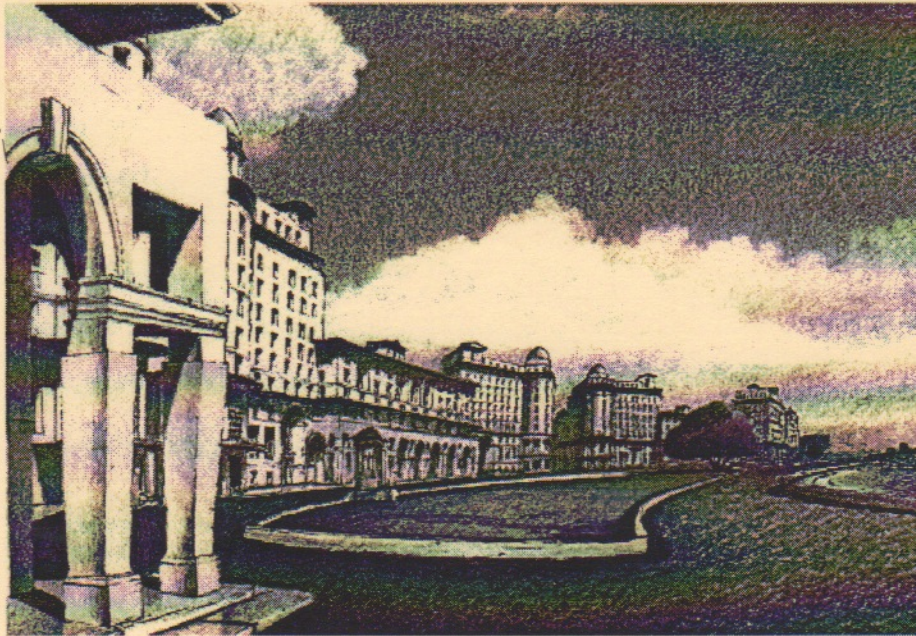


NEW CITY CRITIQUE

BEIRUT, LEBANON

Presented to

GEFINOR FINANCE & PLAN B



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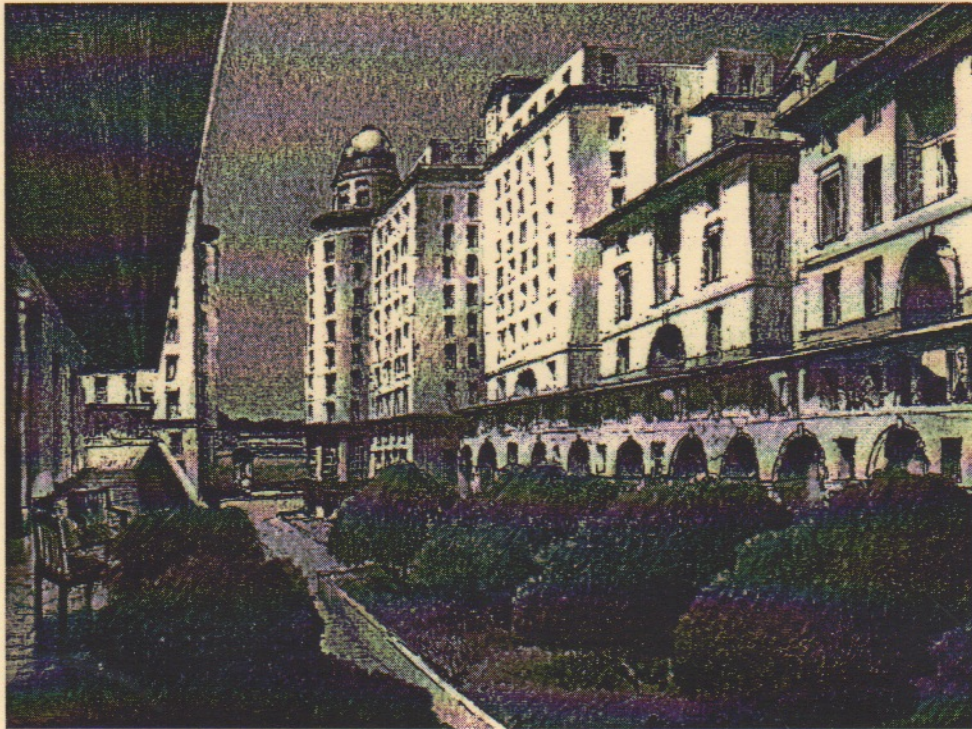
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INTRODUCTION



A Design Critique

The written statements in the Master Plan for New City in Hazmieh contain a variety of objectives and principles that contribute to achieving good contemporary neighborhoods. But the drawings reveal that some ingredients are missing and others, referred to in the document, have not been resolved successfully in the plan (see *illustration 1*).

The purpose of this critique is not to discuss the nature of the written arguments in great depth but rather to focus on the plan's drawings for New City and the extent to which they achieve successful contemporary neighborhoods.

In order to do that, the critique will address key themes, then compare and evaluate the conceptual plan for New City with each of these themes under the following headings:

A. Neighborhood Structure: Towards Sustainable Urbanism

Outlining the problems facing contemporary urbanism across the world.

B. Walkable Mixed Use Neighborhoods: A Contribution to Sustainability

Offering a range of principles that contribute to solving those problems.

C. The Plan for New City

Taking those principles in greater detail and making the following three observations:

1. The degree to which the plan drawings successfully demonstrate good neighborhood design.
2. The degree to which problems exist with the current plan.
3. Recommendations to better achieve good contemporary urbanism in the plan for New City.

The principles are outlined under 10 general categories of issues.

1. Regional Context
2. The Uniqueness of the Site
3. The Mixing of Uses
4. Residential Mix and Location
5. Circulation: The Clarity and Integration of Streets and Paths



Illustration 1. Architects' conceptual image of New City residential tower not described in written text of current plan.

6. The clarity and balance of Public and Private Space
7. Legibility and the Form of Public Space
8. The Phasing of Development
9. Security
10. Design Control and Guidelines

It is vital to understand that in the context of this critique any recommendations are in the form of modifications to an existing design and its accompanying level of information. That constraint inevitably brings with it a different set of responses to those that would result from the task of producing a new design based on a more thorough understanding of context, site and political and economic criteria.

