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REBUILDING SIX UNITS OF GAMBIER STREET OLD SHOPHOUSES DESTROYED BY FIRE ON 22ND DECEMBER 2009

Before midnight on 22nd December 2009, about 6 prewar shophouses were destroyed in a massive fire that was speculated to have started from a 2-unit fabric store. This struck a massive sentimental cord in a lot of Kuching citizen who grew up with memories of this place, and especially for the traders. Thus, almost immediately a 'Rebuilding Committee' was set up to assist the shopowners. the earliest footprint in record to develop a plan for rebuilding.

The proposed plan reinstated traditional airwells to let in light and ventilation for shophouses that is minimum 120ft long. Party wall and rear-yard are introduced as fire breaks.

shophouses up in smoke

It took 47 firemen from five stations four hours to contain Gambier Street blaze; no lives lost



ith four lots going

The incident took frontpage headlines on The Borneo Post on 23rd December 2009.

SHS was invited to be the 'Advisor' on Heritage Conservation and Design matters pertaining to the 'rebuilding' exercise.

Architects from 3 local firms (i.e. Design Network Architects, I-Jong Architect and Arkitek JFN Sdn Bhd) volunteered their time to brainstorm on the concept for 'rebuilding'

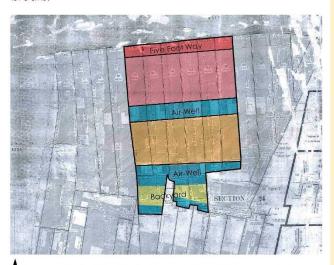
A design proposal was developed by a team of volunteers from JFN's staff, led by Ar. Mike Boon.

All the owners agreed to the design proposal. The same will be submitted by the 'Rebuilding Committee' Chairman Mr. Wee Hong Seng to State Planning Authority (SPA) on behalf of the owners.

The design proposals addressed the following issues:

- How to meet Government Regulations and at the same time satisfy Owners' Requirements?
- How to establish 'existing conditions' as there are no records of Approved Building Plans?
- 3. What is 'original'? How far can we trace back?
- 4. What is Authenticity and how is it relevant?
- 5. What are the Government Policy, Guidelines and Procedures relevant to this rebuilding situation?

Subsequently a 1937 surveyed plan was found in Land & Survey Department Kuching. It gave the basis for tracing



▲ Proposed 'rebuilding' footprints overlaid on 1937 surveyed plan

Out of 6 units, 2 elevations are restored where the remaining 4 takes on new facades that interpreted the architecture elements of the surrounding historical shophouses (i.e. scale, texture, colour, rhythm, materials, etc.) to continue the 'character of old Kuching'.

It is a contemporary interpretation of the past rather than a replica of what was lost. The proposed 'rebuilding' of the shophouses once completed, will tell the story of their past, responding to the present conditions and as a bridge to the future.

