

The Waterfront District elicited early indications of interest on the part of developers, well preceding the delivery of the site. These culminated in the conclusion of major land sales in 2006, totaling 170,000 sq m of BUA. In response to investors' demands, Solidere has engaged since 2001 in a serious planning exercise for sectors A and D, continually improving it and seeking approval from the public authorities for its proposals regarding the district, together with related general and special regulations of the BCD Master Plan

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Until the recent work relating to further amendments, the New Waterfront District master plan, as ratified in Council of Ministers' decree 15803 of November 24, 2005, had been 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.

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 was also designed to accommodate an urban Formula One Grand Prix circuit. This 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 necessary, particularly at bends and chicanes and over-runs, construction works are to dismantle sidewalks, widen carriageways 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.

Sector A comprises the waterside park, corniche, land, quays and breakwater around Beirut Marina. Leisure, sporting and tourist activities are the dominant ones. Decree 15803 lists an outdoor amphitheatre in the waterside park; infrastructure and developments for Formula One racing; development for the yacht club and related services, hotels, tourism, exhibition centers, sports courts, restaurants and cafés. The Beirut Marina yacht club building is subject to a maximum height of 11 m above corniche level. This stipulation was amended in Council of Minister's decree 16546 of March 9, 2006, which increased the yacht club maximum height to 13 m. 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 the following 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.

New Waterfront District

proposed master plan
sectors A and D

In 2006, Solidere commissioned Ian Hogan, urban design consultant, to undertake a master plan amendment exercise for the New Waterfront District. An intense interest was perceived on the part of investors, who were pressing the Company to buy lots in the district. A particular rush was experienced on the land next to the sea (which is not yet reclaimed and consolidated).

The Solidere proposals resulting from this planning exercise address its concern about Beirut being turned exclusively into a resort and residential center, with the disadvantages of extensive absentee homeownership. Solidere is keen to counteract this trend by encouraging the development of a comprehensive mixed-use waterfront district. This also falls within the Company's strategy to market and promote Beirut as a corporate international business center, based on the city's lifestyle assets and skilled human resources. Beirut's competitive edge lies in the qualities of its people and services. Discussion is proceeding with the government on providing business incentives within a defined area of the waterfront district. Consistent with Solidere's mixed-use philosophy, the incentives are planned to apply not only to offices, but also to all supporting uses, including hotels, serviced apartments, retail and other services. Employment generation and other effects are expected to have a big impact on the Beirut economy. At full build-out, the special business district is planned to create some 40,000 new jobs.

The master plan amendment creates two poles, focused on two groups of towers that constitute very dramatic landmarks, within a perimeter of buildings conforming to the previous master plan's streetwall vocabulary as well as new skywall controls that will condition the profiles of towers within the clusters.

The pedestrian connectivity within the master plan amendment forms a branching spine, which starts from the Souks through a footbridge and continues north towards the sea. A special business district, planned to comprise a group of towers with heights ranging from 140 to 220 m, is created on either side of this central boulevard and around the new square to its east. Within the spine, the street is to be widened to accommodate a light rail train. The detailed alignments of the LRT are under study by the Greek team, winners of the Martyrs' Square competition. A new avenue, parallel to the central boulevard and to its east, features arcades providing an architectural link with the existing Maarad-Allenby axis.

A second, easterly cluster of (higher) towers, centered on an axis aligned on the view of Mount Sannine, is expected to be mainly residential, with hotel, serviced apartments, supporting retail, and also possibly some office use. This cluster is carefully controlled to feature in the offshore view terminating the Martyrs' Square axis, with towers leaving space between them giving glimpses of the sea.

Solidere's proposals for sectors A and D were approved by the Directorate General for Urbanism and sent to the Municipality and the Council for Development.

The proposed amendment involves a transfer to the New Waterfront District of some 100,000-110,000 sq m of BUA, equivalent to the areas lost on the Martyrs' Square axis, in sector H, as well as in Wadi Abou Jamil developments and in 178 Saifi Village, where one floor had to be removed to compensate for higher ceilings destined to improve the residential environment. The principle of BUA transfer between the various sectors is recognized in the BCD Master Plan and detailed regulations.

