SINGAPORE: The Youth Olympic Village for the inaugural games in Singapore in 2010 will now be located at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) campus.

This is a change from initial plans to site the Olympic Village at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) S$500-million University Town, which is presently under construction.

Rising construction costs worldwide were cited as reasons for the change by the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee (SYOGOC) at a news conference on Saturday.

In October 2007, when Singapore submitted its bid to host the 2010 Youth Olympic Games, the NUS site was presented as the primary site, as some of its facilities were already slated for completion by August 2010, while NTU – with its ready-made facilities – was identified as an alternative.

SYOGOC chairman, Ng Ser Miang, said since then, Singapore has witnessed a sharp escalation in construction demand. This means that accelerating construction work on the University Town would increase costs substantially.

After a careful study, the SYOGOC concluded that the alternative site at the NTU campus would be a more prudent choice to house some 5,000 athletes and delegates. This is also consistent with the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) instructions to keep the costs of organising the YOG at a reasonable level.

The Olympic Village at NTU will comprise an Olympic Village Square and a cluster of residential halls on an adjoining site. The university expects to work out the details of additional facilities, such as enhancement to its security and lighting system, soon.

No budget has been set aside for these improvement works, but NTU said it will strive to keep the costs down.

Professor Er Meng-Hwa, senior associate provost, NTU, said: "Among the 11 halls, we have two which are air-conditioned. For the remaining nine, we need to do some retro-fitting to put in the air-conditioning system."

Apart from upgrading works, NTU said it might need to postpone the start of its new academic year by about two weeks, till after the Games in late August 2010, so as not to displace students who will be staying in those hostels.

The organising committee said the relocation of the Youth Olympic Village will not compromise the running of the Games, but it will re-look some logistical matters given that NTU is situated in the western part of Singapore.

Goh Kee Nguan, CEO of SYOGOC, said: "Distance to some of the venues, especially those in the eastern side, will be slightly longer, so in terms of planning and scheduling, we have to be a bit more careful to make sure the athletes get to these venues on time."

The IOC's Executive Board accepted the change proposed by Singapore at its meeting in Beijing on Saturday.

Community Development Youth and Sports Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said he supports the decision to move the Youth Olympic Village from NUS to NTU, so as to keep within the budget of US$75 million that has been set aside for the Games.
He added that the government does not expect a substantial increase in costs for the other sports facilities that need refurbishment.

"This decision is consistent with the IOC's instruction to us, to host the Games at a reasonable cost. And I think in the current climate, with inflation and the economic uncertainty, people will support us in making this prudent choice to relocate the Olympic Village to NTU," said Dr Balakrishnan.

Construction work is still being done at NUS' University Town, though with less urgency.

Professor Tan Eng Chye, deputy president (academic affairs) and provost, NUS, said: "It allows us a more phased approach. In a couple of days, we are likely to award the tender for the bridge connecting the Kent Ridge campus and the University Town."

Channel NewsAsia understands that talks to relocate the Youth Olympic Village started about a month ago.

- CNA/so