



**Inter-American
Development Bank**

2011

*Annex 09 Mixed Land and
Amenity Development for Belize
City's Downtown Area*



PADECO

i.E.

A conceptual Paper by Carlos
Betancourth, PADECO

Table of contents

- 3.1. Introduction: Providing Services and Facilities
- 3.2. Locating and Mixing the Uses, Services and Facilities
 - 3.2.1 Movement and Land Use
- 3.3. The overall land use pattern
 - 3.3.1. Belize City Commercial Core
 - 3.3.1.1. A multi-use center: a core retail focus around Orange-street, northern collet canal and Albert street
 - 3.3.1.2. investment projects to improve the quality of orange street as a multifunctional center
 - 3.3.1.3. The Future of Albert (Regent) Street as a multi-use sub-center
 - 3.3.1.4. Jobs in retail and services
 - 3.3.2. Secondary multi-use local centers
 - 3.3.3. Other multiple and mixed land use areas with residential and employment
 - 3.3.3.1. Transforming the downtown areas into multifunctional-walkable neighbourhoods
 - 3.3.3.2. Predominantly residential areas
 - 3.3.3.3. Educational / civic uses
 - 3.3.3.4. Mixed marine-related uses
 - 3.3.3.5. Waterfront leisure uses
 - 3.3.3.6. Mixed-use historic harbor
 - 3.3.4. Community facilities
 - 3.3.5. Multi-functional landscapes and Multi-functional eco-infrastructures
- 3.4. The multiple land use approach to collet canal
- 3.5. Charm experience areas

3.1. Introduction: Providing Services and Facilities

If Belize City, its downtown, and its various neighborhoods are to be turned around to become a successful thriving city and community, it needs to have a good range of facilities to satisfy the needs of existing and future residents. Belize City as a thriving community requires a full range of local services and facilities, including, commercial, retail, shops, education and training, health, spiritual and civic uses, business -park, light industrial areas, network of blue and green spaces, leisure, professional services and a variety of housing tenures.

Most of the opportunities to satisfy these needs may be already found on downtown. In addition, we also need to determine the deficit for these services and propose new areas for service provision and find sites for them. What are the areas in downtown appropriate for these new uses? For instance: the river and water front maybe appropriate for community or sport and leisure use. Would the existing sport and recreational facilities say at the *Bel-Can-bridge* continue to play an important role for sport and recreational facilities? If so what are the improvements needed for these sports facilities?

In other words, we need to identify the inadequacy or otherwise, of existing community services and facilities, and propose and find sites for new ones.

While there are a number of community venues in the downtown area, few seem to offer the full range of facilities, or modern flexible spaces able to accommodate the full range of community uses. There may also be a need to expand youth provision in Belize City to meet the needs of local young people. Other community facilities such as health, education, and offices may also be required.

We (the master plan) will then be able to ensure that an appropriate range of local services and facilities will be provided for the downtown community that meets the needs of the existing and expanding population. This may include the renewal of existing and/or the creation of new high quality schools, shops, health center, spiritual and civic uses, business parks, light industrial areas, cultural, leisure, recreational and community facilities, professional services, commercial office space. Where will these new facilities be sited and housed? Could we transform some of the built heritage for this purpose? Or do we need to create new buildings or both? What is the range of facilities ultimately needed?

All these services and facilities need to find a place in the new downtown. These need to be conveniently mixed, sited and connected to residential areas by safe and comfortable routes, and so as to create an environment that attracts a variety of users to interact with a variety of uses in a vibrant downtown that is successful socially, economically and environmentally. A stream of different users throughout the day and evening will help to recreate a bustling, diverse, safe Belize-City downtown

Locating these multiple and mixed of uses within the various existing neighbourhoods in Belize City downtown is a strategy that can promote sustainability through encouraging walking to shops and facilities, providing a critical mass of customers for local businesses, creating opportunities for people to work locally, and making places for a wide range of people to participate in activities and meet each other.

In what follows I will make some preliminary suggestions as to how these mixed multiple- land uses developments can be designed, promoted and managed effectively. To be successful, these neighbourhoods and mixed-use sub-centers must be in the right place, with the right connections. They should be designed in the light of the needs of all users in accessing and using the services. Flexibility of use should be built in so that buildings can adapt as needs change. These must be done at a range of scales from neighbourhood sub-centers and multifunctional landscapes and eco-infrastructures, to mixed-use buildings (mixed use buildings (shops in the first floor, offices in the second, and housing in the third, is a proto-type commonly found in Belize City downtown, particularly in the area around orange street and the mule park)

3.2. Locating and mixing the uses, services and facilities

3.2.1. Movement and land use

Figure 1: View of Fort George, In the Harbor of Honduras - 23 March, 1828 – Pickstock



Source: <http://www.belizedistrict.com/history.html>

Historically, Belize City seems to have evolved at the most accessible location: the Haulover creek mouth, where the Belize-river meets the Caribbean ocean¹ (figure 1). Its spatial form seems to have been dictated by this delta. Historically Belize City seems to have developed as a delta water city along the river, with the incremental growth of housing, retail, community and employment uses around this original core. The City formed to allow a variety of people to come together to trade, to meet and to interact.

This urban form of multiple land uses (as distinguished from single and segregated uses) constitutes an important urban heritage of Belize City.

Yet despite the virtues (Table 1), of this urban form of multiple land uses and mix development it has been disappearing from downtown, particularly, its residential function

¹ The buccaneers who based themselves on the island of St. George's Caye (around 1600), gradually moved their settlements and their slaves to the mouth of what is today Haulover Creek. And so begun the logging of the incredibly rich forests of Belize's interior (dyes for fabrics and mahogany for furnitures and railways), floating the logs down the big Belize river and into the waiting hulls of European ships sitting in the pretty blue Caribbean

Table 1: the virtues of multiple land uses

1. more convenient access to facilities
2. travel to work congestion is minimized
3. greater opportunities for social interaction
4. socially diverse communities
5. visual stimulation and delight of different buildings within close proximity
6. a greater feeling of safety with <i>eyes on the streets</i>
7. greater energy efficiency and more efficient use of space and buildings
8. more consumer choice of lifestyles, locations and building types
9. urban vitality and street life
10. increased viability of urban facilities and support for small business (such as corner shops)

Some of these benefits and virtuous are still present in downtown (1, 2, 4,) others are disappearing (3, 5, 6, 10) or go unnoticed (7, 8, 9) while others are still to be discovered (7, 8, 9, 10). This tendency for the virtuous of this multiple land use pattern to disappear, can be reversed by preserving them and promoting diversity in terms of:

- Development forms;
- Land use;
- Density;
- Tenure;
- Market segments

For downtown Belize City to become successful and sustainable again, the master plan will recombine these virtuous. For instance, we will need to offer a richer variety of consumer choices of life styles, housing tenures and types (8); to create a movement framework (key input 2), that allow people and residents to walk to access daily facilities, to offer a sufficient range of such facilities to support existing and future residents' needs, and create a network of open and public spaces where a variety of activities can take place. We should also locate uses which require the most foot-fall (such as retail) in locations which are the best connected to the surrounding street structure (see, key input 2. See below the case of orange-street). Connectivity is different to centrality. A site may be central, but if it is not well connected it will not have high footfall. This may explain the difference between say, Orange and Albert streets.

3.3 Overall land use pattern

The structuring elements and movement skeleton provide the basis for arranging and mixing multiple land uses and considering the placement of particular services and their facilities (and buildings). This key input 3 should deliver an overall proposed multiple land use pattern.

This pattern sets out the flexible, mixed-use strategy required to build sustainable neighbourhoods. The key features of this land use pattern and the rationale for locating certain land uses is described below in a preliminary fashion (emphasis should also be placed on the employment employment benefits of these facilities). Different types and intensity of uses will be promoted in certain areas (e.g., the development areas determined in the *urban development*

scenarios) to help shape and reinforce their particular potentials, quality and charms. The key features of the proposed mix of uses are described below for the case of the northern part of the development area known as *collet canal*.

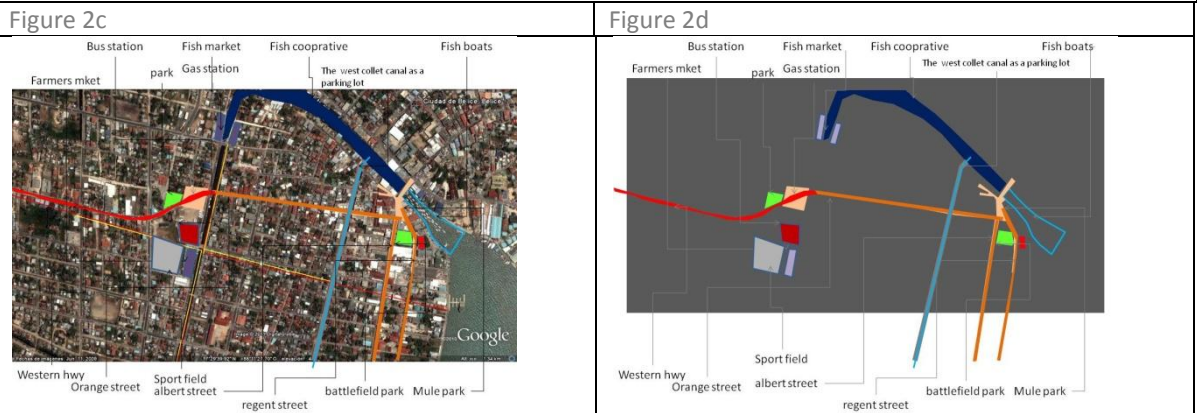
3.3.1 Belize City Commercial Core

3.3.1.1. A multi-use center: a core retail focus around Orange-street, northern collet canal and Albert street

The recombination of the virtuous of multiple land uses can be illustrated and exemplified by the traditional Belize City downtown and some of its areas and neighborhoods, such as the area around Orange-street. We could easily assume that most of the movement in this area and along this street is predominantly pedestrian (particularly young people going to school and back home from the bus station. Shoppers are also present in this street). Vehicular movement is taking over the street and generating conflicts with pedestrians, making street unsafe for them (figure 2a, 2b). Pedestrians have to make way for automobiles. Other travel needs are serviced by a transfer bus station located at collet canal (as well as by the private use of cars that park along the west canal transformed into a parking lot. Figure 2c, 2d). This tension needs to be addressed by the master plan. For instance: it is important to re-claim the public space of orange street for pedestrians and the people of Belize City.

