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Annex 10 – Belize City Waterfronts Strategy



PADECO **i.E.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this Report

As part of the Belize City Master Plan project, this report sets out a strategy for the important waterfront areas that will become a driving force behind the future development of the city, helping to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits and the sustainable development of the city.

This report introduces a series of guiding concepts and principles to provide a framework for the waterfront areas. These guiding concepts and principles are also key to the achieving the Belize City Master Plan main goal:

To regenerate Belize City downtown by making strategic investments in the public realm, thereby creating amenities for the public as well as enhancing the value and opportunity for adjacent private development.

Over time, this combination of public investment and private development will create the conditions for the transformation of the Belize City three waterfronts, detailed in the next section, including:

- The River Waterfront Areas;
- The Canal Waterfront Areas; and
- The Ocean Waterfront Areas.

Further information on how the waterfront areas form an integrated part of the future development plans for the city is detailed in the accompanying Belize City Master Plan document.

1.2 The Need for a Waterfronts Master Plan

The three waterfront areas have historically been the gateways into Belize City. Therefore, it has been identified that the transformation of the Belize City waterfronts introduced in this strategy, requires further detailing in a separate long term Master Plan that would form a more detailed but interlinked submission.

This strategy forms an Annex to the main Master Plan report and introduces a series of ideas, principles and illustrative plans for the waterfront areas. However, in creating an implementable long-term plan for the various categories of waterfronts in Belize City (Figure 1), further planning work would be required to complete in-depth technical analyses and further investigation of the constraints and opportunities in order to develop alternatives, prioritize schemes and create the final waterfronts plan. It should be noted that as part of this further work, economic analysis must be included in each phase of the process to insure that the recommendations in the final plan are well grounded and deliverable. Further information is detailed in Section 5 Next Steps.

1.3 Report Contents

Following this introduction, this report contains the following sections:

- **Section 2 Background and Context:** Sets out the project context, relevant planning context, an outline of the project area and a discussion outlining the key importance of the waterfront areas;
- **Section 3 Vision and Objectives:** Details the vision and key goals of the project alongside a series of overarching objectives and guiding principles and a summary of the potential benefits trying to be achieved;
- **Section 4 Emerging Master Plan:** Builds on the guiding principles to set out a framework Master Plan for the waterfront areas. A series of illustrative plans are then introduced in making recommendations for development of the three waterfront areas in keeping with the overall vision established for both, Greater Belize City and Belize City downtown; and
- **Section 5 Next Steps:** Notes the needs for building on the strategy for the Belize City Waterfront areas using the overarching framework of guiding principles and illustrative plans to develop a detailed waterfront Master Plan.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 The Context

As a revitalization initiative a series of key investment projects in the three waterfronts (canal, river and sea) would provide a focus for re-investing in the social, economic, cultural, and physical infrastructure of the city's strategic urbanized areas and urban ensembles. This would also seek to bring back investment, employment, middle class households and consumption within downtown, and to enhance the quality of life within the city's urban ensembles. The urban revitalization of Belize City downtown implies growth, progress and infusion of new economic activities into an otherwise stagnant and declining city that is no longer attractive to investors.

It is no secret that inner urban decay, crime, social tension, unemployment, and falling standards in the provision of urban services are some of the more salient indicators of the deterioration in the social, economic, political and financial fabric of Belize City.

Such decline has led to out-migration of younger and more skilled members of the urban population as they seek employment elsewhere. The result is that the population in Belize City downtown areas tends to mainly comprise of single parents, unskilled workers and the elderly.

Therefore, a pertinent question for Belize City relates to which economic initiatives can be delivered in the downtown area to enable it to become attractive again to investors and middle-class households. This issue could be further exacerbated with the proposed extension plan for the city. The World Bank extension plan, if implemented, would take the residential function further away from Belize City downtown. A number of urban functions including retail services may all migrate to the new suburban areas of the city that are proposed. This abandonment of the city will have serious implications for the future of Belize City and its historical heritage. Therefore rehabilitating and revitalizing the waterfront areas could help bring back investors and middle class households to Belize City downtown.

There are a number of opportunities and constraints that the waterway areas provide. At present, the canals, river and the ocean front have all become polluted open sewers, contaminated and urban eyesores. These waterways that could provide such an important part of the integrated future plans for the city could be seen at the moment as being a symbol of poverty. As Belize City tries to redefine and redevelop itself, the open sewer in the middle of the city may prove to be an obstacle; the only answer during extreme economic hardship is the quick win of covering it up with roadway. It will bury the waterway as it was an inconvenience rather than an economic, social, cultural and environmental heritage asset. If this plan were to be implemented, it would not enable the range of environmental, social and economic values and opportunities that the waterways provide to be delivered.

2.2 Key Importance of the Waterfront Areas

The city of Belize distinguishes itself through a number of qualities including its informal, innovative, proud, relaxed, walkable, resilient and vibrant nature. This strategy argues that these qualities should be fully extended to the three waterfront areas.

The three waterfronts have historically been Belize City's **gateway**, a centre of activity, industry, and commerce, bounded at its Yarrowborough end by active port facilities. The Master Plan for Belize City

downtown recognizes this character and would aim to create region-serving amenities while also reconnecting the city's residents and visitors with the waterfronts.

The inspiration and foundations for the follow up three waterfronts Master Plan must be founded in the waterfront's distinctive qualities:

- **The singular geography:** a sweeping and gentle bow of still to be made visible abandoned piers and wetland-scapes that offers broad views across the river, the ocean and the canals,
- The **historical, natural and cultural resources and heritage assets** that are still identifiable and integral to the character of Belize City's three waterfronts;
- The **vibrancy and low-rise scale** of the many adjoining neighbourhoods; and
- The potential to **integrate** the manmade infrastructures (such as piers) with natural ecological systems and multifunctional eco-infrastructures.

