

The master planning effort exerted by Solidere in 2006 was successful in eliciting investors' interest and led to the sale of exceptionally large land areas in the new development sectors of the city center

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Following is a description of all the Master Plan amendments that were officially approved in the last year. For more details on the real estate developments, see Developers' Projects.

### Sector H - Martyrs' Square Axis

Sector H follows the south-to-north axis formed by Bechara El Khoury and Damascus streets, to reach Trieste street bordering the first basin of the Beirut port. It includes important symbolic sites: Garden of Forgiveness, Mohamad Al Amin mosque, St George Maronite cathedral, PM Rafic Hariri gravesite, Martyrs' Square itself; as well as the archeological area around the ancient Tell. Development blocks are defined by Fouad Chehab avenue to the south, George Haddad street and sector I (Saifi) to the east and south, Syria street and sector G (conservation area) to the west, Trieste and Port streets to the north and northwest.

## Existing City Center

master planning

The sector plan presented by Solidere, with resulting amendments of the BCD Master Plan, were ratified in Council of Ministers' decree 16163 of January 19, 2006. The plan was based on the 2005 international urban design competition winning scheme, together with important ideas contributed by Solidere on the basis of other studies commissioned by the Company, followed by a workshop held with consultants' team contributing to the project.

The sector is treated as a sequence of four clearly differentiated sections, each attuned to its context. The north-south highways through the corridor that were part of the initial Master Plan were removed, with a view to make the Martyrs' Square axis a destination, not a transit area. This measure will shift traffic at the ancient Tell level to the eastern side only. Through traffic is discouraged by addressing accesses to and from Fouad Chehab and George Haddad streets. Other ideas include extending the scope of Saifi Village to some sections of the Martyrs' Square axis, improving pedestrian links between Monot and Maarad streets, and strengthening the east façade of Martyrs' Square. The land use strategy study for this sector, aiming at preserving Beirut's character, was commissioned to Ian Hogan, urban planner, Ken Conway, urban development economist, and Gaia-Heritage, cultural advisor.

**Southern section: the Threshold** The southern section, constituting the threshold to the Martyrs' Square axis, can also be thought of as forming an east-west continuity with Saifi Village. An important feature of the plan involves creating, in the development block at its southwestern end, a new gateway tower with 120 m maximum height along Bechara El Khoury street, the rest of the block along Syria street retaining its 40 m height.

To its north, lot 987 Marfaa, former site of the City Center Dome, is planned as a mixed-use development with retail, entertainment, residential, hotel and serviced apartment use, containing a pedestrian public passage opened to the sky and a terrace garden, like a flying carpet, separating the residential upper floors from the retail area under the terrace garden. Open space is created to enhance each building, and to create links between Debbas Square garden, the buildings in the eastern part of the mid section, and the City Center Dome site. A pedestrian connection to Monot street is established, and a diagonal movement is created through development blocks to reach the Maarad area, also going into the Martyrs' Square corridor.

In Solidere's strategy, the former City Center Dome site should be connected to the rest of Beirut city center, and used as the first major focus of the Company's cultural strategy, through creating a center of contemporary art. It would have connections with Saifi Village Quartier des Arts and with smaller cultural activities in private developments distributed along the Martyrs' Square axis.

**Mid section: the Memorial Site** The Martyrs' Square axis mid section covers in its western part the sites of the Garden of Forgiveness, Mohamad Al Amin mosque and PM Rafic Hariri gravesite, along with the development blocks west of Bechara El Khoury street.

Master Plan amendments introduced in order to accommodate the Garden of Forgiveness involve property swaps and allow the creation of a footbridge, pergolas and enclosing garden walls. The gravesite of Mr. Hariri and his companions will take the form of a memorial garden, and no building will be erected at this site.

Lots 1524 and 1489 Marfaa comprise the mid-rise Beirut Gardens residential building, and Bab El Saray hotel, designed as a low-rise building symbolizing the gateway into the historic core.

At the center of the section is Martyrs' Square. The concept design for the square proposed by the Greek team that won the international urban design competition, integrates to the landscape scheme for the square a design for the underground car park, destined to re-launch the project on a BOT basis.

In the eastern part of the mid section, a main amendment to the Master Plan introduced by the sector plan is the creation of new streetwall controls that will incorporate a two- to three-story arcade. Because of gardens, low-rise buildings and archeological penetrations in the northern section, the strong edge west of Martyrs' Square was lost, leaving a single streetwall edge on its east side. Solidere aims to emphasize this edge with increased height, to establish façade guidelines for the elevation facing Martyrs' Square, and to commission the design of one building in the elevation.

