

by Bhong Simbajon

A consultant of the Tourism Infrastructure Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) has revealed that the agency has already held an initial talk with Mayor Beng Climaco-Salazar and some representatives from other sectors prior to his appearance Tuesday at the City Council to ask for a no-objection resolution regarding the proposed privatization of the 82-hectare Zamboanga Golf Course and Country Club in Upper Calarian.

Asked by councilors during Tuesday's session if they had already talk to some officials of the city about the proposed sale or lease of the said government property, Jojo Rosario said they have communicated with the city mayor and made a presentation to the latter about the proposal.

Rosario said that present during the meeting in July of last year when they came to Zamboanga was Mayor Climaco, the city legal officer, the city development officer, representatives of the golf association of Zamboanga, and some representatives of the banking sector.

"As far as I can recall, during the meeting, the mayor said that she is open to the proposition, but have certain conditions to consider the historic value of the said property like the preservation of the Muslim cemetery inside the golf beach as well as to take care of the settlers residing inside the golf course," Rosario said.

Rosario clarified that if the mayor and those officials they have consulted earlier were open to the said move, it doesn't mean that they have already the formal approval for the project as alleged by some quarters.

"This is tentative, not fixed and we are proceeding to get more consultations as requested by the city councilors to make sure that every stakeholder in Zamboanga including the residents would be behind this endeavor whether for sale, lease or privatize its operation totally," Rosario said.

The city councilors on Tuesday expressed disgust as they claimed that they were caught unaware by TIEZA's intentions of on the golf course, saying they learned about the matter only during the time when no less than Zamboanga City District 1 House Representative Celso Lobregat wrote the city council via its presiding officer Vice-Mayor Cesar Itturalde informing them of the progress of TIEZA proposal.

It is for the same reasons that the entire Council decided to defer or hold in abeyance the request of TIEZA for a no-objection resolution.

“The property is owned by TIEZA, and the owners are the ones deciding what to do with it, subject to existing government rules and regulations. TIEZA could have gone ahead with the privatization but in deference to the need for consultations,” Rosario added.

TIEZA claimed that after getting a negative impression from the city officials, it has an impact on what they are proposing either to go for sale or adopt a Lease Operate and Manage (LOM) scheme in its privatization process.

Rosario clarified that TIEZA wants to work hand in hand with the local government as well as help in the marketing of the city to the international market and paint a good picture about it thru international tourism promotions, as well as get the best deal for Zamboanga City.

“We admit that consultation may have come late, but just the same we are doing it now to all stakeholders and even to the citizens of the city if necessary,” Rosario said.

TIEZA's objective for the privatization of the Zamboanga Golf Course property is to introduce development in the complex and since the agency faces constraints, it wants the private sector to manage the assets as well as to raise funds for the tourism promotions board.

Fourteen properties under TIEZA administration to include the Zamboanga golf course are under the process of privatization. – Bhong Simbajon/ RMN News