2.3 Planning Context

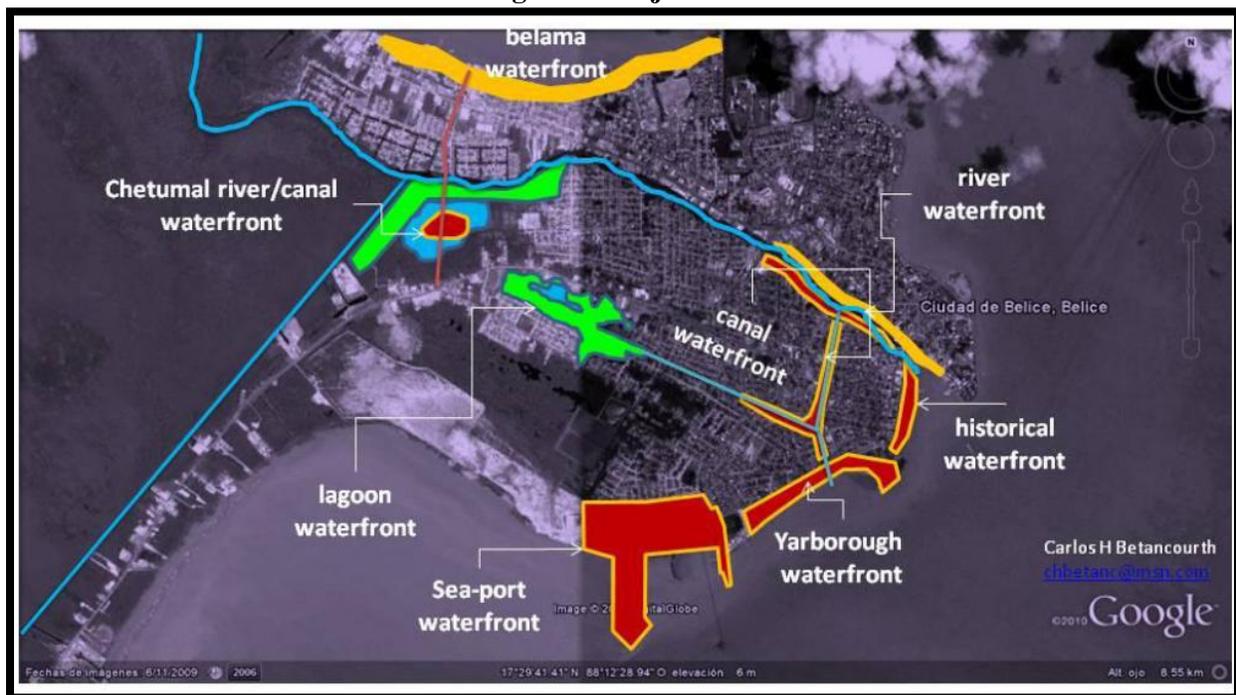
As part of the development of a sustainable and deliverable plan for the waterfront areas there are a number of important institutional and planning actions to be considered. These include the following:

1. Appoint an open, accountable, effective waterfront manager and create the Belize City three waterfronts Corporation (with a board of directors);
2. Adopt a clear zoning and a detailed Master Plan for the three waterfronts and a coordinated regulatory policy;
3. Implement waterfront projects in a variety of categories, including parks, trails, streets, traffic, and parking. Early action projects may include:
 - i. The first phase of the Belize City River Trail between Belize city downtown (the moving bridge and the artisan plaza) and the bridge at the Belize river up north in the way to the airport;
 - ii. The first phase of the Belize City ocean waterfront including the trail between Belize city downtown (the moving bridge and the artisan plaza and the mouth of the river) to the Yarborough neighbourhood and beyond, to Old Belize;
 - iii. The Collet Canal Street (trail, bike, pedestrian) and multifunctional Connector; intensive streetscaping, lighting, and artistic treatment of Collet canal between the river and ocean waterfronts;
 - iv. The bus transfer
 - v. The fish market
 - vi. The farmers market
 - vii. New public spaces at the river, canal and ocean waterfronts
4. Developing a strategy for flood mitigation proposed by the Master Plan and the recent loan for drainage works by the IDB;
5. Linkages with overall Belize City downtown Master Plan;
6. A wider strategy for Greater Belize City; and
7. Preliminary recommendations for multiple land uses, density, and form for the entire downtown area.

2.4 The Project Area

Figure 1 illustrates the waterfronts project area. A key message it demonstrates is that due to the large nature of the area in question, it is important to determine the key areas that are most significant within the 20-year time period of the waterfronts Master Plan.

Figure 1: Project Area



Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

In addressing the next 20 years of development along the central Belize City three waterfronts, the Master Plan must set out a specific framework for the redevelopment and reuse potential of specific areas. Recommendations must also be made for trail connections between the different waterfronts, the city and its downtown and the greater Belize City area.

For these areas, the Master Plan must propose development that can extend across private and public sites. In order to spur this development in the earlier years of implementation, the Master Plan must identify priority sites where strategic public investment should be focused. These sites will make excellent starting points for the transformation of the three waterfronts. The preliminary location and boundaries of these sites are presented in the illustrative plans section of this document.

The Master Plan must also identify important connections between the three waterfronts and the downtown and Greater Belize City that extend beyond the proposed project area. This integration of the three waterfronts with the existing city must be a critical part of the urban design and economic strategy proposed by the Master Plan because improvements to the streets connecting past the boundary of the Master Plan and into the neighbourhoods are essential. In addition, strategic trail connections at a city-wide and regional level are critically important to the objective of linking the larger city and region to the three waterfronts.

3. TRANSFORMING THE BELIZE CITY WATERFRONTS: OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES

3.1 Vision and Goals

The main goal and vision of the Waterfronts Strategy is to transform Belize City's downtown Belize River and Halouver creek; the ocean water front at Yarborough, both connected through a linear park along collet canal waterfront (Figures 1), into an extension of Belize City downtown and its historical neighbourhoods. Breathing life back into these abandoned waterfronts that were once at the heart of the Belize City economy is a tremendous challenge, but meeting this challenge will yield great benefits to the city and strategic benefits for its surrounding region.

3.2 Objectives and Guiding Principles

Overview

As mentioned, a key aim of this report is to set out a series of guiding concepts and principles that provide a framework for development of a detailed waterfront Master Plan. The guiding concepts and principles are listed below and described in the following sections:

- (1) Create a network of civic and public spaces and wet-landscapes that are distinctive public amenities as well as catalysts for private development;
- (2) Promote the development of new, low- to mid-rise, dense and walkable residential neighbourhoods along the three waterfronts and their wet-landscapes;
- (3) Accommodate diverse multiple land uses along the waterfronts;
- (4) Incorporate best practices in sustainability and flood mitigation;
- (5) Create a pedestrian-friendly and balanced transportation plan that supports the walkability of the three waterfronts and their strong connection to the city and to Greater Belize City;
- (6) Create strong inclusionary opportunities for economic development for minority-owned, women-owned, and disadvantaged businesses;
- (7) Create a waterfront Master Plan that can be implemented in discrete increments over time; and
- (8) Create a truly Belizean three-fold waterfront.

Guiding Principle 1:

Create a network of civic and public spaces and wet-landscapes that are distinctive public amenities as well as catalysts for private development.