Even though the principles of good neighborhood and town design are outlined in this critique, it is neither appropriate nor responsible to offer or claim the recommendations come from as rigorous an understanding of the site as would normally be undertaken in the course of a thorough design process. This critique applies those principles to an existing plan. It does not apply them to an existing place.

It is for this reason that site specific design alternatives are minimal. Instead the critique offers a vocabulary of precedents in a range of site specific situations. It is our firm belief that these precedents illustrate those town making principles for which New City would have its own unique response.

New City in its Global Context

The following summary of problems and outcomes may appear at times to be of a scale and order far beyond the 9.4 hectares of New City. Nothing could be further from the truth. While the concerns are global, the solutions are often local. The underlying components of mixed use neighborhoods need to be the building blocks of the greater town, city and regional structure. This is how it used to be, when small settlements developed and amalgamated or were free standing and relatively self sustaining.

When viewed this way, New City is one of those *essential* building blocks of the wider community. How the new development performs internally, how it relates to the immediate hinterland; combining with adjacent under-utilized neighborhoods, offering a new richness of facilities, interacting seamlessly with the surroundings, benefiting from movement along its edges, inviting other citizens to take part in what it offers, all begin to defeat the unsustainable alternatives we have been building for the last half century.

NEIGHBORHOOD PRINCIPLES



**A. NEIGHBORHOOD STRUCTURE:
TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE URBANISM**

There is an increasing realization across the world, whether in urban redevelopment or expansion, that the highly segregated town form of the last fifty years was misguided and only benefitted those institutions that provided both the vast amounts of auto oriented infrastructure or demanded large isolated tracts of single use for ease of acquisition, development, management and disposal.

This preoccupation has led to a reduction in the traditional elements of the public realm; the local streets, fronted by community facilities, local commerce and recreation; the setting for the planned and spontaneous interactions that are the wonderful community legacy of traditional mixed use neighborhoods and towns.

This reduction of an interactive public realm results in less reasons to be out and about in the neighborhoods. These people that remain feel less secure; the spaces take on an air of isolation and become undervalued. This encourages further retreat from the public network, buildings pull away or turn their backs on the streets, security and isolation becomes imperative, and the public realm deteriorates.

Not only does the interactive urbanism suffers, but the rural environment is increasingly consumed by the sprawl of development, bringing with it increasing atmospheric pollution, resource consumption, transportation and maintenance costs. The urbanism consumes resources *because* of its design rather than being a resource supportive of low energy but high value commerce and interaction. The car becomes essential as opposed to optional.

The plan for New City *does* contribute beneficially to correcting some of these trends with particular reference to:

- its awareness of the need for mixed use in close proximity to it's residential areas.
- its realizations that the key to successful mixed use relies on passing traffic as well as local access, utilizing Old Damascus Road and its public transport benefits.
- the benefits New City can bring to surrounding neighborhoods by being grafted into and around existing and future developments.

Valuable as these contributions are, they are strategic and as such are only beneficial if the detailed design is supportive. It is here where most of the criticisms of the New City Plan can be made. Prior to doing so, it is important to summarize the characteristics of sustainable neighborhoods in order for the basis of the critique to be understood.

B. WALKABLE MIXED USE NEIGHBORHOODS

A Contribution to Sustainability

Relatively small walkable neighborhoods are found in many cultures and across history. While exhibiting great richness of cultural, climatic, and site specific diversity, the underlying principles are remarkably consistent (see figure 1).

They have the following characteristics:

- They are limited in size by how far we will walk to our daily needs; about 400 meters (roughly a five minute walk) from the centre to the periphery. In simple mathematical terms this equates to an area of approximately 125 acres or 50 hectares. Topography, climate and culture can have a bearing on this and as with *New City*, if located adjacent to existing fabric, suitably dense and utilizing the surrounding population, they could be smaller and still vibrant and successful. But the basic tenet is the existence of daily needs within a walkable distance.
- The neighborhood may be a complete new entity or it may include adjacent development to give coherence, focus and diversity to both existing and new.
- They have a centre with compatible mixed uses offering a variety of daily needs for the local community including retail, medical, social, educational, local employment and public parks. The centre is usually in the form of a local high street. This may be in the geographical centre of the specific development or towards the edge if advantageous to form a seam between two incomplete neighborhoods.
- The mixed use centre must take advantage of the streets that are the best connected and integrated with the surrounding areas to be commercially robust, taking advantage of *through* movement as well as *to* movement. On occasions this may realign the centre relative to the land ownership. *New City* sensibly does this with its commercial uses along *Old Damascus Road*.
- The location of the centre on the most integrated street will best ensure the presence of good public transport.
- An interconnected street system accesses these uses and activities offering as frequent and direct access as possible. (Cul-de-sacs and circuitous curved roads are antithetical to good local access and therefore the local economy). *The New City Plan* has serious shortcomings in this regard.

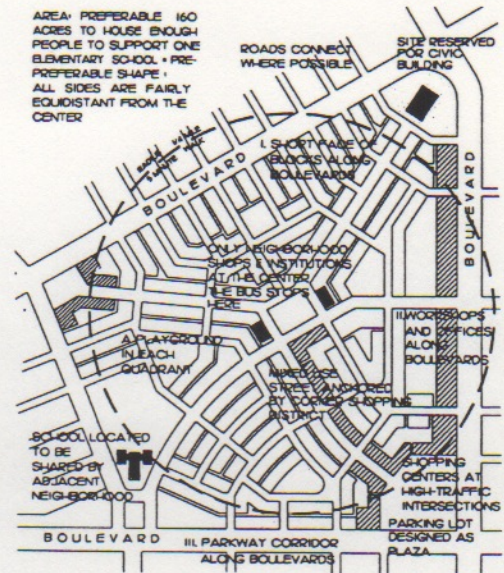


Figure 1. Urban Neighborhood 1990 as part of a town.