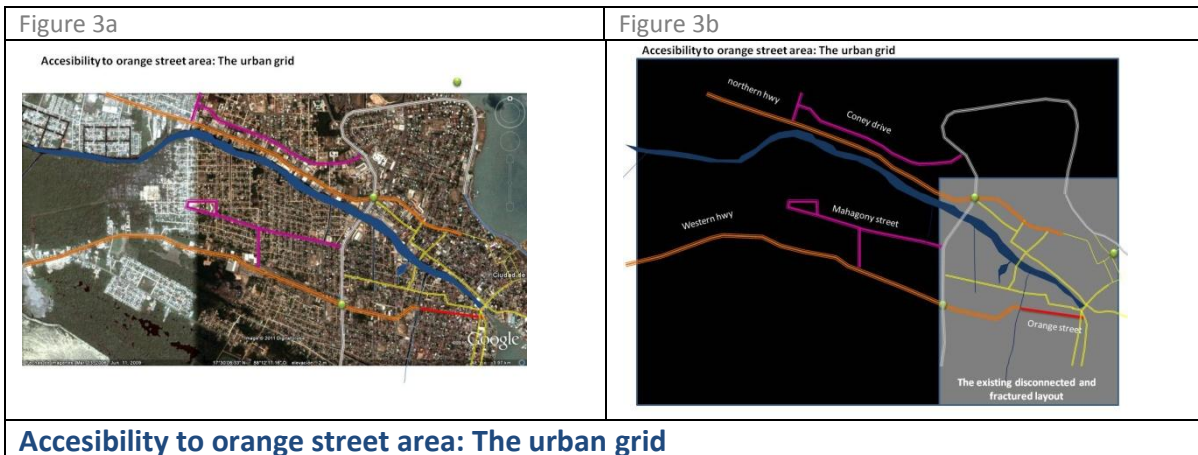


Tension between vehicular and pedestrian movement



Collet canal, its facilities such as the fish and farmers market, the bus station, and orange -street provide the focus of retail (collet, orange), commercial (albert and mule park), civic activity (battle field park, regent street) and leisure (softball stadium near collet, BTL and battle field parks).

The collet-Orange-street area has the potential to become a multi-use sub-center because it is more or less easily accessible: it is well served by the bus station (see collet canal development area key investment project for the transformation of this bus terminal into a transfer multimodal station). It is an extension of the western highway. It is more or less connected to the northern highway through the Central American Boulevard and the Belcan bridge. The connection with the northern part of the city is less clear. This layout is very disconnected and fractured (see figures 3a, 3b). A grid of streets is proposed, which will increase accessibility into and through the area, incorporate a network of safe pedestrian routes and provide the opportunity for better bus service.

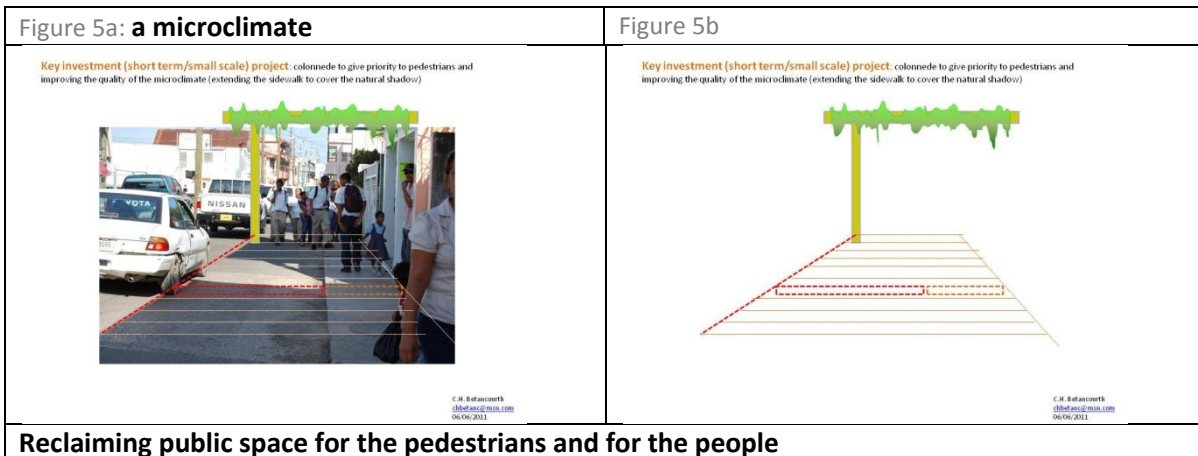


In addition, orange-street area has the potential to become a multi-use sub-center because most of its buildings are orientated towards the street and are visible from it; several of them are mixed use buildings (shop in the first floor, offices and apartments in the second and upper floors).

The street creates a rich microclimate (the relation between the height of the buildings and the width of the street allows for nice shadows and for the funneling of fresh air through it. It is a narrow street with natural shading (figures 4a, 4b). It is also in close proximity to community facilities (those in the mule and battle field park, as well as in Albert and Regent-street).



3.3.1.2. Investment projects to improve the quality of orange street as a multifunctional center



What the street still lacks is a series of well-designed public spaces that serve the street as a multi-use sub-center.

Orange-street is a narrow street with natural shading (and different widths as it gets closer to downtown. This gives variety and visual richness to the street. Figure 4a, 4b). As mentioned above, it is important to reclaim the street for pedestrians and for the people of Belize City, by extending the side walk all the way to the shadow line (figure 5a, 5b), and covering it with a pergola and a colonnade (with plants on the top of it). In this way, we can reclaim the street for pedestrians and reinforce the rich microclimate that the street itself creates (the orientation and the relation between the height of the buildings and the width of the street allows for nice shadows and for the funneling of fresh air through (figures 5a, 5b).

I suggest that a new public square be planned and designed at the western end of the street, similar to the eastern end of the street that is punctuated by the mule park (see figure 6a, 6b). The mule and battle field park would be brought to life with intrigue and animation - including small-

scale specialist retail units, café/pub, community facilities, small offices or workshops - all with flats above.

Figure 5c: Artisan square

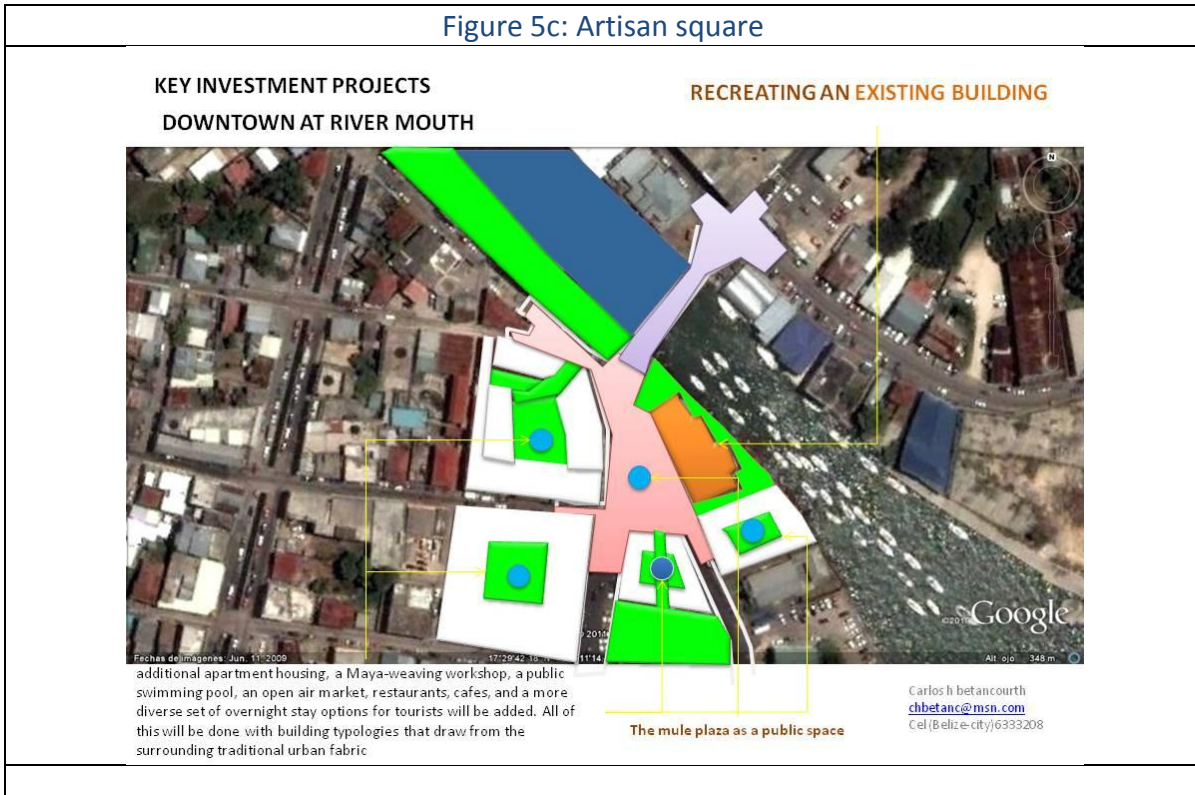


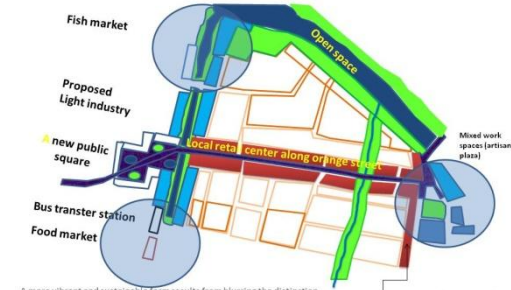
Figure 6a

The potential of the area around Orange street to become a sustainable neighborhood
(See, Bel Cel in key Input 2)



Figure 6b

The potential of the area around Orange street to become a sustainable neighborhood
(See, Bel Cel in key Input 2)



A narrow street with a natural shading

In addition to the grid of streets, accessibility could also be improved by adding water accessibility (via the river and the Collet canal. See figure 6b); and a network of pedestrian and bike streets. The water taxi will be in front of the multimodal transfer station at collect canal (see key investment projects for collet canal).

Orange-street could also offer an attractive mix of flats above a variety of shops and restaurants (at the present time the flats are rather unattractive and un-lively).

Re-habilitating the river front (as part of the green and blue network of open spaces. See key input 4) for recreational purposes as well as for the development of a rich variety of housing types and tenures (an adjacent mixed tenure housing area) will also add to the quality of the area (figure 9).

Improving both, the fish and the farmer market experiences will help to transform this area into a vibrant urban experience (See figure2d, 7a, 7b). The local fish market is of particular interest. As we begin to walk down the collet canal beginning at the river front and towards the ocean the first EVENT we encounter is that of EXPERIENCING FISH *ala* Belize. It is important to redevelop this area. The redevelopment of this area is a key investment project within the development area of collet canal. We will propose to redevelop this area as the area of experiencing fish in the river park through shops restaurants, a fish market, and a new harbor side foreshore park. We will come back to this when we will be dealing with the development area referred to as collet canal (see urban development scenarios).