For the blocks forming the immediate eastern edge of Martyrs' Square, the concept is to have a continuous colonnade facing the square. The purpose is to create a strong urban statement representing the 21st century expression of the 1920's Maarad street colonnade, the signature feature of Beirut's historic core. The colonnade will be a two- to three-story stone arcade, 15-m high. The development blocks height was increased to a 52 m maximum, with a mandated setback at maximum cornice height of 36 m. The spine of tall buildings, with 52 m maximum height, on this edge, is to continue into the southern section (the Threshold), as well as extend to the northern section of the Martyrs' Square corridor.

The southeastern corner of the Martyrs' Square axis, lot 1074 Saifi on the intersection with Gouraud street is known as the *galleria* site, to be developed as an active, public retail and/or entertainment use around a central atrium, with offices or apartments above.

Further north, amendments to the Master Plan include the removal of the police station initially planned on lot 1085 Saifi, site of the former Ottoman police station. Its ownership, devolving to Solidere as a result of a property swap with the State, is to be transferred through sale to house the Rafic Hariri library. Solidere's recommendation, that this important project warrants a limited international design competition, has been accepted by the Hariri family. Following CDR's request, Solidere is preparing a design competition brief and has submitted a shortlist of selected eminent international architects for the competition. The Hariri family is to commission the design once the property transfer is effected.

For the blocks behind the above frontage, maximum building height is reduced to 32 m (instead of the 40 m formerly allowed in the Master Plan), with a 16 m setback at the 24 m height. Two residential blocks, planned to feature typical Saifi Village courtyards and pedestrian streets, may be the subject of a design competition.

The northeastern part of lot 1076 Saifi will house the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be designed in the form of a reconstruction of the former Petit Serail palace. As per Council of Ministers' resolution 27 of May 18, 2005, Solidere is to make a property swap with the State, whereby the Company will relinquish its ownership of the lot in favor of the State, in exchange for the above lot 1085 Saifi, former site of the police headquarters. Solidere prepared the design brief, building massing and façade guidelines for the project, based on the ministry's requirements and research on the Petit Serail. Upon Solidere's recommendation, Abdel Wahed El-Wakil has been commissioned by CDR to undertake the design, now in progress.

**Northern section: the Trench** An important amendment, based on highway design by Dar Al-Handasah following urban design studies carried out for Solidere by Michel Macary (France), relates to grade separation and creates a new road system involving a two-way road link (Byblos street) east of Martyrs' Square axis, and no link on the west. In the original Master Plan, access in and out of Martyrs' Square was through a continuation of Bechara El Khoury street across the square and down to Trieste street. Decree 16163 of January 25, 2006 amended the Master Plan by canceling the section between Weygand and Trieste streets, leaving a shorter, tertiary road, which goes behind Al-Bourj building to reach Hassan Al Kadi and Foch streets. The canceled road would have cut the ancient Tell in two.

This solution provides a larger area around the ancient Tell and the Citadel, both among the important archeological remains which Solidere is striving to integrate into the urban fabric. The traffic of the canceled road is directed to Byblos street, turning the latter into a two-way traffic street. The change also affects accesses and footprints of adjacent lots, especially lots 1474 and 1475 Marfaa, which are separated by a well showing important archeological finds.

Solidere has incorporated in its cultural strategy the Beirut city museum, to be created on the public domain facing Al-Bourj building, with a link between the museum and the Tell. Michel Macary (France), who prepared an early concept design for the museum, also contributed to the design and finishes of the related new road scheme, included in the sector plan.

In the eastern part of the Martyrs' Square axis northern section (sub-sector Hc), the urban design is based on a planning study by Koetter Kim (US). Solidere has taken some losses in BUA in sector H, due to the conservation of archeology, and the reduction of building heights near Saifi Village and for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building to 32 and 24 m respectively, (instead of the maximum 40 m formerly allowed). In order to compensate for those BUA losses, a main change in Master Plan involves an increase in tower height in sub-sector Hc to a 160 m maximum, from the former 120 m maximum.