One of the primary concepts and principles of the Waterfronts strategy is that scarce public funding must be used to implement targeted multifunctional eco-infrastructure projects in the form of streets, utilities, distinctive and attractive open spaces and multifunctional parks for flood protection, in order to create value on degraded and severely challenged waterfront sites. The three waterfronts are currently a landscape of some derelict piers and vacant lands. The waterfronts are disconnected from the vibrant adjacent neighbourhoods, and in many locations they have no public amenities and offer no access points to the river, canal and sea waterfronts. By implementing multifunctional eco-infrastructure projects the public sector will stimulate and leverage private investment. This economic development will bring new residents, businesses, and light industry, all of which increase the tax base for Belize City and contribute funding for ongoing maintenance and programming at public waterfront spaces.

The open-space system planned for the three waterfronts will only become activated, sustainable, and maintainable if dense and successful development exists around it. Public space cannot exist on the three waterfronts without new private development and private development will not happen on the three waterfronts without quality public space as amenities. Therefore, the Master Plan is proposing a preliminary framework for a network of civic and public spaces connected by the three waterfront trails based on the following precepts:

1. An attractive network of public spaces along the length of the three waterfronts will improve quality of life for all Belizeans and will contribute to making the city of Belize a vibrant place to live and work.
2. A rich public realm along the three waterfronts creates incentive for and catalyzes private development in a challenging development environment.
3. A connected system of open space along the three waterfronts creates brand value for the city serving as an attraction for regional visitors and tourists.

The Master Plan has been crafted to utilize public funding not only to catalyze economic development, but also to help advance other city-wide goals. For example, the Master Plan contributes to Belize City storm-water management goals and incorporates wetland and flood mitigation projects to accommodate essential city projects. Additionally, the public realm laid out by this Master Plan has been designed to contribute to the health and social equity of the city by providing fair and equal access to parks within walking distance and by incorporating wealth-building strategies for traditionally disadvantaged communities.

In summary, investing public funding into these three waterfronts will stimulate economic development, create an attractive and memorable set of amenities, and contribute to Belize City's health and vitality.

Guiding Principle 2: Promote the development of new, low to mid-rise, dense and walkable residential neighbourhoods

The Master Plan recommends that the primary form of the three waterfronts development should be a high-density, low- to mid-rise form for three principal reasons:

1. This form of development complements the character and scale of adjacent neighbourhoods.
2. This scale of development may match the near-term market potential for new residential development along the three waterfronts. Height should be regulated to promote low- to mid-rise development, with provisions for exceptions at appropriate locations. This will create incentives for developers and property owners to spread the development along the three entire waterfronts rather than trying to concentrate it at a few locations to the detriment of the adjacent development parcels.
3. Additionally, this development approach will not compete with the character of the historical Belize City downtown or other neighbourhoods. For example, high-rise office development is not proposed for the waterfronts; nor is large-format retail proposed either. Rather, a program of residential development with supporting service retail, cafes, restaurants, and entertainment will establish a year-round amenity for the city.

Reclaiming the three (river-canal-sea) waterfronts for 21st-century urban living, complemented by ongoing and new water-related economic activities that will generate jobs, will offer a resilient and lasting place along the Belize City three waterfronts

Guiding Principle 3: Accommodate Diverse and Multiple Land Uses Along The Three Waterfronts

The strategic Master Plan for Belize City recognizes the need to incorporate important land uses such as port, related port industry and economic activities and commerce, as well as entertainment, residential and neighbourhood-scale commercial. Some of these uses that can be somewhat incompatible with each other must have transition zones in between them. The land-use plan must be designed to minimize these conflicts of use. For example, at the southern end a buffer for the port could also act as a buffer into office/industrial use and/or a large-format retail. A park space buffer could also be proposed that could be used as an observation and interpretation platform where the public could see and understand the role that the port and maritime industry plays in Belize City and the region's economy. The remainder of the three waterfronts could be proposed as a mixture of residential, entertainment and retail uses organized around a network of high-quality open spaces and wet-landscapes and an improved multimodal transportation systems along the canals and water bodies.

Guiding Principle 4: Incorporate best practices in sustainability

The Waterfronts Strategy uses sustainability as an underlying principle for its decisions and recommendations. Specific recommendations address sustainability by taking into account the following aims:

1. Create three waterfront places that will not only economically sustain themselves, but that will also contribute positively to the economic development of Belize City.
2. Utilize best practices in sustainability for architecture, landscape architecture, and city planning to insure that the built environment achieves multiple goals.

The system of parks and open spaces recommended in this plan are designed to function as much more than green spaces or places for active recreation. As multifunctional eco-infrastructures, will also help manage storm-water, prevent flooding, restore natural ecologies, contribute to the health of the river, the canals and the ocean, reduce the heat-island effect of the city, and restore tree canopy. The type of development planned for the three waterfronts not only establishes new, vibrant economic development for the city, but also creates dense and walk-able communities, reduces vehicular emissions through improved multimodal transportation and mass transit, incorporates new and emerging green building technologies into building design and utilizes the existing history and character of the three waterfronts to inform new development forms.

Guiding Principle 5: Create a pedestrian-friendly and balanced transportation plan that supports the walkability of the three waterfronts and their strong connection to the city and to the Greater Belize City.

The current transportation network for the three waterfronts is centred on vehicular travel and provides limited access for other users. The Master Plan for Belize City downtown begins to shape and serve walkable communities, links waterfront destinations to each other and to Belize City historical downtown connects waterfront residents to employment centres, and functions as an integral part of the regional transportation network. It also provides access to people visiting the three waterfronts for recreation and entertainment.

The main transportation components relevant for the Waterfronts Strategy Guiding Principle 5 include:

1. A long-term plan for a multimodal transport system for Belize downtown;
2. Incremental transformation of the Central American Boulevard from a high-speed vehicular corridor to a multi-modal, pedestrian-friendly corridor with significant facilities for mass transit, bicycles, and pedestrians;
3. A comprehensive system of civic streets that connect the three waterfronts with Belize City and provide safe and welcoming waterfront access to existing and new developments;
4. Bicycle facilities for all users including commuters, recreational and families with young children; and
5. A water transportation system, along the three waterfronts, including ferry and water-taxi services.

Guiding Principle 6: Create strong inclusionary opportunities for all including economic development for minority-owned, women-owned and disadvantaged businesses.

