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Include open space conservation in DP 2014-34: Experts

Karishma Goenka @karishmagoenka



The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) invited recommendations from a number of prominent environmentalists on Thursday for formulation of the Development Plan (DP) for 2014-34 to ensure sustainability of natural resources and protection of green spaces in the city.

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One of the major issues highlighted in the meeting was the

loss of open spaces to development and encroachment. This led to a unified recommendation of strict monitoring and demarcation of the city's open spaces and green pockets.

Speaking on behalf of various environmental groups, architect and environmentalist PK Das highlighted the lack of proper boundaries for our natural assets. "It is important to not only map our natural assets, such as rivers, lakes, creeks and green pockets, but also maintain clearly demarcated buffer zones that are publicly marked to enable citizens to be vigilant about threats of encroachment and development," he said.

They also brought out loopholes in the classification of open spaces by the BMC that give way to wrong interpretation of the regulations set for them. Environmentalists present strongly opposed the No Development Zone (NDZ) tag given to most open spaces and mangrove areas. They suggested instead that they be termed as either buildable or non-buildable land to avoid misuse of the land.

"NDZ is land kept aside for future development as required, it does not provide for conservation of any of these open spaces. We do not want an NDZ tag, so that there are no loopholes or manipulation of regulations for encroachment of these areas for development," said Das.

In the BMC's land use classification, natural assets are listed under natural areas, water bodies and open spaces. Natural areas include forest, mangrove and hills, and open spaces include playgrounds, gardens, promenades and beaches.

Shweta Wagh, a professor at the Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture and Environmental Studies, pointed out that these classifications are regulated differently and there is no reason why beaches, which are part of the city's natural landscape, should be in the same slot as open spaces.

"A beach should be classified differently from open or natural areas and needs to be regulated with its indigenous inhabitants in mind, similarly, so does Arrey colony. These beaches are encroached upon at many places, by forcing local fisherfolk to move their area of work."

karishma.goenka@dnaindia.net