

NEW WATERFRONT DISTRICT MASTER PLANNING

The plan aims at turning the new waterfront into the destination and climax of Beirut's citywide corniche. Upon completion of the Beirut Marina town quays, corniche promenade, eastern marina quayside and Beirut port first basin promenade, the city center will provide an uninterrupted extension of the Beirut shoreline. The terraced corniche promenade, over 1.3-km (0.8-mile) long, with a width varying between 45 and 110 m, will be a socially active pedestrian arena, with views to the sea, Jounieh bay and Mount Sannine.

The street network, designed to fit a Monaco-style Formula One Grand Prix circuit, received FIA's preliminary technical approval in 2002. The track is to run clockwise along 4.8 km with the starting grid on the coastal corniche. Where streets are less than the standard 12 m width, construction works are to dismantle the existing sidewalk, widen the carriageway and install safety barriers and debris fences prior to the race event. On the 40-m wide upper corniche promenade, temporary stands are to be installed to accommodate spectators during races.

Sector A comprises the waterside park, corniche, land, quays and breakwater around Beirut Marina. Leisure, sporting and tourist activities are the dominant ones. The decree lists an outdoor amphitheatre in the waterside park; infrastructure and developments for the Formula One racing; developments for the yacht club and related services, hotels, tourist and exhibition centers, sports courts, restaurants and cafés.

The new waterfront district elicited early indications of interest on the part of developers. In response to their demands, Solidere proposed a plan for sectors A and D, which, together with related general and special regulations of the Master Plan, received official approval in Council of Ministers' decree 15803 of 2005.

The plan is a development of the 2001 planning study by a consortium of US firms: Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM) for urban design, Sasaki for landscaping, and Parsons Brinckerhoff for transport planning. The study provided a conceptual urban design framework for the district; integrated landscaping guidelines for the new coastal corniche; and resolved the connection to the city and to the two marinas at the northwestern and northeastern ends of the city center.

The detailed plan was completed in 2001 and submitted to the relevant authorities for review and approval. The higher council for Urban Planning and the Beirut city municipal council approved it in 2002 with some qualifications, which were left to the government's decision. In 2002, the SOM design was the only non-American project to win a Charter Award of the Congress for the New Urbanism (US).

The Beirut Marina yacht club building is subject to a maximum height of 11 m above corniche level. No permanent construction is allowed on the marina quays and breakwater, apart from infrastructure or buildings relating to port management, such as customs, immigration, petrol station or car parks. Restaurants and shops built as temporary structures along the town quay are not to exceed the height of the finished corniche promenade above.

Sector D comprises the development blocks and public domain extending north of Sector E (Souks district) to reach the corniche promenade, and east of the waterside park to reach the Beirut port first basin and the eastern marina.

Planned as an exemplar of modern development, it is a multiuse district with a wide range of commerce and retail services, office, tourist and hotel space, convention centers, exhibition and cultural facilities, together with extensive residential development. It also includes a part of the Formula One track. The provisions relating to developments on the Beirut Marina are also applicable on the eastern marina.

Development lots should have specified minimum areas: 750 sq m subject to encompassing an 18 x 18 m square, in sub-sectors Da, Dc and Dd; 1500 sq m subject to encompassing a 25 x 25 m square, in sub-sectors Db and De.

Two streetwall controls are applied and view corridors are created to preserve sea and mountain views. SW5 requires a 3 m setback at the 36 m height. SW6 is similar to SW5 with the additional requirement of a 5.5-m high arcade on the street frontage.

Building heights and envelope controls ensure a careful distribution of floor space. The majority of development is at medium density (40 or 52 m height), with a limited number of high-rise sites (90, 120 and 160 m height) planned in distinctive locations and landmark buildings framing spectacular views to the sea and mountains.

The road widening and addition of new roads in the sector plan result in larger areas dedicated to public domain. The total built-up area remains unchanged, with no increase in development areas allocated to Solidere.

The ratification of the sector plan will pave the way for starting the detailed design for infrastructure, hardscaping and landscaping, preceding real estate development in the district.

New waterfront district urban planning design model
Skidmore Owings & Merrill