The implementation of this Master Plan must offer a means for minorities and women to build wealth. This outcome can be achieved when entrepreneurs are able to participate in an inclusive environment and grow their businesses, workers are able to freely participate in professional endeavours and individual investors are able to recognize profit from well-placed risk. The opportunity to engage in wealth-building practices exists in every aspect of the Master Plan.

Given the 20-25-year time frame of the Master Plan, the opportunity exists to create a phased pipeline of projects that, properly formulated and executed, will result in significant wealth creation for minorities and women as individuals, business owners and investors. In addition, the Master Plan envisions a significant amount of new retail, dining and entertainment serving both existing and new residential communities. The Master Plan envisions that significant opportunities will be created for entrepreneurial minority and women businesses to be commercial tenants in these mixed-use developments.

Guiding Principle 7: Create a waterfront Master Plan that can be implemented in discrete increments over time.

In order to create incentives for private development on the three waterfronts, scarce but essential public funding must be carefully targeted and phased over the 20-25-year span of the Master Plan. Therefore, a detailed phasing strategy must be crafted to concentrate initial public funding at key locations where private development can occur in the relative near term in a manner consistent with current absorption rates. Additionally, various elements of the Master Plan for Belize City downtown must be designed to be built discretely, without requiring other major public investments at the same time. Lastly, projects of various scales must be proposed allowing the government, the City of Belize and other partners to undertake small and large projects to create and maintain a constant momentum of transformation across the three water-fronts project area. Priority sites must be selected in the three waterfronts at which publicly owned land at key locations can be used to initiate early development activity.

Guiding Principle 8: Create a Truly Belizean Three-fold waterfront

The Belize City waterfronts may have been once seamlessly integrated into the city; they may have had close physical connections with the city, as well as a Belizean charm, character and identity. However, these connections have been severed over time and the three waterfronts must now be carefully redeveloped to re-establish these integrated connections. Redevelopment must be sensitive to the qualities that are essentially Belizean rather than creating a new place that has no physical connection to the character and fabric of Belize City. The three waterfronts should simultaneously possess Belizean charm and character (see Figure 2) and also a special identity as waterfront places.

It can be difficult to identify the particular traits that create charm and character in a place, as these are somewhat intangible; however, all components of this Master Plan, including open space, new development, and infrastructure, are formulated with the specific purpose of creating a uniquely Belize city experience of place.

The Master Plan aims to accomplish this by drawing on the rich cultural and natural history of the three waterfronts and of the city as a whole; by making use of the city's strong cultural, natural and heritage assets, including its artisan and artistic traditions; and by considering the scale and density of the buildings in the adjacent neighbourhoods

The project area may contain historical and archaeological resources of national and possibly of international significance, although further investigation and confirmation is required. These historical resources could make the Belize City three-waterfronts unique and create a sense of place that will draw both tourists and residents to the waterfronts. The Master Plan for Belize City downtown recommends integrating these resources by various means, such as reusing historic wet-landscapes, buildings and hydraulic infrastructures, interpreting archaeological and historical sites and installing a comprehensive interpretive signage program. A more in detail historic and archaeological resources inventory will be needed that will help inform potential archaeological and historical sites and buildings and structures that could have adaptive reuse potential for future development.

Public art and programming are also important character-buildings elements that re-connect people to the three waterfronts and act as attractions. Therefore, the Master Plan recommends that public art be installed as an integral component of the three-waterfronts, wet-landscapes in both permanent and temporary ways. Locations for iconic pieces of art must be identified in the follow up waterfronts-plan, such as the battlefield and mule parks. Private developers should take advantage of these incentives for public art.

Finally, the strongest component of a successful waterfront that draws on the past while embracing the future is the continued role of Belizeans themselves. Public participation and engagement must be a central component to the development of the plan. The history of the three-waterfronts and the city as a whole demonstrates that Belize City is always evolving, inventing, and innovating. In continuing this

tradition, the three-waterfronts can draw from their past and present to create a truly Belize City waterfront for the future.

Figure 2: Belizean Waterfront Charm



Source: PADECO/iE

3.3 The Potential Benefits

The vision for the waterfront areas and the associated guiding principles outlined in this report, seek to achieve a range of environmental, social and economic benefits for the city. By reinvesting and re-energizing the waterfront areas, the Master Plan will be able to attract and bring back investment, employment, middle class households and to enhance the quality of life within the city’s urban ensembles. This will amount to the infusion of new economic activities into an otherwise stagnant and declining city that is no longer attractive to investors or middle-class households. A brief summary of the main benefits is given below:

Environmental Benefits

One of the main environmental benefits is that the open watercourses (river-canals-lakes-lagoons-ocean) will handle flooding rains more successfully than buried sewers do. Therefore, it has associated climate change proofing synergies. The storm drains turned into streams, open watercourses and canals also tend to cool the downtown areas overheated by sun-baked asphalt and to nourish greenery that lures wildlife as well as pedestrians. Other environmental benefits include improved urban biodiversity and the enrichment

of ecosystems (fish, bird, insect species) along the watercourses; decreases in nearby air pollution from cars and reduced air temperatures along the new corridors.

Social Benefits

With regards to social benefits, the plan offers the possibility of constructing the kind of grand public gathering places that have been in short supply in Belize City. The restoration of the river, the canal and the sea front, will bring back parks into the urban core and reclaim nature. These new waterfront parks will appear in many parts of the city, rich and poor, including the downtown, which is undergoing a revival. The new waterfront concepts above all will shift the balance between people and vehicles in the built environment. The downtown will be evolving from a car-oriented city to a human-oriented city. Belizeans will be able to market river-canal-ocean-lagoon-lake waterfront properties and restaurants etc. Residential and office villages would rise along the river's-canal-ocean-newly greened banks.

Economic Benefits

Economic benefits will arise from replacing the car dominated environment, with walk-able redesigned waterfronts, waterways, multifunctional greenways and wet-landscapes helping nearby homes to sell at a premium after years of being sold for relatively low prices by comparison with outlying properties in Greater Belize City. The new waterways and wet-landscapes would indeed become drivers of local economic activity.

Water Quality Benefits

Several solutions could be proposed to help clean polluted waters that spill into the river and the ocean from storm drains and polluted canals. These proposals could centre on filtering the water through new vegetation in the three waterfront parks, before it reaches the river and the ocean.