Figure 7a: The market experience in Belize City downtown



Figure 7b: the fish market experience



Orange-street together with Albert-street, and the area of collet canal around the fish and farmers market, and the transfer bus station, could be envisaged (in terms of land use patterns) as Belize City commercial core.

We may need to add to this core, some supplementary services such as a small medium size supermarket (?), surrounded possibly by a cluster of small shops, offices and a health center. This recognizes the commercial prerogative of placing retail uses in particular where frontage is most visible to passing trade (as it is the case in Orange and Albert streets). The proposed new public spaces above (figure 6a, 6b) will further emphasize the 'gateway' nature of this area and location. These supplementary services could be located in this new public square.

These supplementary services still need to be analyzed and evaluated further through a market research (and feasibility analysis) that helps us to formulate and answer the following questions: what is the retail effective demand in Belize City? Is it for supermarkets or is it for new retail premises? We don't know since that market research hasn't been done. However, we may assume that as the image and profile of the area develops along with the increase in the numbers of residents and businesses in the new developments, there should be sufficient demand to support a number of units providing local goods and services, specialist goods, cafes, bars, etc. It is possible that a number of small units (in orange street, albert street and collet canal) could be viable - providing the full vision for the area is pursued.

3.3.1.3. The Future of Albert (Regent) Street as a multi-use sub-center

Revitalized albert street with pedestriands, water and landscape



The local community and stakeholders have expressed a particular interest in the future of Albert Street. It remains one of the important streets from the historic core of Belize City and can provide an attractive, interesting part of the street pattern in the future. Some of the existing retail businesses provide an essential service to existent residents. These retail businesses seem to be going through a very difficult period, and the master plan should help them to survive and improve their opportunities. Physical integration of Albert Street with the rest of the city will encourage residents and visitors to use Albert Street more intensively. Careful design of new development projects, street layouts, pedestrian routes and environmental projects should be used to draw more people into the Street. A range of initiatives should be elaborated and recommended to support the enhancement of the environment and commercial viability of Albert Street.

For instance: will be important to provide the existing businesses -which have survived years of decline - with the opportunity to reestablish their businesses and attract new trade. In the médium and longer term, it is important to identify and provide the opportunity for new premises to accommodate new or growing businesses in these retail sectors, adding new jobs into the area (as well the enhanced retail offer to residents and businesses).

A key employment issue is to ensure the continuing viability and vitality of the shops which are essential to local residents. Proposals for the street layout and building plots will ensure that there are effective links and good pedestrian routes through Albert Street. The health centre placed nearby in regent street and the various schools will provide a source of activity and linkage through to other new uses. It may be beneficial to complete and create a continuous frontage in albert street. In addition to providing a good retail service to residents, retailers in albert street must also provide an attractive environment for the community. A series of initiatives should be considered, including action to convert upper floors to affordable flats, environmental improvements and initiatives to support the viability of local shops (figure 5a, 5b above).

Within these core areas such as Orange and Albert streets, uses should be re-positioned to concentrate pedestrian flows by spacing anchor stores at a maximum of about 250m apart.

Albert-street together with orange-street could then help delimit a multifunctional neighborhood (figure 8). Before moving into this component of the overall land use pattern, let us look briefly at the issue of jobs.

3.3.1.4. Jobs in retail and services

The majority of employment in the above multiple and mixed-use areas will be in offices, commercial, and services outlets which can be located within mixed-use buildings or adjacent to other uses. But with careful design, even some types of light industry and factory (so badly needed in Belize City) can be accommodated in these areas. In some of these industries, information technology has made home working possible either full-time or for part of the week. Mixed-use buildings or blocks can bring vitality and so raise values on certain sites and allow for shared facilities, including parking. Buildings would have to work harder to be profitable and, on the downtown, mixed-uses in plan, mixed-uses in section and more flexible terms of tenure can make for development which is both responsive to market conditions and raises values by creating a more diverse and stimulating development area.

Shops and related businesses - such as cafes and bars - will benefit from the regeneration of the area around Collet and Orange Street, as more residents, employees and new visitors to the area, have more money to spend. The master plan should provide the opportunity for new premises to accommodate new or growing businesses in these sectors, adding new jobs into the area. As part of market research and feasibility studies new retail floor-space must be identified, offering the potential of new jobs in the area (as well as the enhanced retail offer to residents and businesses). In relation to Orange and Albert Street, the key employment issue is to ensure the continuing viability and vitality of the shops which are essential to local residents. Proposals for the street layout and building plots should ensure that there are effective links and good pedestrian routes through Orange and Albert Street.

A series of initiatives should also be considered, for Orange Street (particularly when it meets the Mule Park) including action to convert upper floors to affordable flats (in a better way than it is done now), environmental improvements and initiatives to support the viability of local shops (particularly those that are essential to the local community), such as the integration of the river front and the Mule Park by way of the Artisan Plaza (see key investment project: Artisan Plaza).

Maximise synergy, minimise conflict

In considering the widest possible mix of uses that can be introduced to add vitality to downtown (and/or to each one of the neighborhoods or defined development areas) an **economic feasibility study** should be undertaken to check viability. This should be undertaken in conjunction with an evaluation of the relative compatibility between the existing and proposed uses and their existing neighborhoods, and then each use positioned to promote compatibility and avoid conflict. High traffic-generators such as distribution warehousing complexes, for instance, are best located close to motorway junctions (e.g., along the western highway) and, car breaker's yard should not be backing onto a park (this is a common case in Belize City).

3.3.2. Secondary multi-use local sub-centers

A high concentration of activity (particularly retail) seems to be emerging naturally along principal routes or points of convergence - along Orange and Albert Streets, as well as at crossroads such as Mule Park.

In addition to this commercial core above, there are other areas in Belize City downtown that can function as secondary local centers such as the areas, along Central American Boulevard, Mahogany Street, 6th Street, Coney Drive; etc.,- offering small-scale retail, office and leisure facilities. In addition, flexible ground floor units could be encouraged in some other locations containing community, employment and further small-scale secondary commercial uses (for instance along the western Collet Canal, the areas along the western and northern highways as they approach the city, etc). Each of these areas could also be targeted for mixed-use development, and take advantage of the profile of these areas to capture passing trade. These Mixed-and multiple land use sub-centers are within walking distance of residential areas. This strengthens their identity, provides passing trade.

3.3.3. Other multiple and mixed use areas with residential and employment

Currently this rich spatial and use patterns of multiple and mixed land uses (commercial, residential, employment, leisure) above, is being degraded and deteriorated possibly due to the dispersal of movement patterns facilitated by the car and the trends towards the movement of residents to the belt of sleeping communities (see component 1) surrounding Belize city, where, land uses are exclusively residential (with little services in terms of schools, shops, offices and some industry. Though some of these services (such as retail and Chinese shops) have started to appear in this belt of suburban communities)

In order to begin to reverse these tendencies above and preserve, conserve and promote the virtuous of multiple land uses and mix development, we will need to transform the various neighborhoods in downtown Belize City into walk-able neighborhoods.

Combine primary-activities

What is needed urgently in downtown is to combine the primary activities of living and working so as to support an existing and proposed greater variety of secondary facilities (whether commercial, entertainment, leisure or community-based). Grouping these main elements of this palette of uses will help to re-make downtown Belize City as a vibrant place.

3.3.3.1. Transforming the downtown areas into multifunctional-walkable neighbourhoods

Local facilities bring Belizean residents together, reinforce community and discourage car use. So the first component of the movement layer will be to determine the walking distance from neighborhoods to local facilities and specialized urban functions. The quality of the routes is also important.

Mixed and multiple land use development can best be promoted in downtown Belize city by using the distance most people will walk to daily facilities, the corner shop or the bus stop as a starting point. This neighbourhood unit can provide a useful organising device - but only when it is overlaid on an integrated movement framework and conceived as a piece of down-town Belize City whose activities and forms overlap.

Once we have delimited the neighborhoods and mapped the existing facilities (To create a strong community focus in residential areas, the minimum non-residential uses and community facilities that may be introduced are: a local small shop, commercial use, a bus stop, a primary school, and amenities.², an initial benchmark is for these neighbourhoods of mixed multiple land use development to cover a 400m radius, equating to about five minutes walk. This translates into more or less 50 hectares.

² **Task:** The uses within each neighbourhood will be layered. The master plan interventions identify and foster the different layers at which each neighbourhood works. We need to identify uses which are complementary and those which may have contrasting needs, and locate them in the most appropriate locations. Identify the optimum locations for the different land uses required. This may include residential, employment, schools, health and community facilities, shopping and services, leisure, sports and recreation, and other open spaces

Belizeans should be able to walk in 2-3 minutes (250 metres) to the post box or telephone box: the newsagent's should be within 5 minutes (400 metres). There should be local shops, the bus stop, the health centre and (primary) schools within a walking distance of (say) 10 minutes (800 metres). Convenience shops and services³ require sufficient population within a five to ten minute walk (400 to 800metres). Residential areas can support a significant floor area of convenience goods and services. Every effort should be made to retain as many of these uses as possible within the various neighbourhoods. This can be aided by ensuring that densities are compact, the quality of the services, and both the quality and convenience of the built environment, are right. The provision of a mixed-use center/neighborhood can reduce car use and make it possible to provide live/work homes in the immediate area.

3.3.3.1.1 The case of orange street neighborhood as a 400-600 mts radius multifunctional neighborhood

The neighborhood around orange-street (but there are other neighborhoods as well) is an excellent illustration of this concept of a multi-functional neighborhood unit (or Bel-cel. See also Figure 8a). As I am working off the top of my head and a proper inventory has not been completed (this needs to be done in situ by the local team), I am not sure if we already find in the neighborhood a full range of local services and facilities.

We need to inventory them and determine the deficit (another subtask that still needs to be completed). Once we have done this we need to find a place (and re-design the building and surrounding area if needed) in the neighborhood for the supplementary services (another subtask) and redesign the walk-able routes (using the benchmark above) through which these services will be reconnected among them and with the residential areas (another subtask).