Solidere further wants to encourage linking the sub-sector to the Beirut port first basin quayside, through two pedestrian bridges across Trieste street: one linking sub-sector Hc to sub-sector Dc on the Beirut port first basin, another linking the archeological area of the ancient Tell to the same sub-sector. In addition to designing Martyrs' Square with its underground parking, the Greek team has been commissioned to work on the archeological park to the north, while Machado and Silvetti Associates (US) undertake the belvedere garden overlooking it.

**The Sea Gate** The Sea Gate envisioned in the Martyrs' Square axis urban design study is not part of sector H, but of sub-sector Dc north of sector H. The Company's proposals for changes in sub-sector Dc, as part of amendments to decree 15803 of 2005 relating to sectors A and D of the Master Plan, were approved by the Directorate General for Urbanism, and sent to Beirut Municipality and to CDR prior to their forwarding to the Council of Ministers. Following government approval, the amendments will be issued by decree.

**The Cultural Corridor** Solidere's concept for a Martyrs' Square cultural corridor was developed in detail by Gaia-Heritage. The strategy envisages twinning projects with similar cultural projects in other Mediterranean cities, with funding potentially sourced from the European Union.

The center of contemporary art, where artists can be promoted locally and internationally, will stimulate the Lebanese public's exposure to contemporary art. Together with Quartier des Arts and a proposed art auction house in Saifi, it will create a strong artistic magnet, positioning Beirut as the place for arts in the Middle East and on the international art market.

Beirut city history museum, located on the Tell archeological site, will use classical conservation methods and the latest audiovisual technologies to present the history of the city from the first human settlements.

The museum of the Mediterranean Sea will provide a large exhibition space and an aquarium, related to Lebanon and the Mediterranean basin. It is planned to be twinned with a similar museum in Valencia, Spain, and will host a research center with a specialized library and major international thematic exhibitions.

The congress hall and center of performing arts will have a dual function, as a venue for international conventions, and as a national center for opera, music, dance and theater.



#### **Sector I - Saifi**

Council of Minister's decree 16163 of January 19, 2006 also approved Master Plan amendments relating to sector I, which involve a new grade separation scheme at the already congested junction of Fouad Chehab and George Haddad streets. Vehicles travelling from west to north will use a free-flow tunnel, while those travelling from west to east will have the benefit of a new overpass. These improvements will reduce traffic within the city center.

#### **Sector J and The Landmark**

Council of Ministers' decree 16184, dated January 25, 2006, ratified amendments of the Master Plan as far as sector J. The main changes were eliminating the tower on the site south of Amir Amin garden, featured in the original Master Plan, transposing it to the Landmark site north of the garden. The decree approved The Landmark scheme as designed by Jean Nouvel on lot 1520 Bachoura, and granted it specific exemptions from BCD and Lebanon construction law regulations.

The Landmark exemptions involve canceling streetwall controls, modifying pedestrian passages by removing part of the north-south passage and adding an east-west passage, and exemption from providing landscaping on 50% of un-built areas. The former Master Plan maximum height of the tower was increased from 40 m to 164 m with a 55 m-high podium. Other exemptions relate to technical issues: location of the technical floor, direct sunlight, ventilation, claustra (musharrabiya); and to the BUA calculation for cinemas' halls and double volumes (more than 5.50 m of height).

Sector J amendments also include an increase in the heights of the two gateway buildings framing Gibran Khalil Gibran garden at the southern edge of the city center. To the west of the garden, the tower height on lot 1132 Zokak El Blatt was increased from 90 m to 130 m. To the east of the garden, the tower on the western part of lot 739 Bachoura was increased in height from 120 m to 150 m along the two roads framing the development block, Fouad Chehab avenue and Ghalghoul street; while the part of the block behind the tower, facing Amir Amin garden, was decreased in height to 40 m.

Block 128-4, part of lot 739 Bachoura, is to be the object of a property swap agreement with the State for the construction of an arts center or multiuse cultural building, subject to the issuance of a Council of Ministers' decree approving the terms of such agreement. The project funding is a grant by the Sultanate of Oman to the Ministry of Culture. Solidere gave the ministry a development brief for the project, with the suggestion to organize a national architectural competition.

#### **Sector E - Souks District**

Solidere's proposed changes to the Master Plan, as far as sector E, basically include a pedestrian bridge linking Majidiya Square through the department store to Jean-Paul II Square across Park boulevard. The Directorate General of Urbanism approved the changes and forwarded the proposal in June 2006 to the Council of Ministers for approval. The Master Plan amendment is to be issued by decree.