centre and Jurong Gateway Hub within the next few years is the next major milestone in this decades-long endeavour. If successful, the JLD will reshape how Singapore thinks about business districts, urban growth, and the relationship where people live and where they work.

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