4. EMERGING MASTER PLAN FOR THE WATERFRONT AREAS

4.1 The Framework

Overview

This section builds on the guiding principles to set out a framework Master Plan for the waterfront areas. The framework considers open space, development, transportation, and economics as equally important components. Therefore, an iterative process should be used to formulate the open space plan and create development sites, insuring an appropriate balance that is both economically feasible and supported by the existing and realistic future transportation networks. The waterfront Master Plan must therefore create a mixed-use waterfront, interwoven within a network of public parks, a multi-use trail and excellent integration of transportation. The Master Plan proposes investment in high-quality public spaces not only to provide valuable recreational, cultural, and entertainment attractions, but also to increase the value and development potential of privately owned parcels .

A Mixed Use Plan

On the basis of the land use framework provided in Annex 9 of the Master Plan, it is proposed to extend the pattern of neighbourhoods to the three-waterfronts. Suggested developments, will be of high-density, both low and midrise and mixed-use and will be organized in relation to a rich network of open spaces serving the neighbourhoods, city and region (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Multiple land uses along the river waterfront in downtown Belize City



Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

Parks Every 0.5 Kilometres

The Master Plan proposes parks located approximately every 0.5kms along the three waterfronts, where they intersect each other at the end of key streets/canals (such as the intersection between Orange Street and Collet Canal). This will provide amenities and add value to the adjacent neighbourhoods and the city as a whole. The park system will be designed to have a wide variety of open-space types to provide diversity and interest along the three- waterfronts. Therefore, these open spaces may range from park-like settings with predominantly planted landscapes to urban plazas and promenades that are more hard-scape in nature. The parks are also designed to be as distinct in their character, activities, and design as the neighbourhoods serve and the portions of the three waterfronts in which they are located. The Master Plan proposes new parks along the three waterfronts (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Parks Every 0.5 Kilometre

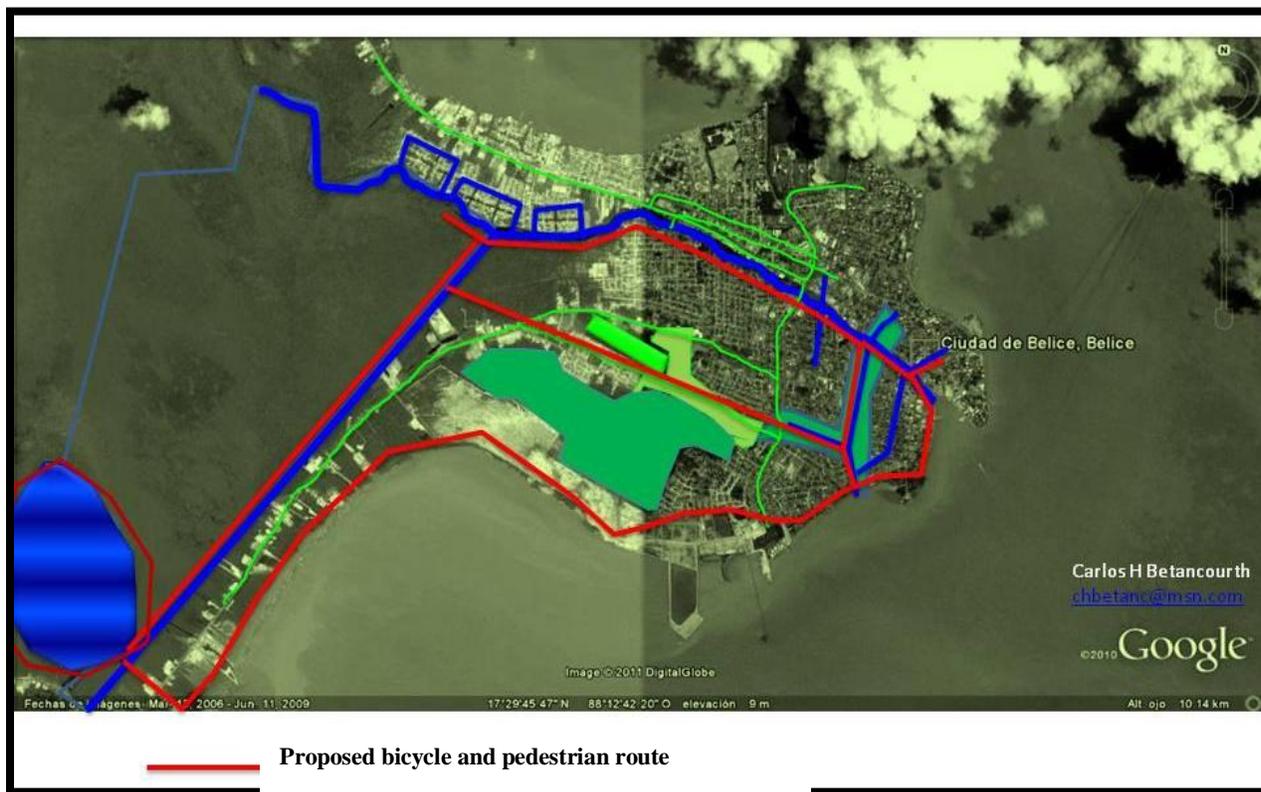


Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

Bicycle and Pedestrian Routes Network

Multi-use routes for bicycles and pedestrians is proposed for the full length of the project area (see Figure 5), with varied configurations across the three-waterfronts. This trail connects the river and the ocean through Collet Canal and the city with Greater Belize City through the Bourdon canal and lake as well as through the Krumman lagoon. In addition to serving as a continuous three waterfronts trail, the trails will connect the parks located every half-km along the three-waterfronts and provides access to the development sites.

Figure 5: Proposed Route Network



Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

Ownership, Economics, and Implementation

A certain amount of the project area may be in private ownership, although further work is required to confirm this detail. Land and/or easements must be acquired in order to implement the three water-fronts Master Plan. Some form of commitment may be needed to advocate for the acquisition of property in conformity with applicable law. Public sector investments on publicly owned property maybe critical to stimulate development on privately owned sites. Further work is required to select priority sites where it is suggested that strategic public investment be focused in the short term, as well as a detailed phasing and investment strategy for these sites.

4.3 Illustrative Plans: An Overview

The following sections present initial illustrative plans for the key waterfront areas, putting the guiding principles into action. It is important to note that these illustrative plans are not yet intended as legal documents; they make recommendations for development in keeping with the overall vision established for Greater Belize City, Belize City Downtown and its three waterfronts.

Whilst a framework of guiding principles has been outlined in his report, each of the various types of waterfront areas in Belize City need site specific plans and treatment under the overarching guidance. Therefore a range of important examples across the river, canal and sea waterfront types have been included in this section. These are listed below and described in the following sections:

- Illustrative Plan: The Yarborough Sea Waterfront;
- Illustrative Plan: The River Waterfront;
- Illustrative Plan: The Moving Bridge Waterfront;
- Illustrative Plan: The Historical Waterfront Area;
- Illustrative Plan: The Port Waterfront;
- Illustrative Plan: The Collet Canal Waterfront key investment restoration project; and
- Illustrative Plans: The lagoons waterfront key investment restoration project.