- In addition to the street system a series of nodal spaces are located at key positions be they squares, greens or plazas, often as a focus for civic and community buildings. *With the rich range of uses proposed for New City the possibilities for a more meaningful and richer palate of public spaces needs to be addressed (See illustration 2).*
- On street parking is encouraged to bring additional use to the street and to act as a barrier between traffic and pedestrians. On street parking can also contribute to slowing down the speed of the moving vehicles. If necessary, further traffic calming devices can be employed. *More could be made of on street parking than the current New City Plan implies.*
- Any substantial on-plot parking must not push the building back from the street, separating the building occupant and activity from the overlook and interest of the pedestrian. If large amounts of parking are required additional to that on street, then either alleys or rear lanes should be employed, basements where appropriate and cost effective, or specific car parks behind the street oriented buildings.
- If possible, densities should increase towards the commercial center providing greater concentrations of people to support commercial uses. Land uses taking large amounts of land should be located towards the edge of the walkable neighborhood.
- Streets and adjacent buildings are positioned and detailed to make walking and driving safe and interesting at all times of the day and night, by being close to the footpath with a clear front facing the public realm; no blank walls, dead facades or isolated pedestrian paths. This in turn, allows for a more private space to the rear of the building whether it be for servicing or recreation space for the occupants of the buildings. *While some of the residential buildings relate positively to the streets, there are some serious shortcomings in the New City Plan as regards distinctions between the fronts and backs and the public and private nature of the spaces.*
- Street trees are recommended wherever possible to give additional spatial definition and to modify climate, particularly where extremes of climate influence the use of public space. *There is evidence of tree planting or conservation in the park and other off-street spaces but poor provision for street trees in the current New City.*



Illustration 2. Creating plazas as nodes where circulation, retail and residential uses interwine.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OF
CRITIQUE**

The elements of highly successful developments have not been resolved adequately in the New City plan. The initial success will be short lived, as the weaknesses inherent in the plan's design method begin to surface. The method referred to is the modern practice of planning, which only superficially addresses the importance of **regional context, site characteristics, uses, circulation, open space, phasing, security, and design.**

The following are issues which will prevent New City from achieving the success worthy of such a prominent and valuable location:

REGIONAL CONTEXT

The role of the project is not made clear by the current plan. We feel the location predetermines New City to be a neighborhood center for the region. As such it needs to serve as a connector of adjoining neighborhoods, and a destination for local retail and leisure activity.

SITE CHARACTERISTICS

It is short-sided to depend on only one aspect of a site to determine success. Only one site feature has been addressed at length, specifically the views looking outward. External views are not guaranteed to remain without development control of adjoining property. It is wiser to accentuate multiple site conditions such as frontage along existing roads, existing structures, interior slope, and existing landscape, to create and control the marketable environment of the neighborhood.

USES

The uses described in the plan are highly segregated, and as such impair the ability of each to function at it's fullest potential. The separation of the hotel and club from the retail has no advantages to either and should be reconsidered.

The residential units are undifferentiated from one another implying similar interior layouts. This will handicap marketing of the project, due to a reliance on a small segment of the buying population.

CIRCULATION

The current street system is inadequate. Dead end streets and the lack of a traffic network removes the possibility of alternate access which is crucial for efficient traffic flow, phasing and servicing. This also inhibits the efficient parcelization of the property, which reduces the possible unit count and maximum open space. Single residential access will exacerbate traffic problems.

OPEN SPACE

The provision of clearly defined and usable open space is poor. The desire for greenery is a key marketing tool for New City. However, the current plan fails to provide the implied vision of a park setting when analyzed at ground level.

The space is ill-defined in relation to the buildings, which in turn lack the discipline of front and back orientation. An accurate description of the current open space plan is one of a buffer, not a park.

PHASING

The current phasing plan is expensive and risky, providing for the greatest amount of site disruption at the least convenient time.

The current phasing plan will:

- eliminate most of the greenery as excavation for the underground parking is prepared, at a time when marketing and image building are critical to the success of the project, and
- commit the developers to a plan without future flexibility to adapt to changing market demands.

SECURITY

Security is achieved through design, not guard gates. The extensive use of underground parking, the ill-defined orientation of fronts and backs of buildings, and the ambiguity of the open spaces, bring into question at what level security becomes effective in the current plan.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

The lack of coding reduces the predictability of the final design, and therefore, it's marketing strength over the development cycle of the project. Codes provide assurance to potential investors that the level of quality depicted in the designs will be carried out.

THE CRITIQUE

THE PLAN FOR NEW CITY

With these clearly stated principles forming the basis of the critique it is now possible to look at the Master Plan for New City in more detail. It is proposed to take these principles and demonstrate the degree to which the Master Plan (*figure 2*) is successful, offering explanation and modification when it is not.

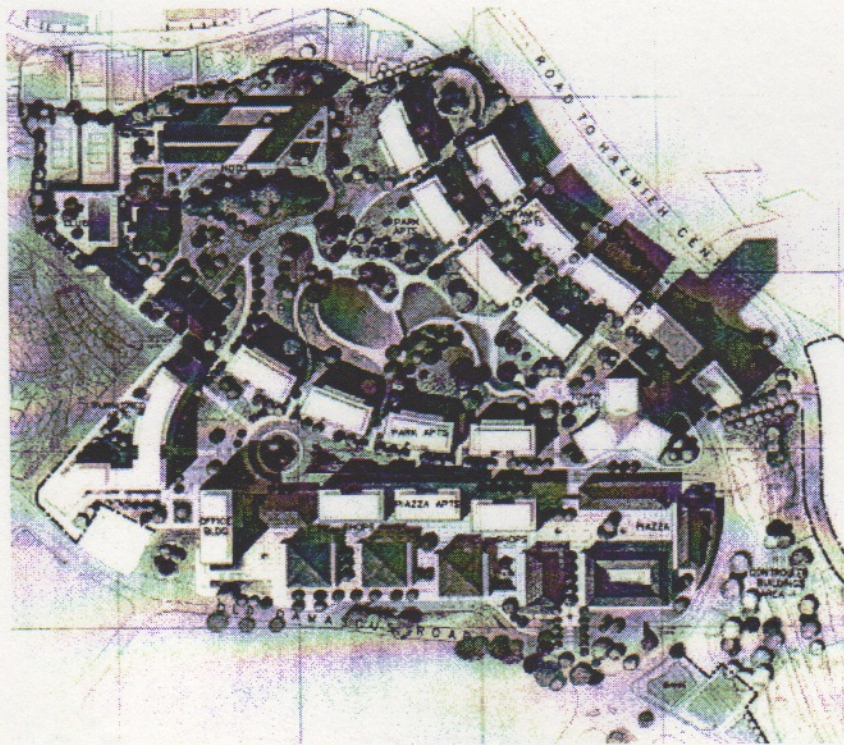


Figure 2. The Master Plan

I. Regional Context

Success of the plan

For both its scale and location, this site is of considerable significance in the wider region (*see scale comparison, figure 3*). It is very close to the confluence of several historical and proposed routes. Both the old and New Damascus Roads focus on the growth center of nearby Hazmieh, which is developing into a regional center of some significance. They continue directly into the heart of downtown Beirut.