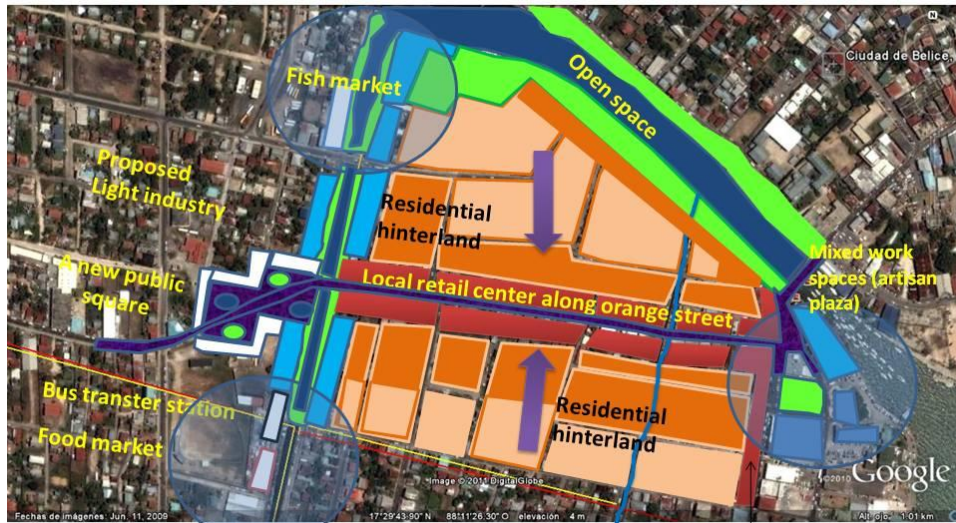
Once all these has been completed (this is the work that still needs to be completed *in situ*), a more vibrant and sustainable urban form will result (around the orange street neighborhood) from blurring the distinction between uses and re-designing the orange street area as a place that makes walking to downtown, to the bus transfer station, and to these services, as convenient and comfortable as possible (if I am right the distance between the transfer station and downtown/albert street (along orange street) is approx 500-600 mts. See figure 8a).

This multifunctional neighborhood can be represented schematically as it appears in figure 8b. A full range of local (and citywide) services and facilities, including commercial, educational, health, spiritual and civic uses could be sitted some of them along orange street, others along collet canal and along the river. They will be re-connected to residential areas by safe and comfortable pedestrian-biking-public transport routes

³ This is a small retail store that is open long hours and that typically sells staple groceries, snacks, and sometimes gasoline. This may be the case of the Chinese and Salvadorean shops as well as of some of the gas-stations

Figure 8a: the benefits of multiple land uses in downtown Belize City

The potential of the area around Orange street to become a sustainable neighborhood
(See, Bel Cel in key Input 2)



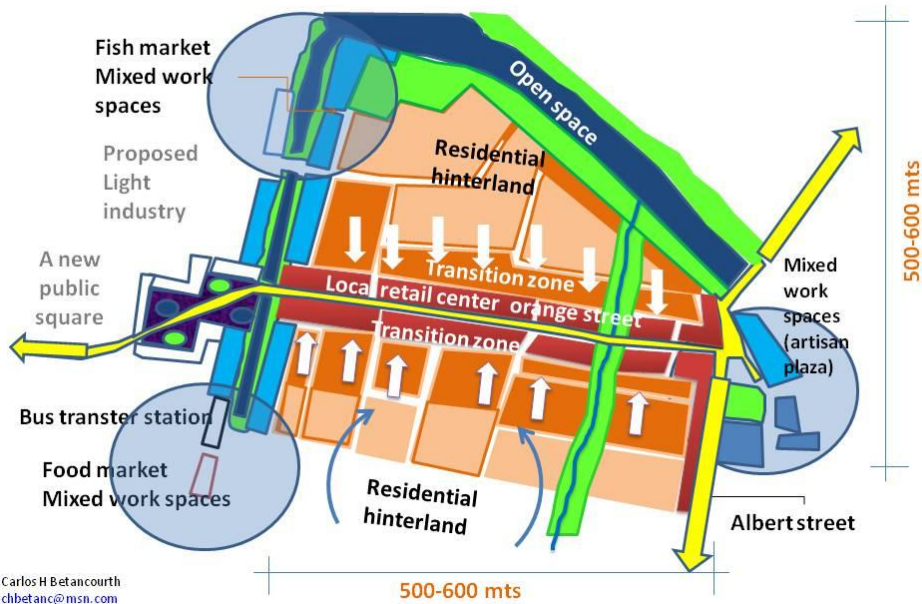
A more vibrant and sustainable form results from blurring the distinction between uses and designing places that make walking to the local center and bus transfer station, as convenient and comfortable as possible

Albert street

Carlos H Betancourth
chbetanc@msn.com
Cel: 633 3208

Figure 8b: The 400-600 mts radius multifunctional neighborhood

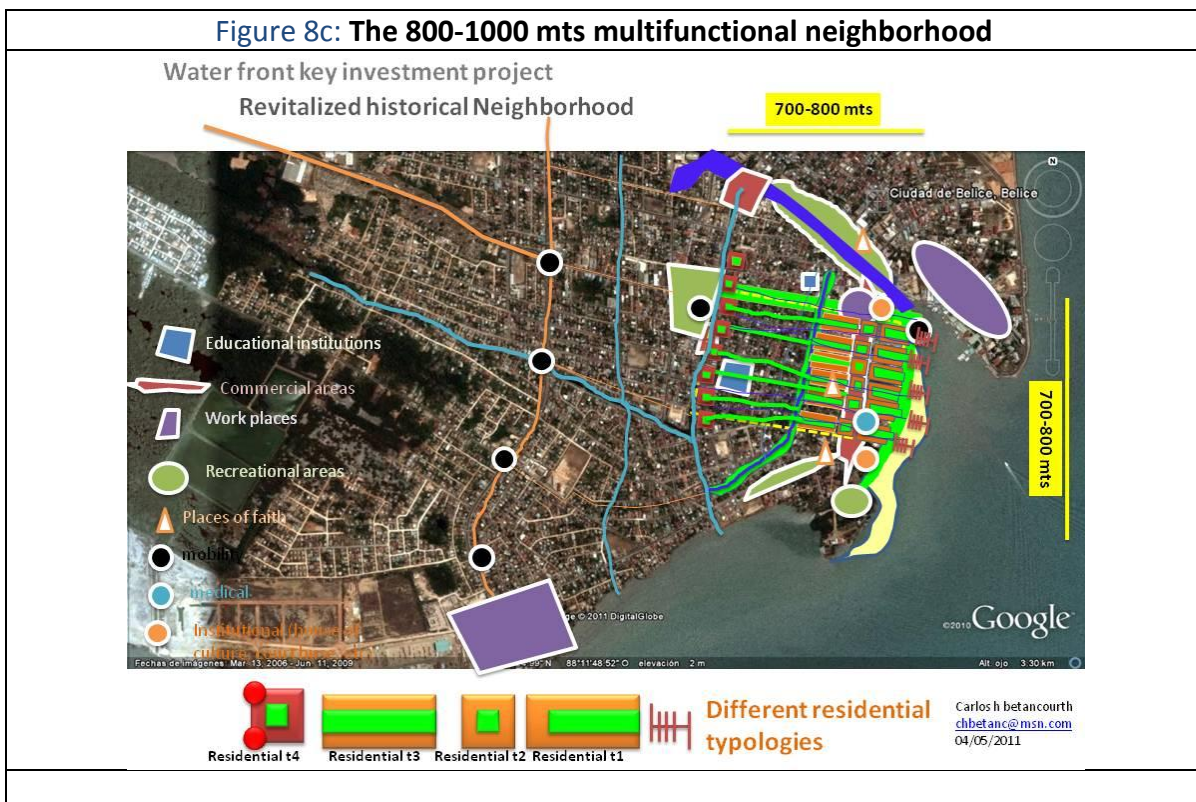
The potential of the area around Orange street to become a sustainable multifunctional neighborhood (See, Bel Cel in key Input 2)

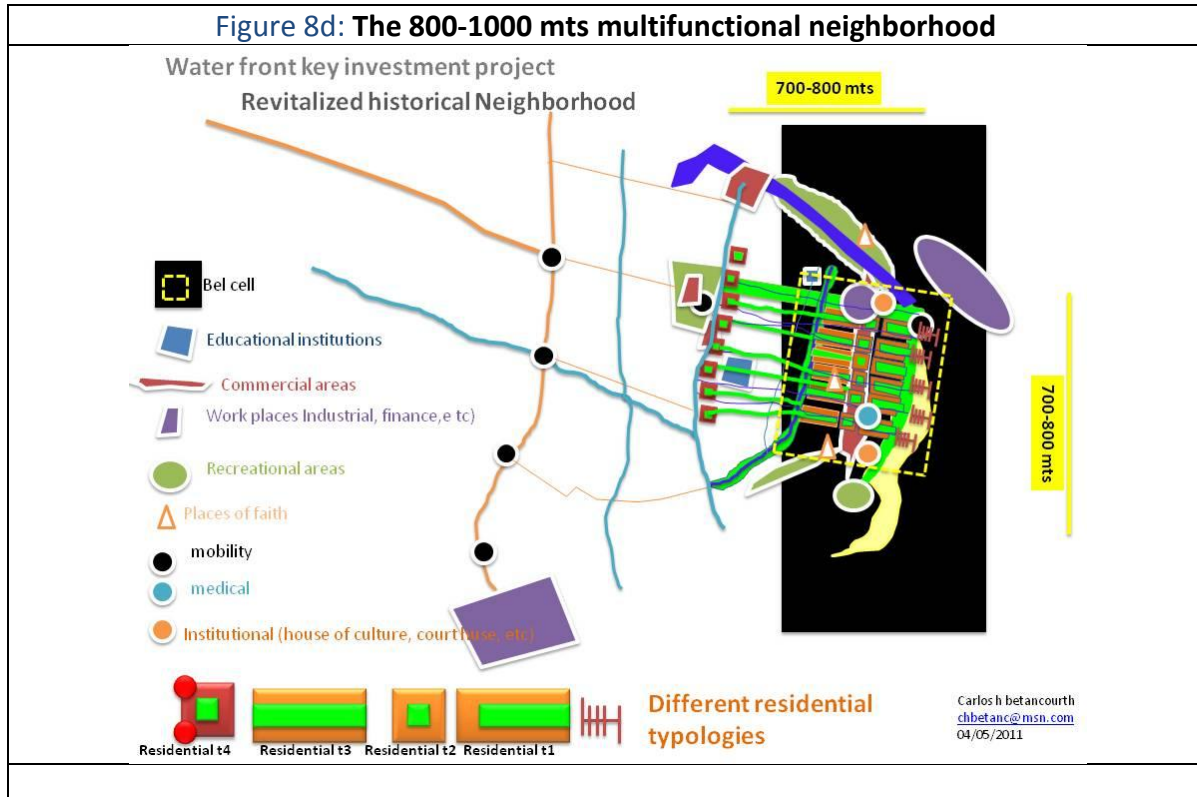


Carlos H Betancourth
chbetanc@msn.com
Cel: 633 3208

3.3.3.1.2 The case of the historical environment (waterfront) area as a 800-1000 mts radius multifunctional neighborhood

In Belize City this (400 mts benchmark) is not necessarily the upper limit and walking offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly those under 2 km (see figure 8c). I have been informally speaking with citizens in the downtown area, and they can easily walk between one and one km and a half per day. This is the case of many women who walk back home from work at night, but also of entire families living in the south-side and working in the northern part of the city (their kids walk to the schools in downtown, and their husbands to the transfer station). This seems to be an old tradition that is disappearing from downtown due to issues of safety and security. Thus the above benchmark could be extended to a 800m-1,200 mts radius in Belize City (See figures 8c, 8d: *The 800-1000 mts multifunctional neighborhood*)