Illustrative plans and artistic renderings should still be produced as part of a follow up Master Plan project for the three waterfronts. They will be the graphical representations of the 25-year build-out of the highly inter-related elements of the three waterfronts-Master Plan. These may include a (new) street grid, which creates new development blocks, new development on existing parcels, and an extensive, high-quality system of parks and trails. The illustrative plan and renderings will also illustrate a multi-use trail stretching the length of the project area connecting together all the urban ensembles, as well as the critically important improvements to key connector streets and improvements to streets such as Central American Boulevard, Orange street and Collet canal.

The main general illustrative plan (see Figure 1) must be composed of a series of sub- plans. In the manner of an illustration each section that follows contains a brief narrative, describing plan elements. As part of a follow up project these illustrative plans will be very carefully formulated to be implemented based on discussions held with property owners, a detailed cost-estimating and financing strategy, and the input of numerous stakeholder groups.

4.4 Illustrative Plan: The Yarborough Sea Waterfront

The Yarborough Sea Waterfront area has distinctive characteristics that will determine its quality and pace of development. Yarborough, would be the most important urban beach resort of Belize. The two heritage landscapes of the cemeteries are fundamental structuring elements within this area. The area boasts a relatively high degree of blue and green wet-landscapes. While upgrading of the area is clearly desirable, this should be undertaken with caution in order to avoid destroying it's the unique character.

The seafront will be fully integrated into Belize City. This strategic key investment project will comprise the rehabilitation of approximately 2 km of the seafront from Birds Isle to the sea-port (see also Figure 6). It will create a new major public boulevard and pedestrian zone along the coastal line, while at the same time strengthening the coastline defences for Belize City.

Figure 6: The New Yarborough Sea Waterfront



Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

The seafront will then be given back to pedestrians and cyclists, meanwhile car drivers may still enjoy a scenic drive without dominating the street space. Furthermore, this sea waterfront would include a beach which in addition to its recreational urban function, it will play a role as part of a multifunctional infrastructure for flood mitigation.

The Master Plan recommends the following public-realm elements to organize and incentivize development on parcels that are now either privately owned or owned by public agencies, relevant for the new Yaborough Sea Waterfront and connected proposals:

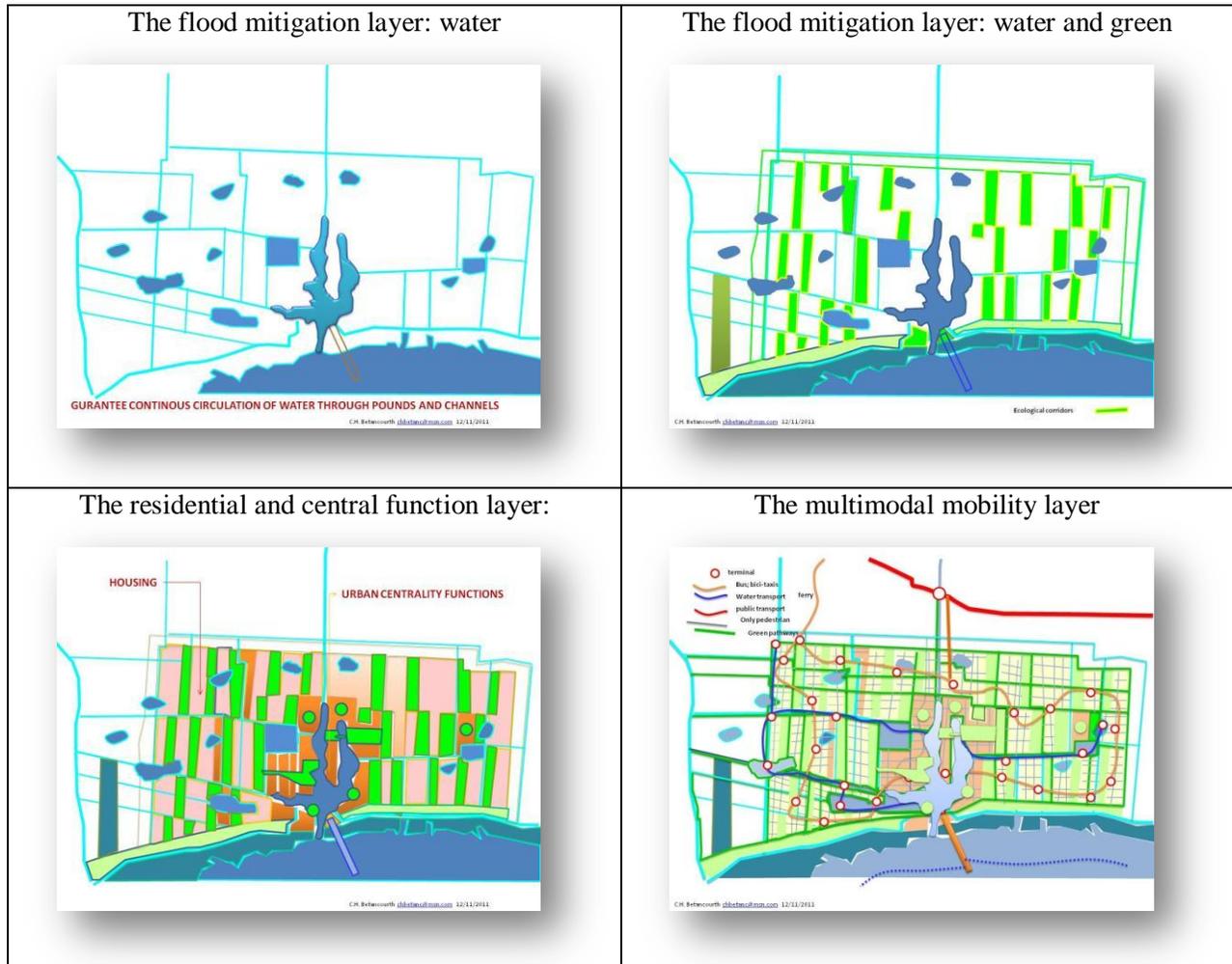
1. **Three major new parks:** the existing historical cemeteries, Birds Isle, and a new park on an empty lot. They would be located at the ends of their respective primary connector streets.
2. **Significant coastal wetland-scape and mangrove forest restoration.** This area has the potential to become a valuable habitat as well as an important eco-infrastructure for flood protection.
3. A 50-foot waterfront trail and linear park along the coastal line that would extend the same length as the wetlands park.
4. The rehabilitation of 2 km of the seafront. It will create a new major **public boulevard and pedestrian zone**, including a **beach**, while at the same time strengthening the coastline defences for Belize city.
5. A major destination on the Yaborough waterfront as the site for large-scale civic functions and events, including concerts, multicultural festivals, and fireworks displays. It would also serve as a gathering place for people seeking to enjoy the Yaborough waterfront.
6. This system of parks would amount to the development of a major recreational facility for public use. It could include a variety of elements such as an urban beach, a boat launch, a set-off point for kayaks, playgrounds, and athletic facilities.