If and when the new highway is constructed, access becomes trans regional or even inter continental, with a new junction only a short

distance from the site.

All the above when combined with the topography and associated views should make residential demand high and have a bearing on the densities that can be achieved without negatively affecting that demand.

Problems of the plan

The apparent growth of the center of Hazmieh does raise the important issue of how much and what kind of retail is possible along the southern edge of the New City site and may also bring into question the site as a suitable location for a cinema complex. Some specialized retail already exists along the frontage at the base of Mar Takla to the north east of the site and something similar may well be possible for New City. But the new retail will be in new buildings that demand relatively high rents to justify their presence. Obviously the new residential will affect retail rents to some degree, as would, the provision of better connectivity from other surrounding areas.

Recommendations for New City

The commitment to local facilities is commendable but the document does not give sufficient, well argued evidence for the commercial viability of those facilities in that location. It is essential that this be taken further and related to growth within the immediate region. This would entail:

- A retail analysis showing regional retail deficiencies.
- A retail plan, identifying tenants and coordinating their mixes and location within the project.

We have found that such analysis needs to be undertaken simultaneously with planning to insure the most successful retail design. This is best accomplished during a design charrette.

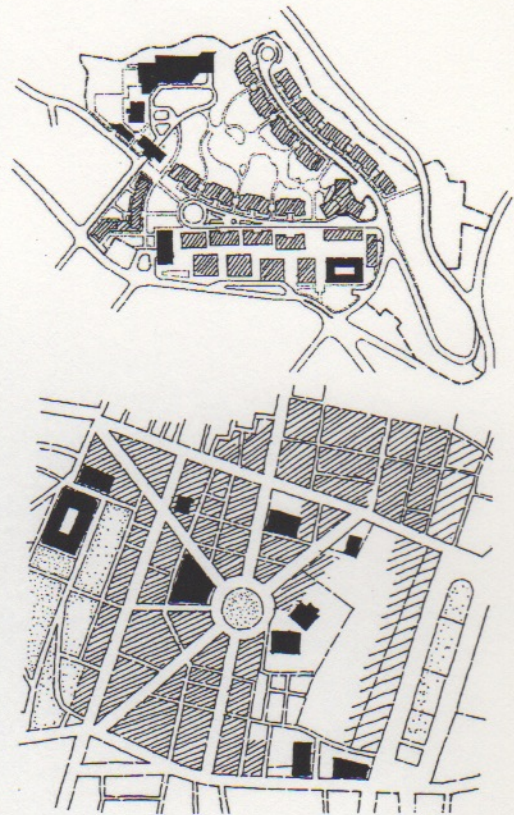


Figure 3. Scale comparison of New City site (top) and the Central Historical District of Beirut (bottom).

II. The Uniqueness of the Site

Success of the plan

There is no doubt that the written document acknowledges the significance of the site in terms of the existing buildings, the landscape and the setting, wishing to maintain and utilize many of its unique qualities.

Problems of the plan

The unusual combination of past use, present vegetation, topography and outlook are the key elements that make this site remarkable and possibly exceptional. The absence of any further detailed evidence within the document does not give confidence that these possibilities have been maximized. This should also extend to any land uses that affect the overall image of the place, for better or for worst. The sizable Pepsi Cola plant is very close to the site and almost opposite a major access point. It is hard to believe that this had no bearing on design decisions. The document does not inform one way or the other.

The importance of maintaining views needs to be further studied in light of adjacent, off-site, building allowances. Due to the topography, high rise construction on abutting property would eliminate the views from a majority of the panoramic apartments as depicted on the current site plan (see figure 4).

It is crucial, therefore, to provide not only views where possible, but great urbanism within the site, to insure the highest market performance under any scenario. Successful projects are so because the plans create and take advantage of great spaces in the form of parks, squares, and streets. Views become secondary selling points. This permits increase real estate values throughout a project, not just along or beside natural features.

In addition, sites of this prominence are often as important from the "outside in" as they are from the "inside out", in terms of impact and being a good neighbor. Not enough evidence has been given addressing this issue.

An example would be the effect upon the adjacent Mar Takla in terms of impacting on their views of and beyond the site. This is not to say that development should necessarily be subservient to its surroundings but the issue should be addressed and seen to be so.

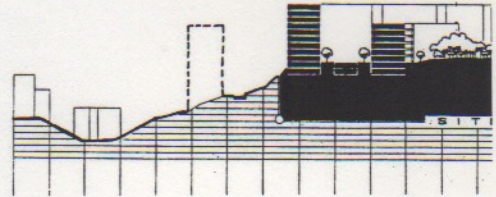


Figure 4. Possible affect of a new adjacent building on views from Panoramic Apartments.

Recommendations for New City

Both the written components and graphic supports detailing more specific on site and contextual analysis should be in evidence. The extent to which this level of detailed analysis and synthesis would fundamentally change the design is difficult for a "distant" critique to assess but all the interested parties need to be in a position to make that judgment. Currently this is not possible.

III. The Mixing of Uses

Success of the plan

For a relatively small site (9.4 hectares / 23.2 acres) the land use mixing is considerable. In its general location, the non residential uses take advantage of being adjacent to the Old Damascus Road. This encourages use from other areas of the city, gives prominence for passing trade and offers the new residents and workers a range of facilities at the local level that many other areas probably cannot match.

The use of some upper floors for residential, above the retail, will help activate the street and give overlook and surveillance out of retail hours. The office building to the west of the retail offers a similar benefit.