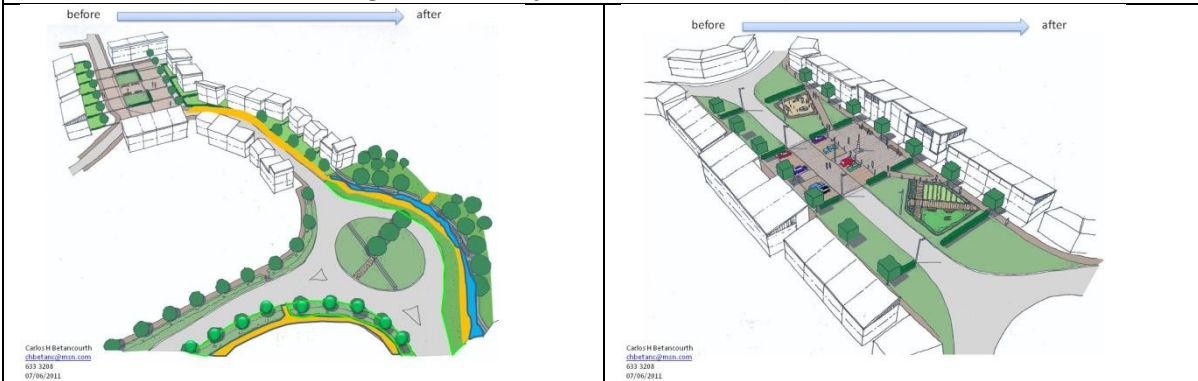
3.3.3.1.3 Special Feature of the Master Plan: a multifunctional neighborhood as the basic building block for the Belize City master plan

In this way we can then re-compose a basic building block for the Belize-city Master Plan: a single cell, that serves to integrate the different land uses within a modular 400x400, 800x800, 1000x1000m mts grid. Educational institutions, commercial areas, workplaces and recreational areas such as a new waterfront and beach, are distributed within these Bel-Cells and located close to the residential areas to minimize commuting. Together, these Bel-Cells add up to re-compose the urban form of neighbourhoods, districts, and the urban downtown (figure 8e).

3.3.3.1.3.1 a preliminary typology of walk-able multifunctional neighborhoods in Belize City

The various types of walkable multifunctional neighborhoods that are found in Belize City are represented in figure 8f. A preliminary inventory of these neighborhoods generate the following typologies: Waterfront walkable multifunctional neighborhood; street walkable multifunctional neighborhood (Orange, Albert, Regent, etc); transfer station walkable multifunctional neighborhood; nodal walkable multifunctional neighborhood; school walkable multifunctional neighborhood. Other typologies include: walkable multifunctional neighborhood adjacent to main road (such as those along central American boulevard, Coney drive, Mahogany street; etc); walkable multifunctional neighborhood adjacent at a motorway (such as those along the western and the northern highway).

walkable multifunctional neighborhood adjacent to main road (central American boulevard)



Plazas and squares integrate the western and eastern communities that CAB actually splits apart

Figure 8e: albert and orange street delimit a multifunctional neighborhood as the basic building block for the Belize city master plan

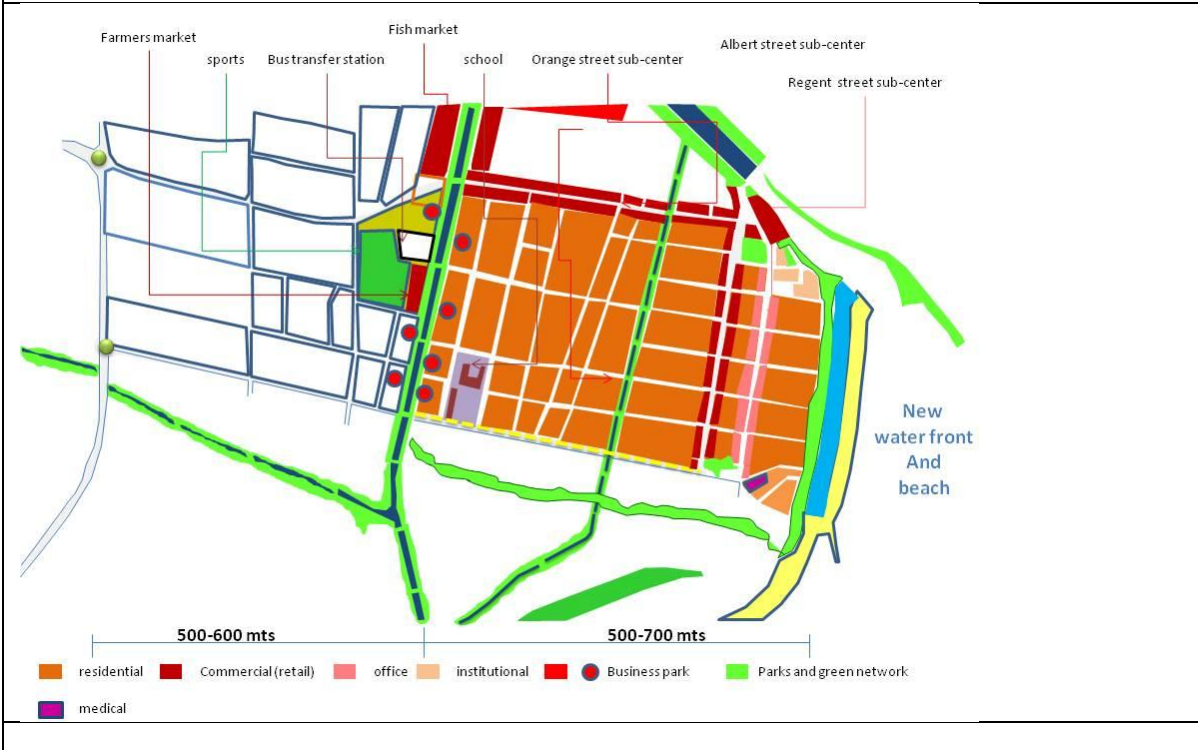
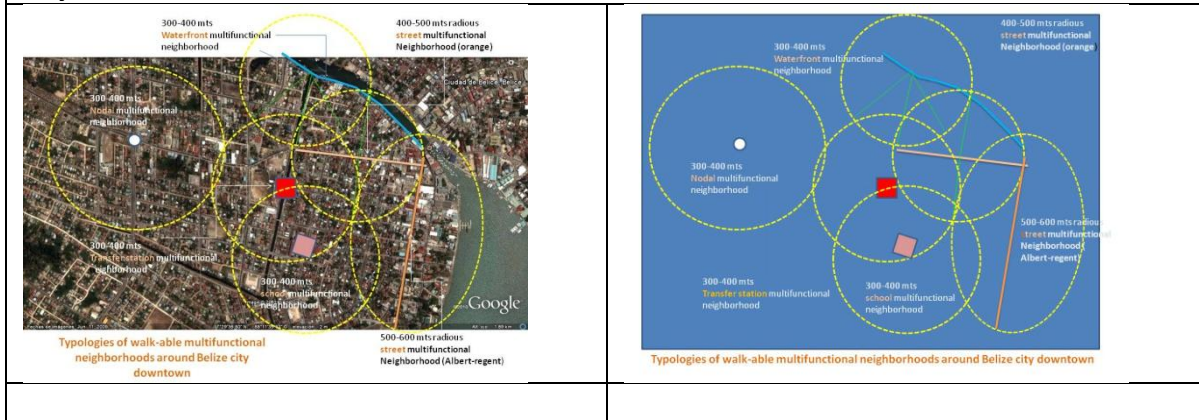


Figure 8f: a preliminary typology of walkable multifunctional neighborhoods in Belize City

3.3.3.1.4 Safe and secure multifunctional neighborhoods : Bringing housing into the mix of uses

The above multifunctional neighbourhoods (8a-8f)-as well as most neighbourhoods in downtown Belize City-, will need a residential component if they are to be safe and secure throughout a 24 hour day (some of downtown neighborhoods (those around Orange-street and Collet-canal) are becoming the most unsafe areas in the city). Other uses will be overlaid on this residential base as needed. The various neighbourhoods in downtown may therefore be characterized by uses such as shopping, local services, business or entertainment but also need to function as residential communities. Of course there are houses in Belize downtown. **But most of the housing stock is in a stage of serious deterioration. Therefore it is important to re-inject housing into the multiple and mix uses**

Spraying housing types and tenures

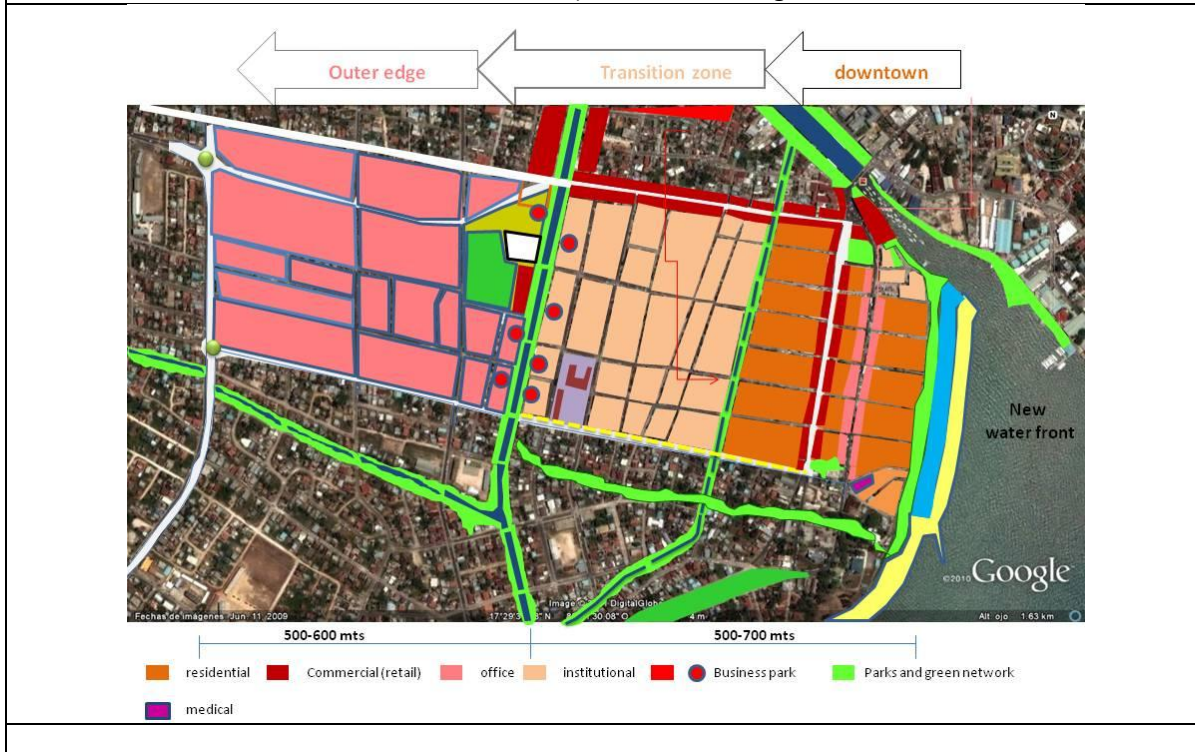
Mixing housing types and tenures promotes social diversity and it is therefore important to spread different building types and tenures across a layering that includes the downtown as such, the transition zones (Central American Boulevard, the river front, the canals) and the outer edges (Krumen lagoon, Chatumal street, Central American boulevard). Spraying these different tenures throughout this range (downtown-transition zone-outer-edge) ensures that a variety of housing types and ownership patterns are sprinkled, rather than clustered into exclusive enclaves (such as the enclaves along the major highways). The existing variety of development blocks as defined by the grid and movement skeleton, would allow for a variety of parcels and plots and thus for a variety of housing types and tenures (see figure 9a)