The section of Central American Boulevard at Yaborough could consist of mid-rise residential with ground-floor retail designed to make this section of the boulevard more walkable and pedestrian oriented. It is proposed that these stores be phased into a more urban-waterfront friendly design containing a series of hybrid buildings that include first-floor retail, rear parking garages, and upper-floor residential. The integration of these stores with other uses, including other retail, structured parking, and even residential uses, would be encouraged (see Figure 7).

In terms of phasing, Belize City could plan to begin development of the future wetlands park by restoring habitat adjacent to the coastal line. Belize City could also plan to begin development of the trail along the coastal line, for example, the section between Bird Isle, Yaborough and old Belize. The Government's role will be to help catalyze this development by making substantial investments in the public realm. The area around the port facilities with supporting land uses will not be dealt with in this document.

New housing projects would improve living conditions in the area. New cultural, tourism, and entertainment related activities may offer the best development opportunities for this area. Storage, small-scale industry, processing industries, workshops, and office space may also offer important development opportunities for this area given its proximity to the port. Capturing these development opportunities requires that its existing open areas and green and blue landscapes be preserved. The reorganization of the area could allow development of modern housing facilities at the Caribbean ocean front, that take full advantage of the area's strategic location between the port area, the historical downtown and the Yabra neighbourhood. A natural ecosystem for flood mitigation will be preserved and rebuilt (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Combination of Layers Delivering the New Yarborough (Wetlandscapes)



Source: PADECO/iE

4.5 Illustrative Plan: The River Waterfront

A new, spacious, green park, as indicated in Figure 8 will be constructed, stretching from the riverfront to Orange Street. This park will be integrated gently from Orange Street to the river. The park will accommodate a full variety of public uses, including space for daily passive recreation, large and small events, iconic public art and the new fish market experience. The creation of this park will effectively join Orange Street’s landing to Belize City historical downtown, and establish Orange Street as the gateway to the old city and its river waterfront.

Figure 8: New Park at the Riverfront



Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

An important project at the riverfront will be the adaptive reuse of the Belize City Generating Station which would could be redeveloped into a vibrant mix of cultural, museum, archival, office, studio, gallery, retail, and entertainment uses. Furthermore, the beach-concept proposed for the Yarbrough area could also be part of the Belizean river banks (Figure 9). This system of parks and beaches would amount to the development of a major recreational facility for public use. Each would have plenty of refreshment areas, selling food and drink.

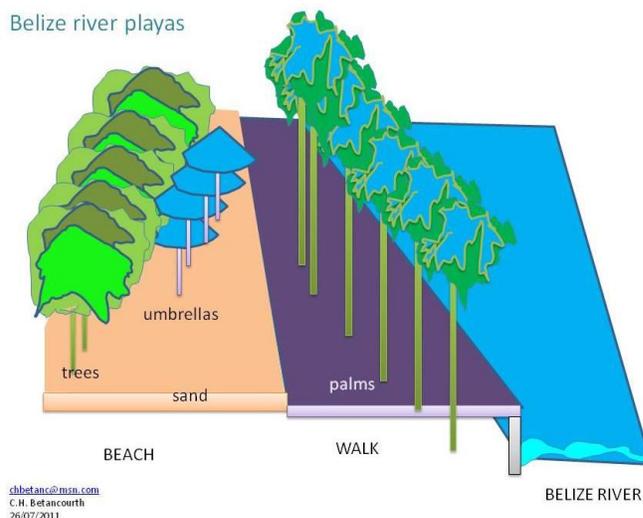
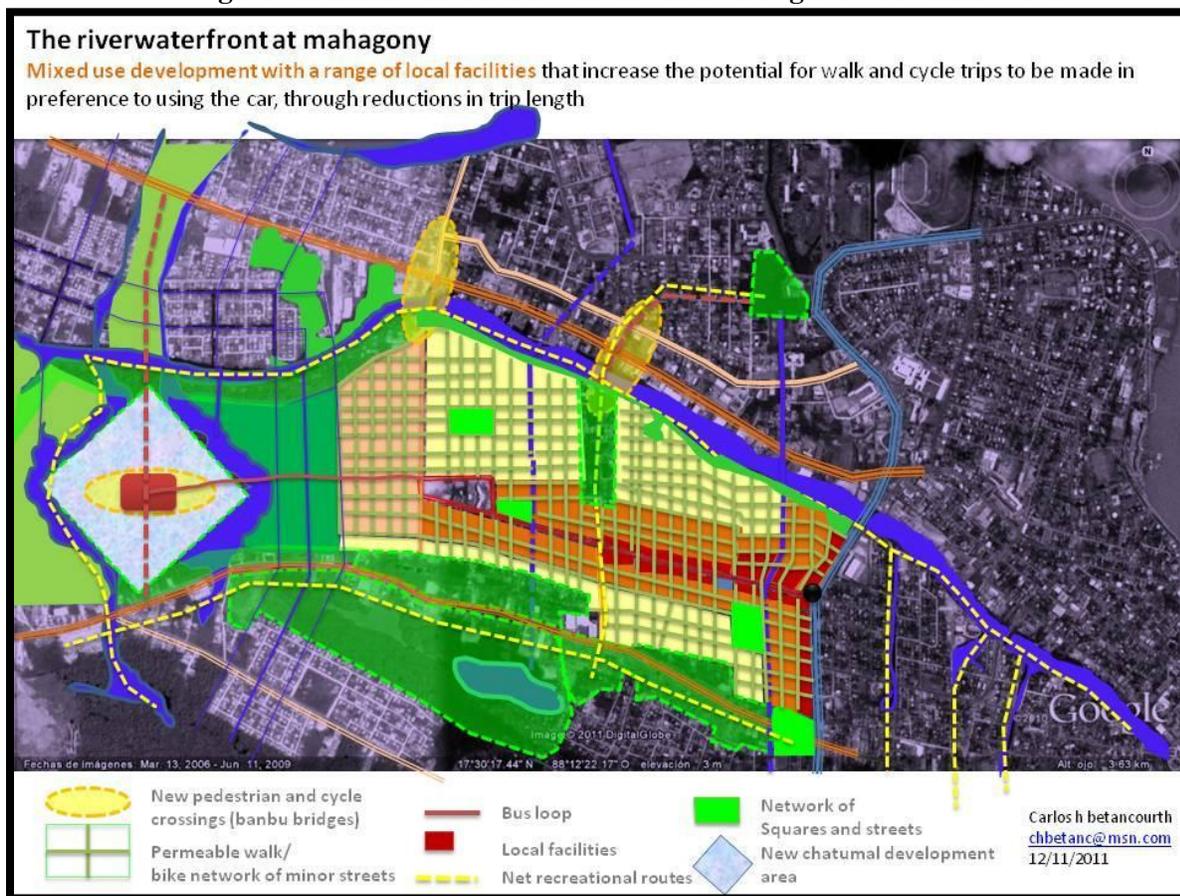