Problems of the plan

The retail takes strategic advantage of Old Damascus Road, but fails to capitalize on it in detail. There is insufficient frontage addressing the major route and very little street frontage parking implied by the drawing. The retail pavilion buildings give short runs of frontage with very circuitous circulation patterns; not usually conducive to successful retail. The east-west running retail units form more of a traditional frontage but the erratic building line disrupts good retail sight lines (see figure 5).

In addition, those same retail units are located in such a way that there is ambiguity between service access for the retail and a high quality residential street. This front/back confusion results in neither of these functions working satisfactorily.

The hotel is the one major attraction for visitors that is in the body of the site. As a result, a separate, exclusive access is deemed necessary, causing considerable disruption to the continuity of the street

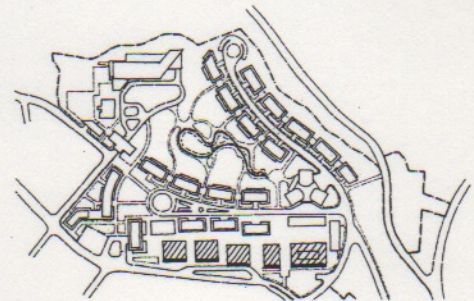


Figure 5. Erratic and fragmented retail frontage on Old Damascus Road.



Illustration 3. An example of a continuous street frontage.

system. In addition, the location puts considerable distance between the hotel and the other retail and entertainment facilities along the Old Damascus Road (figure 6). If all this is to capitalize on the exceptional views from the Hotel to the ocean then there needs to be very precise evidence and scrutiny of that panorama.

Recommendations for New City

Maximum advantage must be taken of the *through* movement along the major road and the exposure that this offers.

1. A continuous street frontage of retail is essential here, broken only by secondary streets running at right angles to the Old Damascus Road.
2. Depending on retail demand, a double fronted retail street may be possible parallel to Old Damascus Road, with short 90 degree connecting links. This would produce a much more fluid circuit.
3. It would be further enhanced if vehicular traffic and its associated parking was allowed to penetrate the full retail area. It is rare for "pedestrian only" streets to carry a necessary degree of 18-24 hour activity other than in the heart of major city centres. There is no danger of traffic behaving anti-socially on such a street if designed to accommodate mixed activity from the outset.
4. Clearly, site levels are an issue here as there appears to be a level change from East to West of some 15 meters. With the limited information available it is difficult to be more precise as to the implications this may have on any redesign of the retail area.
5. If the specific hotel location is not crucial to maximize ocean views, then consideration should be given to locating it further south, towards the Old Damascus Road and the associated commercial and entertainment facilities.

If it is crucial to maintain the current location of the Hotel, an alternative strategy worthy of examination is, in addition to the Old Damascus Road frontage, to take the retail north along the major street connecting to the Hotel. This would have greater implications on the overall plan because a great deal of mixed use activity would need to be associated with this north south street and it would need to be part of a through circulation system for vehicular traffic. However, it would begin to unify the commercial elements of Hotel retail, office and entertainment that are currently somewhat strung out and not fully benefitting from each others presence.

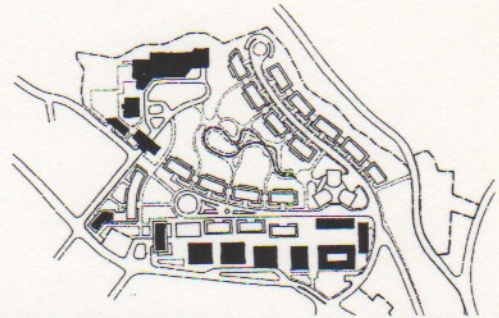
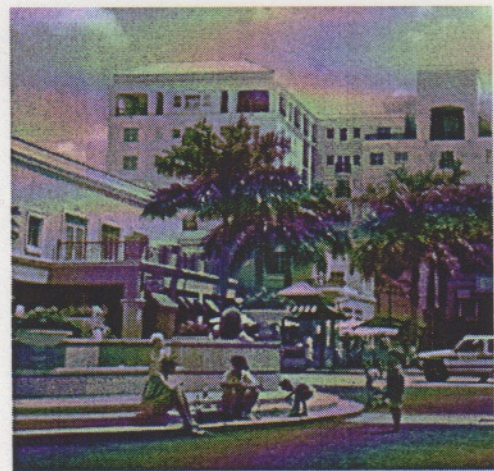


Figure 6. Need for integration of hotel and retail facilities.



Illustrations 4 & 5. Examples of integrating residential buildings with retail facilities.

6. It is encouraging to see some residential over retail on the current plan. If at all possible this should be carried through *all* the retail buildings. Residential may fluctuate with office use, but the whole ambience and vitality of these streets would be transformed by at least a continuous second story or even more if possible, whilst maintaining an acceptable height/width ratio to the street.
7. The cinemas should attract a considerable number of people, benefitting the other commercial uses. To place the bulk of their built form at a lower ground level absorbs the negative internal nature of the buildings. However, as much as possible of the "front of house" facilities should be at the street level, and the presence of retail on the lower ground level competes rather than supports the active public realm on the street above.

IV. Residential Mixing and Location.

Success of the plan

The Plan document refers to a range of dwelling types and a range of prospects and locations is evident in the design, capitalising on both the views beyond the site and giving definition and overlook to those newly created features within the site (figure 7):

- Apartments overlooking the retail plaza
- Apartments overlooking the park.
- The tower apartments
- Furnished apartments
- Panoramic apartments
- Controlled development plots

Problems of the plan

No doubt more market research is necessary in order to be more precise about the range of dwelling types and sizes with the flexibility to respond to changes in demand as the phased development progresses. If this is so, the plan appears to be overly precise about building footprints at this stage, in order to create and emphasize the external spatial qualities of the plan.

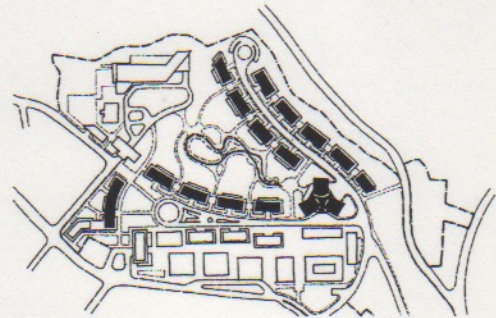


Figure 7. Distribution of Residential Uses.