Infuse housing into the mix

The lack of a rich variety of housing types, tenures, and residents, in Downtown Belize City demonstrates how urban vitality and viability are lost where high quality housing and a rich variety of tenures is not part of the mix of land uses. Injecting high quality housing into the mix, will enable activity to be stretched beyond day-time office and shopping hours. A stream of different users throughout the day and evening will help to make a bustling, diverse, and safe downtown Belize City (today, Belize downtown is empty at 5:30 o'clock!).

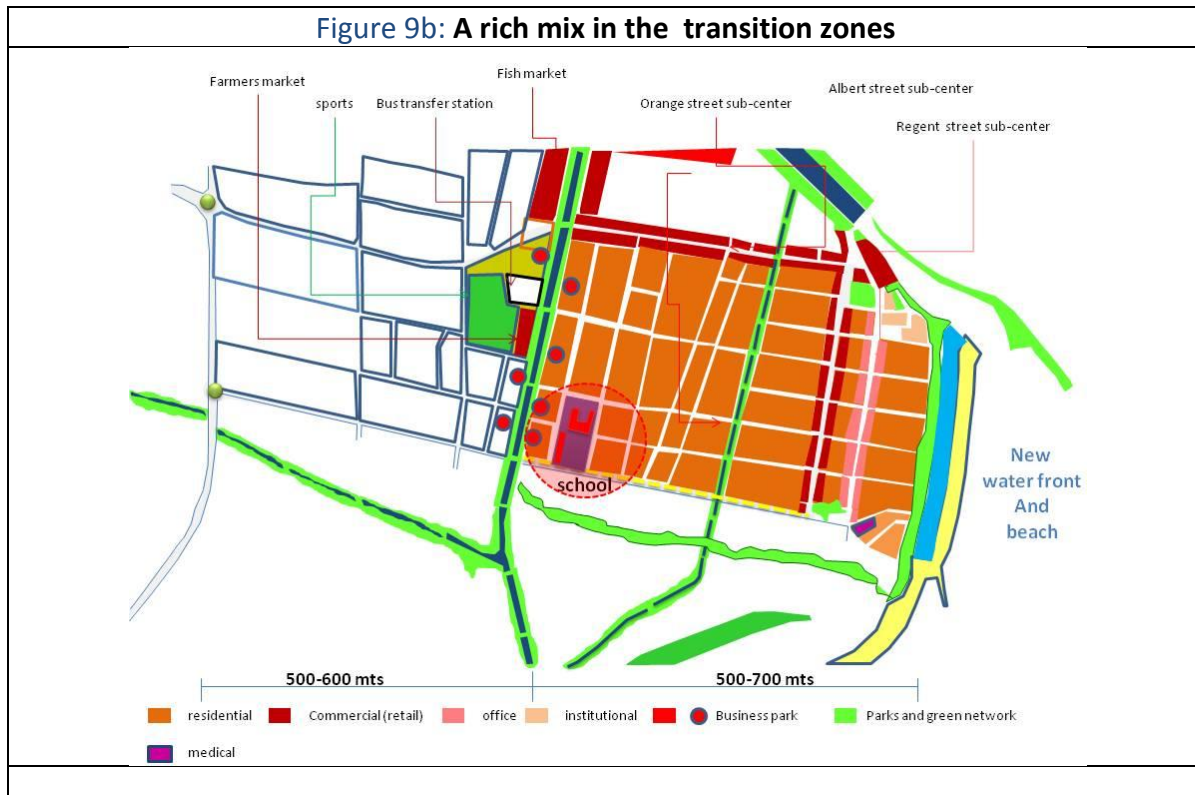
There is a rich variety of areas that could be promoted for a mix of residential, employment and live work uses such as within quieter “interior” areas away from the primary streets (see figure 9a, 9b), in transition zones along the central American boulevard, the river, the waterfront, and the canals (such as the collect canal), incorporating some flexible ground floor units appropriate for small-scale offices / business start ups to inject life into these transition and canal areas, which could be promoted as civic hubs, where existing buildings of conservation merit may provide opportunities for workshops alongside the new residential development.

Figure 9a: **Spraying housing types and tenures** across a layering that includes the **downtown**, the **transition zones** and the **outer edges**



A rich mix in the transition zones (we may need to extend the transition zone west of CAB in search of the outer edge at new Chatumal street extension)

The transition zone between downtown and edge (figure 9a) is fertile land for multiple and mixing of uses to occur, and can vary enormously in charm. These are the hotch-potch areas that bridge the commercial historical core and the residential hinterland. It is within these zones that the most dynamic mix may occur, with shops, workspaces, storage yards, and houses existing side-by-side. Land values may enable some of these lower density uses to thrive and provide the most scope for encouraging live-work, speciality retailing, artist and cultural quarters, for instance. Night-time uses (pubs, clubs and restaurants) can also work well here. Schools are also often best located in the transition zone between the higher density residential areas and downtown, where they are as close as possible to the majority of children, and where they can be introduced without cutting off pedestrian access to the center (see figure 9b)



3.3.3.2. Predominantly residential areas

In the consolidated residential areas, away from the main focal hubs, mixed-tenure housing refurbishment and redevelopment will be promoted, served by small-scale neighbourhood facilities (this would be the case of Mahogany street, but also of the Belama area).

3.3.3.3. Educational / civic uses

The existing variety of schools to be found in Belize downtown, will remain. This variety of potentially inter-linked facilities may open the opportunity to explore alternative initiatives such as a cluster/federation of educational facilities.⁴ It is important to identify and map the main educational and other civic uses that are anticipated to remain. It is also important to prepare plans to travel safely to school by foot and bike.

Emphasize the civic

⁴ This envisages the creation of a new type of educational resource - one that is open from perhaps 7:30am to 7:30pm- and potentially delivers education through a variety of existing facilities, which could be inter-linked and reconnected across the downtown area. Importantly, the concept embraces care and skills development, and so also has a major part to play in generating job creation and skills development. Care would provide for the educational and training needs of 0 to 16 year old children, as well as adult education classes and vocational training for school leavers. Strong connections between schools and further education providers nearby would be established. To realize the concept of a federation of educational facilities in Belize City would require extensive discussion with the schools, governors, parents, teachers and pupils

Public services and amenities support residents, and provide focal elements on the urban structure (the fusion between movement skeleton and multiple uses) that help to encourage a strong sense of community and identity. Nurseries, libraries, community centers, police and fire stations and government offices are best placed at these central points in highly visible locations. Public squares can be used to emphasise their civic status. This is indeed the case of the Battlefield and mule parks. The area around and behind the court house and the battle field park could be promoted for community use so that it once again becomes one of Belize City principal civic focal points. This is an area with lot of potentials (figure 10 b. concept). Yet it is being degraded by traffic and parking of private cars and taxis (figure 10a).

Figure 10a: Emphasize the civic

THE IMPACTS OF THE CITY OF BELIZE SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND SPATIAL STRUCTURE IN ITS HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT AS THE RESERVOIR OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY



Source: Belize Archives and Records Services

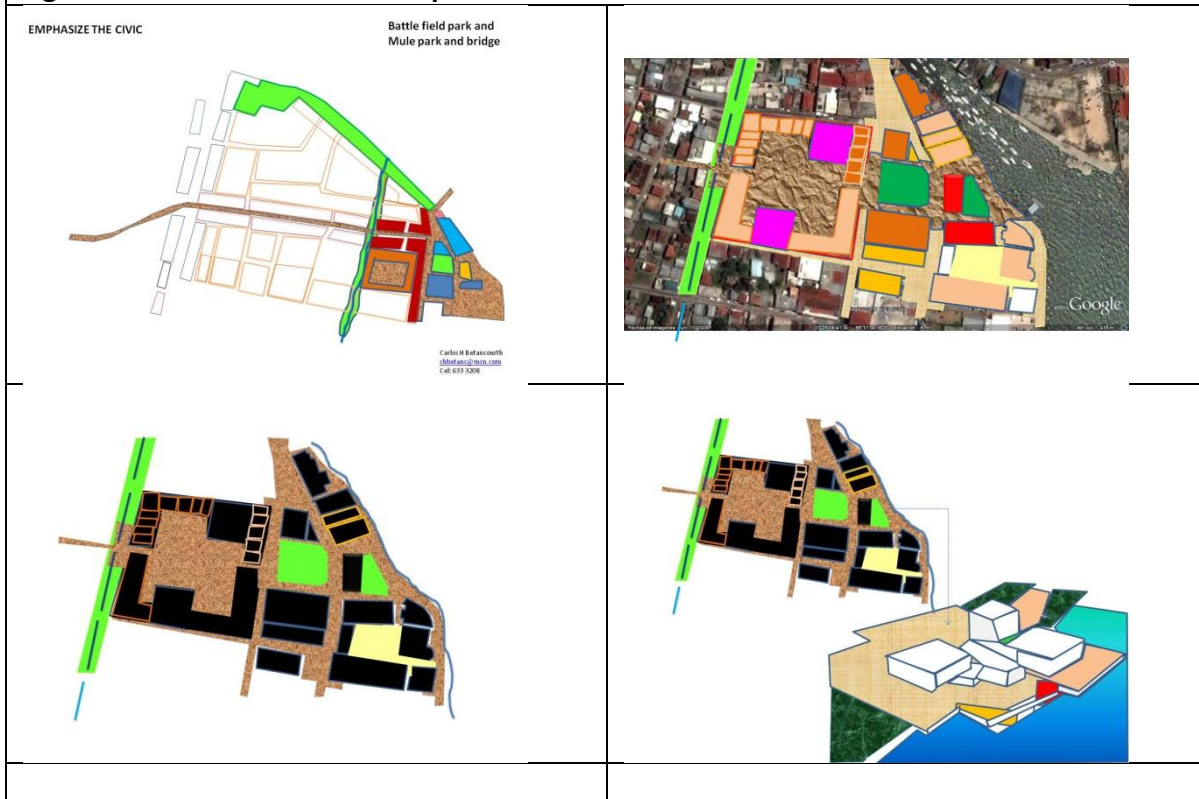


Source: C.H. Betancourth

In, Water movement and the Re-covery of the water infrastructure heritage

d:\Users\Carlos

Betancourth\Desktop\ME2011\BELIZE2010\BELIZEDELIVERABLES\belizepriorityprojects\heritageprojects\issuepaper2

Figure 10b: institutional civic square and cluster

3.3.3.4. Mixed marine-related uses (the river, oceanfront, the river mouth and the Canals)

The city port synergy

The citizens of Belize city live on or very close to the river and the sea shore because this has been historically the place for exchange, the door towards other cultures, the development of commerce and ideas, the myth of travel and adventure, an exotic place, Some-what extraterritorial, the place for mingling of populations. Like all important capital cities Belize City has a port on the sea and the river (the mouth of the Halover creek). The port of Belize City is a living body. It was born long ago, it has developed, it has changed use from industry and trade to “marinas”, real estate or cruises. It has known a phase of development which is port-oriented during which the port has developed independently from the city. Will this phase be followed by a city-oriented development phase where the inhabitants of Belize City re-appropriate the port areas?

