

How MPs Can Better Engage Residents

The Straits Times Forum Online Story (July 27, 2011)

THE recent general election and proliferation of websites have led to a change in the way politicians engage residents.

Inspired by grassroots and community governance practised overseas, Singapore's parliamentarians ("Getting to know you and how it can make a difference"; last Saturday) are eager to leverage on residents' views.

It is understandable that residents, who have a full plate with their jobs and personal commitments, are not interested in routine matters.

Having engaging agendas which combine neighbourhood and national issues may well appeal to a wider audience.

Such public sessions will facilitate interaction, heighten understanding and strengthen the formation of interest groups.

Thereafter, the MP - together with his committee, staff or volunteers - can spearhead focus group discussions to explore the joint supervision of estate matters with identified residents. These residents who want change would be able to reach out to their neighbours and obtain more personal perspectives.

Such personalised approaches may subsequently achieve the desired outcomes. The reason for community indifference to existing programmes may be down to the perception that residents' suggestions are regarded lightly or ignored.

Lethargy and apathy can be overcome if the administrators apply more imaginative and purposeful efforts; otherwise, resources and manpower would come to nought if no residents are willing to be involved.

Kwan Jin Yao