If the market research *has* been carried out in depth then the relative uniformity and repetition of dwelling types and sizes appears to cater to a somewhat limited market sector. For example, despite the variety of prospects, (panoramic, park etc.) the dwelling plans seem remarkably uniform for the vast majority of units. This further highlights the relatively crude grain of residential zoning.

Much is made of views beyond the site as an added attraction for the residential units. This may well be a significant feature, particularly bearing in mind the topography of the New City site. But if so, then much more precise demonstration of the views and key site lines should be incorporated in the document. There should also be absolute certainty about the impact any future development may have on views beyond the site.

The tower apartments have a considerable impact beyond the site and even greater within the site itself. A twenty-seven story building in such close proximity to many other uses is of a scale and mass that may well be disadvantageous to the desirability of some of its neighbors. A thorough examination of the costs and benefits of such a tower should be clearly articulated.

Recommendations for New City

If the market research is at an early stage then a variety of other techniques to ensure and illustrate the structure and definition of the public spaces could be employed whilst maintaining a greater degree of flexibility of dwelling types. This is not to say that rules and principles would not be in place, rather they would be specific for some objectives and more flexible for others. This is the technique of coding explained later in this critique (*see page 26*).

But in addition, it is recommended that a greater mixing of dwelling type and size be employed throughout the plan if at all possible. This will bring with it greater interaction between residents of different ages, family type, life styles in places other than just the retail areas. In turn it will allow for greater architectural responses within the family of codes for New City.

While no two locations are the same and certain unique developments can create their own market, clearer evidence of dwelling plans, dwelling mix and building types within recent and highly regarded developments would serve to either justify the uniformity of the plan proposals or offer a much richer and varied range of possibilities for New City. Plans of this significance need a close, integrated and continuing collaboration between market research and design development.

V. Circulation: The Clarity and Integration of Streets and Paths

Success of the plan

The written document is rightly concerned about the negative impact of unnecessary traffic, particularly in the residential streets. The arresting of the bulk of traffic at the southern perimeter of the site alleviates a lot of that concern. The Hotel and Club being in the body of the site does bring internal traffic along with it that must not disrupt local street life.

However, there is quite rightly an acknowledgment of the need for frequent pedestrian connections between the residential blocks and the facilities towards the Old Damascus Road.

Problems of the plan

Striking a balance between safe movement for local residents and the benefits of multiple choice that may encourage unwanted traffic is always difficult in modern development. Often the tendency is to highly segregate and truncate the movement system far more than is necessary (see figure 8). What also tends to happen is that a disproportionate amount of attention is given to vehicular circulation, relegating the importance of both the pedestrian experience and the less glamorous but vitally important aspect of servicing.

All of this has happened in the New City Conceptual Design. For a variety of reasons not made entirely clear in the document, the site itself is a large cul-de-sac in that there are no street connections into the development from anywhere other than the Old Damascus Road. Therefore, there is no opportunity for any movement through the site en route to anywhere else. Perhaps land ownership and/or topography plays its part in this condition but the merits of that degree of exclusion deserves re-examination.

Even if this remains the case, it gives further credence to being more permeable *within* the site itself. Acknowledging the broad cul-de-sac nature of the total site there is no advantage whatsoever in then making a series of cul-de-sacs at the detailed street scale. The local residents suffer more than any other group. Every time a journey is made, it involves going past the same dwelling twice *because* of the cul de sac. If the streets were connected into a more permeable network, the only likely through movement in addition to residential related traffic is that generated by the Hotel and Club. But those uses would still have the most direct connection back to the Old Damascus Road and any other route would be a considerable detour.

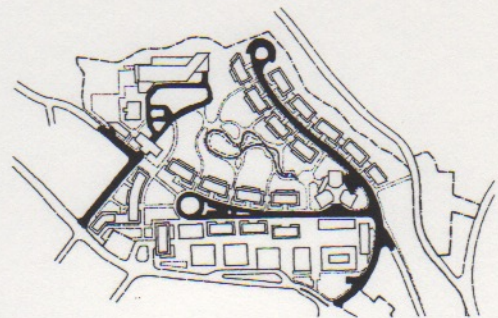


Figure 8. Current Master Plan traffic diagram.

A major issue with any large central park is the inevitable peripheral nature of the streets. As a result, pedestrians are unlikely to walk to the retail facilities along these streets. This makes the park and the crossing of the streets a vital part of the direct circulation system (See figure 9). As drawn, the space between the apartment buildings, clarity of routes across the park and detail of the street immediately north of the retail, do not acknowledge this activity.

Recommendations for New City

A re-examination of the possibilities of additional connections to and through the site acknowledging that this must result in a perceived benefit to the development itself (see illustrations 6,7).

Regardless of whether the streets are relocated in any further design work, the internal street system should have much more connectivity, eliminating the cul-de-sacs.

(It should also be acknowledged that an interconnected street system has great advantages during phased development, in offering far more options of build out and release as well as dirty and clean access for construction related traffic).

Whilst it raises key issues about the nature, size and design of the central park, the clarity of the north-south pedestrian movement should be re-examined even to the extent of exploring the implications of an additional street.

The north/south axis to the hotel exists in one of the plans and has been removed in another. At present, the use and benefits of this original access compared with the road a little further to the west, is ambiguous and not resolved in the built form. This should be rationalized for both spatial clarity a sense of arrival and efficient land subdivision.

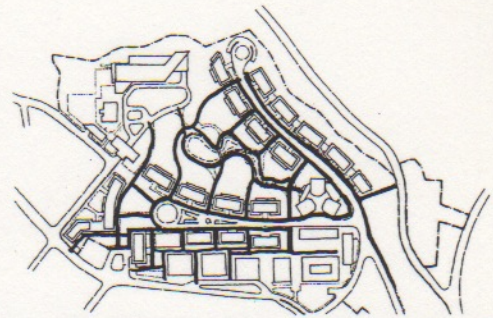
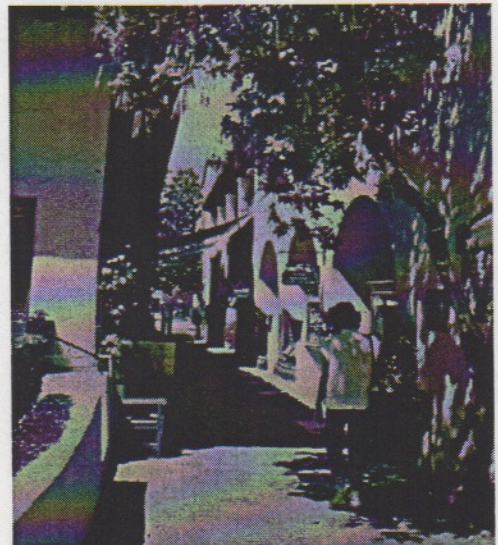


Figure 9. Pedestrian diagram; most circulation will concentrate on direct paths or sidewalks with street life.