A mixed use approach and model to the marine related areas

This approach rejects the total and non reversible reallocation of derelict port spaces for other uses to the benefit of maintaining or creating compatible port functions: passengers ferries, cruises, inland transport, port tertiary uses. The port will enter again into the city and will become an added value, a factor of modernity. City and port look for a common plat-form of

partnership. The port is the origin of the city, and its identity. We will come back to this when we will be dealing with the port-city development area.

For the time being, it is recommended that the master plan develops a focused strategy for these **marine and water related areas** that seek to make the most of these **waterfront locations**. A mixed-use approach is envisaged that includes waterfront apartments, side by side with specialist marine-related employment uses and recreational facilities (a new beach with mangrove forest and wetlands. The scope for waterfront office development may be considerable. This mixed use strategy should embrace the potential for the river mouth (and the moving bridge) to be upgraded in a way that is sensitive to existing fish-boat owners.

3.3.3.5. Waterfront leisure uses

This area, centered on the river and the ocean, should be targeted for further recreational facilities to increase the attraction of this area, and better connect it into the blue and green network of open and public spaces.

3.3.3.6. Mixed-use historic harbor

This area, within the mouth of the river area, is defined by various clusters of historical buildings (some of them existent, others non-existent, yet still in the memory of the people). A mix of uses is proposed that brings these two areas into the public realm of the mule-park and battle field park within the context of a wider heritage

3.3.4. Community facilities

A range of community centers may exist in Belize City downtown but this still needs to be identified and mapped - from larger facilities such as the hospital to smaller facilities such as pharmacies and a rich variety of churches and temples, as well as doctor and lawyers offices. Though well used generally they do not seem to offer the full range of facilities or modern, flexible spaces to accommodate the full range of community uses.

A variety of youth facilities may also exist in Belize City but they also need to be identified and mapped (has information on this). There is also a commonly expressed need to expand youth provision, particularly to meet the needs of teenagers (as we all know teenagers are very vulnerable in Belize city as young people in Belize City do not have enough opportunities to engage in appropriate social and leisure activities. Are there enough sport facilities for young people?)

The master plan should develop plans for upgrading existing community facilities. A range of other community facilities may still be required - relating to health, education, and neighbourhood policing. These plans might include transforming the built heritage for these uses.

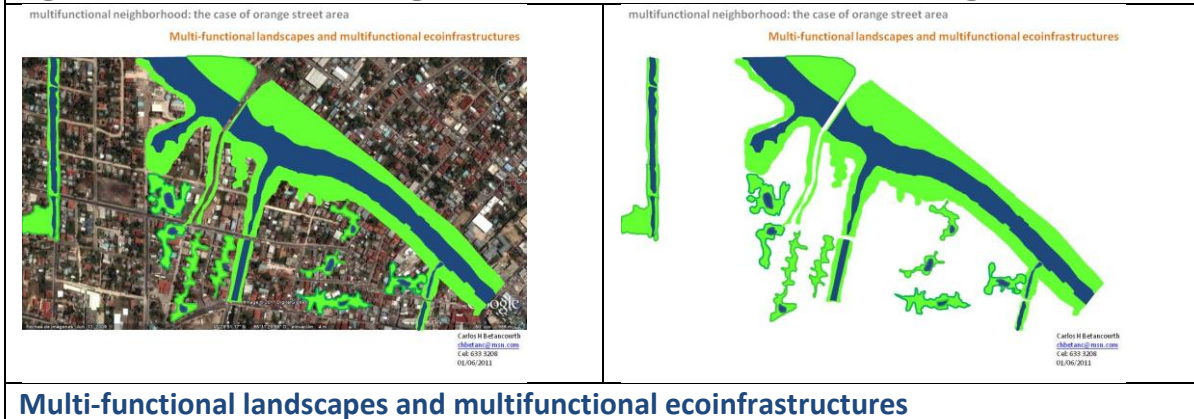
A strategic assessment of the demand and supply of such facilities and the appropriateness of existing buildings to accommodate spatial requirements needs to be considered in a more detailed way completed as part of feasibility analysis). It is recommended that this asset assessment is

undertaken within the context of the proposed land use pattern of the master plan we are proposing here in a preliminary fashion.

3.3.5. Multi-functional landscapes and Multi-functional eco-infrastructures

The river, coastal and canal landscapes (that is, the blue network of landscapes) can simultaneously serve a number of functions which may benefit from their overlap. The network of blue and green landscapes may provide habitats, resources such as water or food production, recreational amenities, as well as the management of floods and hurricanes (see figure 11).

Figure 11: multifunctional neighborhood: the river and the case of orange street area



3.3.5.1. a new mixed-use location at the river front

Here there is an opportunity to reconnect the center and riverfront location on the side of the orange-street and Collet canal area and create a new mixed-use location, linking the city center with the River. This requires putting together a Belize City river front sub-master plan. This sub-plan will seek to create a vision for how the river may become an even more valuable resource than it already is; one that is more easily useable for everyone and provides a richer and more inviting experience. To arrive at detailed plans and subsequent implementation, more focused processes will be needed. At this point we don't have the resources to undertake this task.

The purpose of this river front sub-master plan will be to create a coordinated vision for how to realize more fully the original promise of the Belize River in today's context, and to improve the relationship between the riverfront and Belize City's built environments: its streets, buildings, and parks, both new and old. While Belizeans already appreciate the river as a unique regional resource, many obstacles (such as wide expanses of automobile traffic and lack of safe crossings) prevent easy access from adjoining uses and neighborhoods, and detract from the enjoyment of arriving at the river waterfront.

It is important to capitalize, now and in the future, upon opportunities to create stronger physical design relationships that could be lost without a focused plan for improvement along the Belize river. The underlying goal is to expand the formal and informal use of the riverfront, and thereby realize the full potential for liveliness offered by this defining physical feature of Belize City communities, and region.

The accessibility and usability of each section of the river will have to be described with reference to the relevant threads of history that have led to the current connections to neighborhoods (or lack thereof) and opportunities for community activity. Important general shortcomings to be addressed are that

- the experience of moving along the length of the river is almost impossible,
- there are not opportunities to sit contemplatively or to gather more communally, and,
- it is not always easy to get to the river from the city.

The sub-master plan should make recommendations to address these shortcomings.

Again due to lack of resources, we will only make general suggestions in specific sections of the river such as the one at collet canal. The suggestions may include general public sector actions such as how local street and open space improvements may be designed to enhance the citizens' experience of the riverfront (see for instance, the artisan square and the rehabilitation the "ugly building" next to the crossing moving bridge). Suggestions may also include private development actions such as ways new projects may facilitate the community's appreciation of the riverfront through the introduction of activity and public uses along the river waterfront; pathways and buildings designed to embrace the river, create view corridors; and design features that relate to the river. The overall strategy suggested in this sub-plan is to be prepared, as a community, to make improvements when opportunities arise, recognizing that any specific under-taking is likely to require a process involving many interested parties.

For instance at the specific section of the river at collet canal, the master-plan would provide the basis for the creation of three new major public spaces linked by a riverside walk and flanked with a mix of activities (international convention center, office park and artisan square). Art will be part of this plan with participation of the artist of Belize city. The river will connect with the canals where new buildings will be proposed containing student housing, apartment blocks, small businesses, retail units, cafes, crèche, bars, nightclubs, hotels sports/recreation facilities, workshops, showrooms, retail units to add further life and vitality. The space behind the court house should become a park addressing the river. Multistory car park may be accommodated beneath the bridges.

3.4. The multiple land use approach to collet canal (this can be applied to other canals as well as the other development areas: river, waterfront, etc).

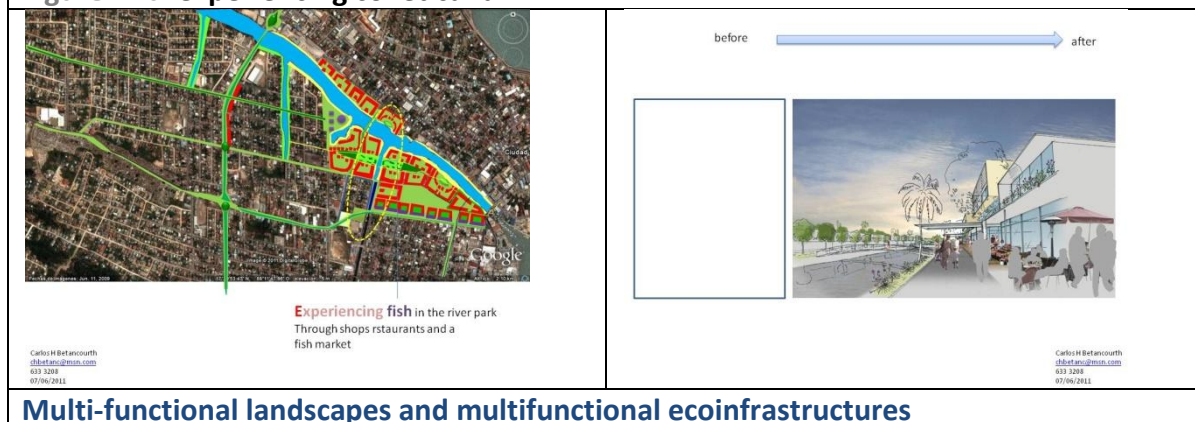
Figure 12a: experiencing collet canal



The collet canal development area presents a unique opportunity to re-integrate Belize City in overall terms - particularly in the way that the river, the downtown and the coastal-front could inter-relate in new ways. The area is made up of a complicated mix of constituent parts. Determining the most appropriate development strategy for the area is not simply a question of **defining one land use solution, but rather a strategy that interweaves the various components, namely:**

- The river front
- The fish market experience
- The gateway experience when collet meets orange street
- The transfer bus station
- The farmers market
- The softball stadium
- The ocean front
- The drainage function
- The ecosystem services function
- The various neighborhoods along the canal

Figure 12b: experiencing collet canal



The strategic importance of this development area cannot be over-stated. It provides an important strategic development opportunity in the area which has the advantage of integrating (through

eco-infrastructures) open space, water, habitat, biodiversity, drainage, ecosystem services, and views across to the rest of the city and river and oceanfront where new uses can benefit from a high quality environment, link seamlessly through to the existing urban grain, connect to the waterfront and allow the completion of the blue and green network.