Illustrations 6 & 7. Examples of integrating pedestrian circulation

VI. The Clarity And Balance Of Public And Private Space

Attitudes to the form and nature of public and private space often varies between cultures. However, the presence of both clearly demarcated, is common to most. It extends the range of activities available in outside space and clarifies the approach and access to buildings. In addition, it aids security if the public/private distinction is embodied in design at the street/building interface.

Problems of the plan

In this particular issue, the plan contains a great deal of ambiguity. It could be argued that apartment blocks can be free standing with accessible public space all around them. This type of pavilion building has prevailed for more than half a century. But more often than not these are the ambiguous external spaces where *private* outdoor activity is difficult or impossible, and rights of access confusing, often resulting in vandalism and neglect (see figure 10).

A clear unambiguous frontage only exists in one location at present; along the cul-de-sac at the northern edge where the panoramic apartments face the garden apartments.

Whatever claims may be made, the key public park is *behind* the apartment buildings. It is rare to find a successful public space in the heart of a neighborhood that is not fronted by the buildings that define and enclose it, however detailed and elegant its design may be.

There is a similar front/back confusion in the space between the Piazza Apartments and the Park Apartments immediately north of the retail. It is difficult to fully scrutinize those retail/residential buildings but it appears that the ground floor is for parking and servicing to the shops and it is more than likely that the facade at ground floor will be the rear of the stores. This in turn faces the front of and major arrival to the apartments on the opposite side of the road (see figure 11).

Recommendations for New City

If the clarity of public and private space (or alternatively front and rear space) is given the importance suggested in this critique, it has major implications for the layout and particularly the street/park relationship. The combination of the level of traffic along these streets and the size of the park need not reduce quality and value if the concept of a "carriage drive" frontage approach to the flats, was

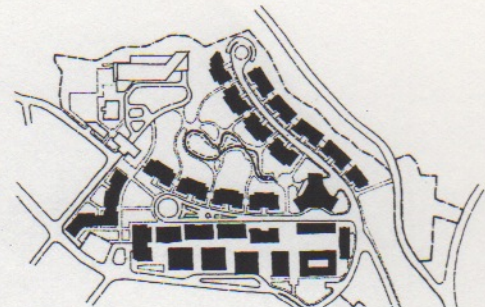


Figure 10. Built form and open space.

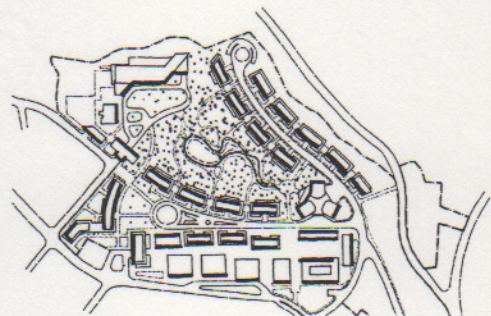


Figure 11. Fronts and Backs.

incorporated around the edge of the park (See *Illus. 8*).

There would then be a clear park address for those apartments and they could have communal space to the rear, common to each stair.

In turn this would allow the rear of the retail to be more closely associated with an alley space than a residential street.

The amount of single loaded infrastructure must be evaluated against increased value of "address". However, it must be pointed out that the plan already has a considerable amount of single and indeed *no* frontage roads at present. In addition to the amount of extra road involved in the traffic circles for the cul-de-sacs as drawn, this involves a great deal of infrastructure compared with a traditional through street alternative.



Illustration 8. An example of a "carriage drive" with a street and square frontage.

VII. Legibility and The Form of Public Space.

In addition to the mixing of uses, interconnected street system and active frontages successful, public space within neighborhoods should have a series of path/node relationships that are clearly structured in plan and three dimensional in definition, to give additional clarity and focus. The nodes are not arbitrary and are at a scale commensurate with their role in the hierarchy of spaces both within and beyond the site. They serve to emphasize the meeting of routes, gateways to the site, vistas both within and beyond the site, and as a setting and focus for public, civic and other landmark buildings (See *figure 12*).

This aspect of legibility also incorporates the retention and celebration of specific qualities of the existing landscape and built form both within and beyond the site itself.

As with other issues identified in this critique there must be a cultural and climatic interpretation of these components.

Success of the plan

Many of these qualities have been taken on board in both the written work and the plan drawings, most notably capitalizing on the views beyond the site to benefit as many buildings and spaces within the site as was deemed possible.

The curved plan of the apartment blocks gives an elegant and unique definition to the park. The siting of the Hotel at the termination of the vista from the Old Damascus Road will be both visually and commercially beneficial.

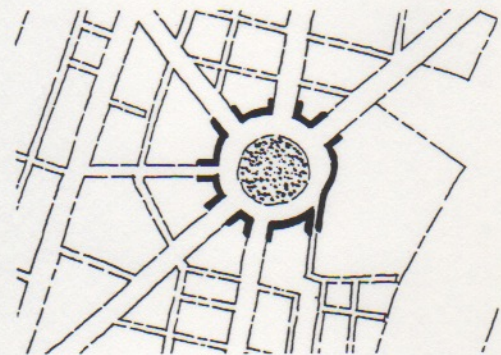
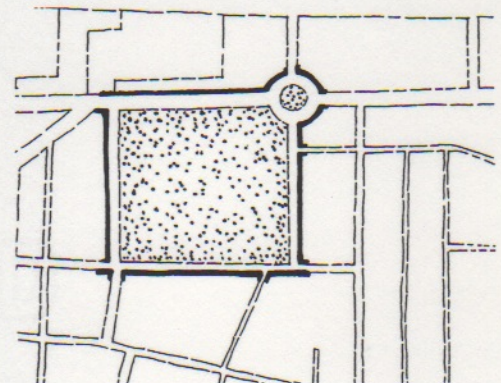


Figure 12. The clear spatial forms of the Public Garden at Emile Edde Road (top) and Place des Canons at the Historic Center, Beirut (bottom).

Problems of the plan

These qualities could be taken further to good effect. There is a tendency for the streets to veer towards heavily engineered roads and intersections rather than streets and nodal spaces, be they squares, plazas or greens. In places, neither the buildings nor the open spaces give three dimensional structure to the plan.

Recommendations for New City

The potential for nodal spaces, gateways and terminated vistas should be identified as part of the reworking of the street system with appropriate building mass and use celebrating these key positions.

If at all possible, the existing buildings giving continuity of character identified in the written document, should contribute to this menu of legibility by celebrating their presence in vistas and deflected view lines.

The written work emphasizes the need to maintain and respect aspects of the existing landscape. That is to be applauded. But at present there cannot be much confidence that this is being done to best effect due to the lack of evidence in the document of the original landscape content and quality and therefore that which is to be retained and celebrated. This should be insisted upon and produced accurately.

Because the streets are almost entirely internal despite the prominent site elevation, it would be worth exploring the possibility of taking the northern street to the northern side of the panoramic apartments for some or all of that length. The apartments would then have frontage along the natural slope and road to Hazmieh Center, creating an address for these residences even if future construction off-site limits the views.

VIII. The Phasing of Development.

Success of the plan

Very little is stated about the phasing intentions and possibilities in the written document. There are discreet packages that can be developed separate from other components and accessed differently; for example the hotel and the residential.

The nature of the retail and entertainment above several decks of parking is clearly a major element of construction demanding major infrastructure investment that could operate separately from the residential.

Problems of the plan

The document describes and illustrates an extremely simplistic phasing strategy that requires enormous amounts of infrastructure in advance of any of the buildings (See figure 13).

It exhibits almost a "megastructure" mentality for what could be a finer grain of increment. This is primarily due to single parking structures underneath a finer grain of residential apartment blocks.

Not only does this tend to commit to uniform building footprints, it involves sizeable ramping and access infrastructure that demands street space at ground level.

Recommendations for New City

The adoption of a fine grained "plating module" which is essentially a subdivision system that accommodates a range of residential types, would allow a far more flexible response to market trends and changes while still maintaining the overall integrity of the plan.

Consideration should be given to much more modest basement parking provision on a building by building basis, and in turn offering much greater staging potential including opportunities for change and review as the development progresses.

(In association with this, much more can be made of parking on the street for residents or visitors, under a canopy of street trees. On street parking slows traffic, separates the pedestrian from moving traffic, and creates a feeling of habitation and security which is absent along deserted streets).

As already stated during phased development and release, an interconnected street system offers far greater potential for dirty and clean access arrangements, thus reducing the impact of construction on areas of the neighborhood which have already been sold.

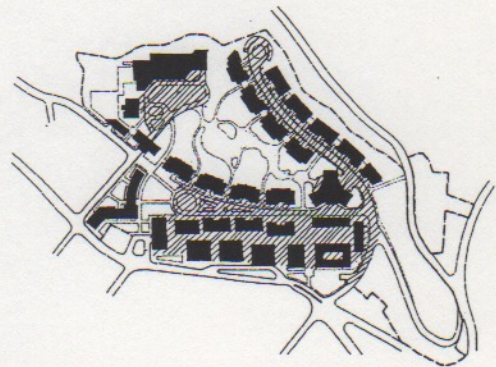


Figure 13. The two phases of construction.

IX. Security

Success of the plan

In any particular city, what is meant by threats to security and ways to offer protection, is a very specific matter. As drawn, the segregated street system allied to segregated land uses does allow for a gated vehicular access to the residential development.

Problems of the plan

It can only be assumed that threats to security are alleviated by such a gated road. However, the possibilities for accessing the site in many other ways seem numerous and, at a pedestrian level, random and very unstructured due to the public private ambiguity of much of the spaces surrounding the buildings.

This is further exacerbated by the sizeable tracts of car parking beneath the residential buildings.

Recommendations for New City

A strategy that addresses security at the building level would seem to offer a better compromise between the active vibrant mixed use nature of the development and the need to offer legitimate protection to all members of the community whether residents or visitors. Active frontages and overlook to all streets public paths and public spaces is a key to self-policing via design.

X. Design Control and Guidance

Success of the plan

The conceptual design document contains some excellent renderings that give strong and powerful images of the development. They are stylistically similar and uniform which is not uncommon at this stage of design development when carried out by one architectural practice. The document tends to acknowledge this by referring to the selection of renowned architects to bring individuality and creativity to the project.

Problems of the Plan

The two extremes alluded to above, tend to have their problems when a specific neighborhood character is being sought. If the architecture is effectively under one hand then an institutional feel is almost inevitable and that tends to be historically associated with tracts of public housing, particularly with medium rise apartments in a parkland landscape.

Conversely, if individual architects, however skillful, are left to their own devices any one building may be unique and extremely successful in its own terms; which for key landmark civic buildings can be ideal, but the overall neighborhoods or district can become a series of disaggregated elements.

Recommendations for New City

Good urbanism as opposed to merely good individual architecture tends to have “variety within a pattern” that emanates from a set of agreed and coded ground rules within which creative responses enrich the underlying themes.

It is widely acknowledged that such codes have produced good urbanism in recent years and have done so in past times. They are culture, place and issue specific and become the property of all the stakeholders.

The codes should consist of three broad categories:

1. **The Urban Code** - dealing with building placements, street types, public space, building use and type,
2. **The Architectural Code** - focussing on the crafting of materials and construction (and stylistic matters if appropriate),
3. **The Landscape Code** - dealing with both the retention of existing landscape elements and those to be introduced; be they of a formal, informal or ecological nature.

The codes need to be graphicly represented with simple written instructions.

It is recommended that a code be produced for New City that will build and elaborate on the kind of organizational structure desired for the project. This will provide the predictability necessary to reassure potential residents and lending institutions of their investment in the community.