Figure 12c: experiencing collet canal



Multi-functional landscapes and multifunctional ecoinfrastructures

This area forms a major part of the gateway to Belize-city downtown. It also connects the river with the ocean and thus transform Belize City downtown into an island.

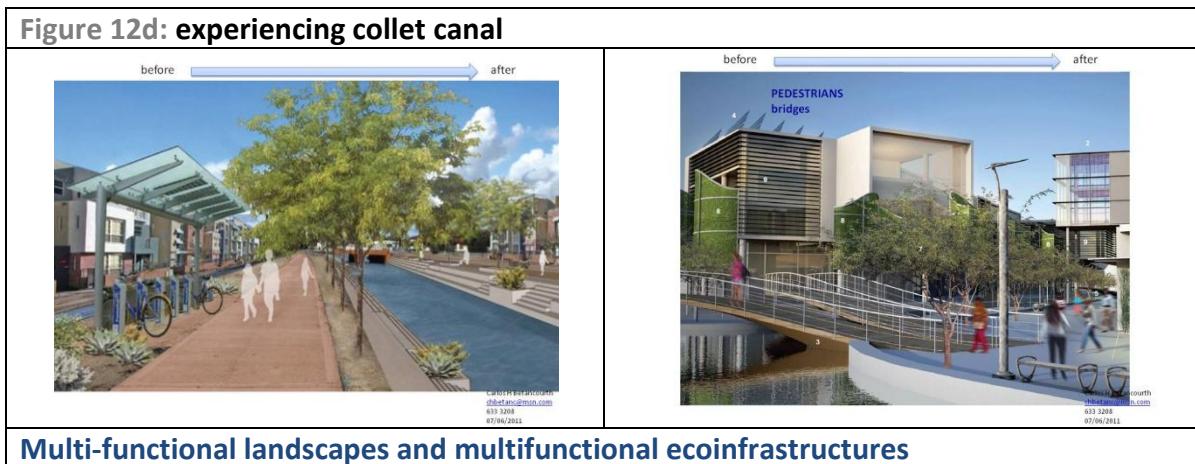
The recommended approach for Collet canal begins by establishing the following planning and design principles:

- The area of the collet canal is a very important part of a network of blue and green spaces that composes the natural environment and natural resources of the city). These natural resources are currently undervalued. This under-estimation of the value of natural processes in economic terms means that we take inadequately informed decisions on how to use these resources. The result is pollution, the loss of species and ecosystem services and damage to the processes we need, with real economic costs to either recover them or provide artificial alternatives. With ever increasing pressures on these natural resources (see for instance the impact of the new chatumal street on the mangrove forest and the river), partly from growing populations but still more from growing levels of individual consumption, it is essential that we learn to take account of the full value of ecosystem services in our decision making. By doing so, we cannot only protect what we have and repair damage where needed, but harness these resources more effectively to generate wealth and well-being. Thus valuing them properly will enable better decision making, more certain investment, new avenues to wealth creation and jobs, and greater human and social well-being in changing times ahead.
 - The wealth of the city and of the communities and families that compose it depend critically upon this environment that provides the city with the food, water and air that are essential for life. This natural environment and its **ecosystem services** provide the processes that purify air and water, and which sequester or break down wastes. It protects against flooding and hurricanes (as in

the case of the mangrove forest and its wetlands). It is also the environment where Belizeans may find recreation, health and solace, and in which their culture finds its roots and sense of belonging and place.

- At some point the master plan would have to assess our stocks of natural ecosystem resources, their state and the trends in their development.
- At this point we can only illustrate briefly how to map (assess these stocks of natural ecosystem resources, the state of our natural environment and the services it provides, and the trends in their development) what is there in general terms, propose to protect them, repair damage where needed, and, make some suggestions as to how harness these resources more effectively to generate wealth and well-being. This can serve as the basis for thinking about how we want to use these services to best effect, for national wealth and national well-being, now and for Belize nation's children into the future. The aim is to ensure that decision makers in government, business and society have the knowledge, foresight and tools to mitigate, adapt to and benefit from environmental change.

Figure 12d: experiencing collet canal



Multi-functional landscapes and multifunctional ecoinfrastructures

- Once the area of the canal has been re-conceptualized as part of the natural environment of the city and of its ecosystem services, it can also be conceptualized as an open park (a recreational service and facility), a civic space for biodiversity and habitat creation, that connects continuously the river and the Caribbean sea, and is opened up for public access. It integrates the south-side with the city center and the north. This park will be connected by bike and walking paths with the krumman lagoon, the Bourdon reserve, the river front and the ocean front
- It is important to address local vehicular access and public transport access to the areas,
 - through the transformation of the bus **terminal** into a multi-modal **transfer** station and the facilitation of pedestrian, cycle, and water access along the canal providing a vital link in the green and blue network of open spaces.
- the existing softball field next to the bus station should be brought into community use as a recreational resource of regional and city wide importance. It should be enclosed by new buildings providing attractive frontage
- Listed buildings in the canal area and their attractive landscaped and public space settings will be sensitively restored and converted.

- The enormous potential of the fish and farmers market experiences must be redeveloped and maximized for the area to become a beacon of civic pride, with community uses included to help realize downtown revitalization objectives.

These principles should be further detailed in a separate document for the collet canal area. Within this context, a range of uses can be envisaged. Each potential use should be considered in relation to its ability to capitalize on the tremendous strategic potential this area has. To retain sufficient flexibility to pursue a variety of options for area and site development, it is recommended that the following be considered:

- The Collet canal should be allocated for mixed use development, including a variety of housing and residential uses and tenures. The following additional uses are acceptable as part of a mixed use scheme:
 - Office-park (river front).
 - Non-residential institutional uses including health and educational facilities (university and student apartments).
 - Sporting facilities
 - Multimodal transfer station
 - hotels
 - Fish and farmers market
 - The ecosystem services and drainage function

Figure 12d: experiencing collet canal



Multi-functional landscapes and multifunctional ecoinfrastructures

3.5. Charm Experience Areas

A patchwork of different activities

Once we have identified and located in a map the downtown and its outlying neighborhood clusters, as well as the existing (and needed and proposed) uses and facilities, we next need to identify the particular charm experience areas with which the Master plan and each one of the proposed development areas may relate to. Can new themes be added or particular existing attributes strengthened further?

The preliminary pattern of uses proposed above will help define a series of different areas, or sustainable multi-functional neighbourhoods, each with a particular charm-type. In most instances the proposed charm areas reflect the distinguishing qualities of the many different places within Belize City. However, in areas that are either to be substantially redeveloped (new chatumal street extension), or areas with little and negative existing charm (orange street, collet canal), new urban qualities are to be created or the existing charm redefined

In most neighborhoods in Belize City there is already a rich vein of features and qualities that give each locality its own identity. It is largely a matter of identifying, drawing out and reinforcing the individuality that already exists.

For instance, the charm of Belize City as a water city should be encouraged to evolve and develop in a manner that is both sensitive to the past and the existing, but which also encourages vitality and imagination for the future.

Due to the many years of development and redevelopment (due to the impacts of natural disasters, floods and inundations), there seems to be a variety in building types, forms and materials. This can create diversity, and often in very close proximity (the downtown area), that sometimes makes it difficult to define clear or consistent areas of urban charm and identity. Charm varies significantly within very small areas. Nonetheless several broad areas may-be defined, the aim of which is to provide an overall structure within which design codes and/or development briefs can be prepared at a later stage. The key is to express local identity of each individual charm and development area in an integrated way that supports the overall vision for Belize city (as a water city).

Building on local charm and identity

The principal influences on the charm of Belize City may be:

- its long history, represented in the built heritage, and its particular geographical setting as a delta and water city at the mouth of the Belize river,
- Two of the most important features are the green network of blue and of open spaces (the bourdon reserve, the krumman lagoon, etc) that has determined the settlement pattern of Belize city; the coastal and delta ecosystems are fundamental features
- the geometric layout of streets in downtown is also important
- the views on the ocean and the river

These are all features that a charm areas study would seek to preserve and exploit. Current re-development gives little regard for the opportunities that these features afford, but the master plan and future planning and development should seek to enhance and make the most of the exciting possibilities that they can offer

Other features general to Belize city are:

- the simple qualities of much of the architecture, often colonial and vernacular, but also with some quite dramatic and surprising flourishes. These have some foreign influences that reflect a global maritime and colonial past; and

- the local wooden and stone frames. Much of the town has been built in the local wood (and stone) that is unique in colour. This natural palette is enriched by the rich cultural palette of the Caribbean and the variety of cultures and communities that live in downtown Belize (Creole, Garifuna, Maya, Indian, Lebanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Central American (Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico)). The effect of this palette under the clear light of the seaside location is enlivening and rather particular to Belize city. Design codes should encourage the tradition of these colours, as well as the use of local materials.
- To this we should add the rich tradition of musical sounds and smells of local cuisine

Individual Urban Charm Areas

Broadly, several urban charm areas may be defined:

- The historical environment;
- the river front,
- the oceanfront,
- the network of canals,
- the city-port area;
- the mangrove forests and coastal and river wetlands (in a process of deterioration).
- The neighborhoods west of central American boulevard
- The neighborhoods east of central American boulevard

A description should be made of these areas from the point of view of their identity and uniqueness.

In Belize City, there is scope for strengthening existing neighbourhoods where identity is based on a particular activity or mix, (the farmers and fish market places at Collet or the college campus up north CAB, or, the whole melée of sights, sounds and smells that give uniqueness and character to the area along the river), or devising new areas of special charm (e.g., Chatumal street). Such charm experience areas can reinforce local identity and serve as a marketing tool to raise the profile of a particular neighbourhood, as in the case of the fish market and farmers market experience area (figure 7a, 7b above). These charm experience areas may relate to predominant uses and users, focal buildings, historic associations or ethnic composition, such as a "Coolie-town" and "Yabra".