Figure 9: Belize river beaches
Source: PADECO/iE

Like the sea waterfront, the river front could become an innovative example of sustainable urban revitalization (see Figure 10). With a river bank area that cuts through the heart of the city, it has the potential to become a green lung for the city as well as an ecological attraction. Protecting and restoring the natural water flows of the river (and the coastal waterfront) and ecosystems would be a cost-effective method of addressing flood-related problems. This may involve setting aside flood-prone areas as temporary pasture or protected areas, restoring traditional flooding patterns and removing dykes and barriers to provide space for flood waters to escape upstream, reducing downstream impacts. Mangrove forest and wetland protection or restoration strategies also help to mitigate floods with positive results. This will be a key investment project which will successfully restore the river’s floodplains and natural ecosystem functioning which will provide cost-effective protection against floods. Such project and actions would have the added benefit of creating considerable investment opportunities and increased property values. It will also be a recreational and a cultural place with sculptures, fountains, a historic bridge and waterfront decks.

Figure 10: Sustainable urban revitalization along the river waterfront

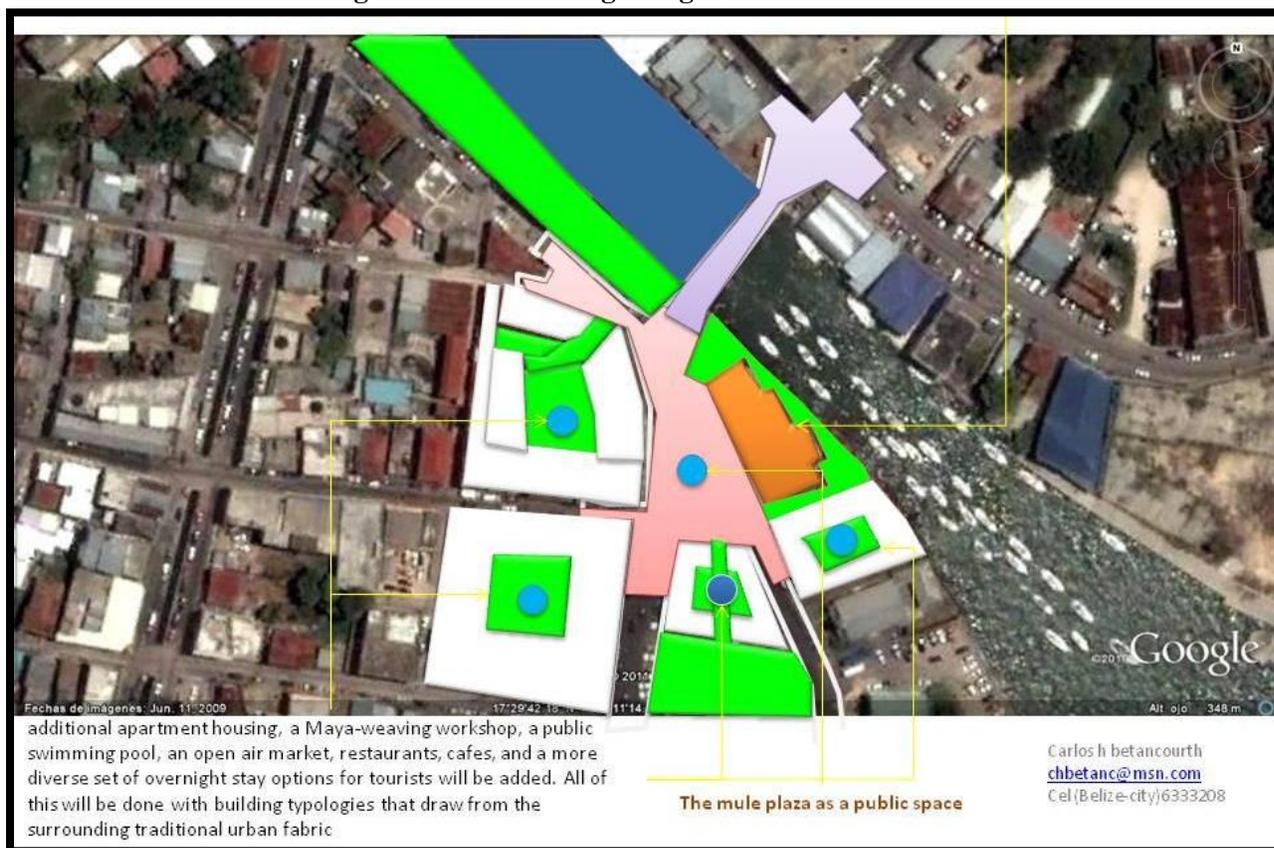


Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

4.6 Illustrative Plan: The Moving Bridge Waterfront

Along the riverfront towards the swinging bridge, new development will include a new independence Seaport museum and potentially a new hotel. In fact, the entire mouth of the river reprogrammed to reinvigorate its current use as a place for marina and water activities, such as kayaking, using paddle boats and enjoying fountains and public art. The land on the northern edges of the mouth of the river may be developed as mid-rise residential, with waterfront restaurants and retail on the bottom two floors and floating restaurants. Two historic ships may be re-located in a high visibility location at the end of the mouth of the river vessels will be adopted by financially-sound non-profits dedicated to their preservation. The redevelopment of this segment of the river will be greatly facilitated by the pedestrianisation of the moving bridge.

Figure 11: The Moving Bridge Urban Ensemble



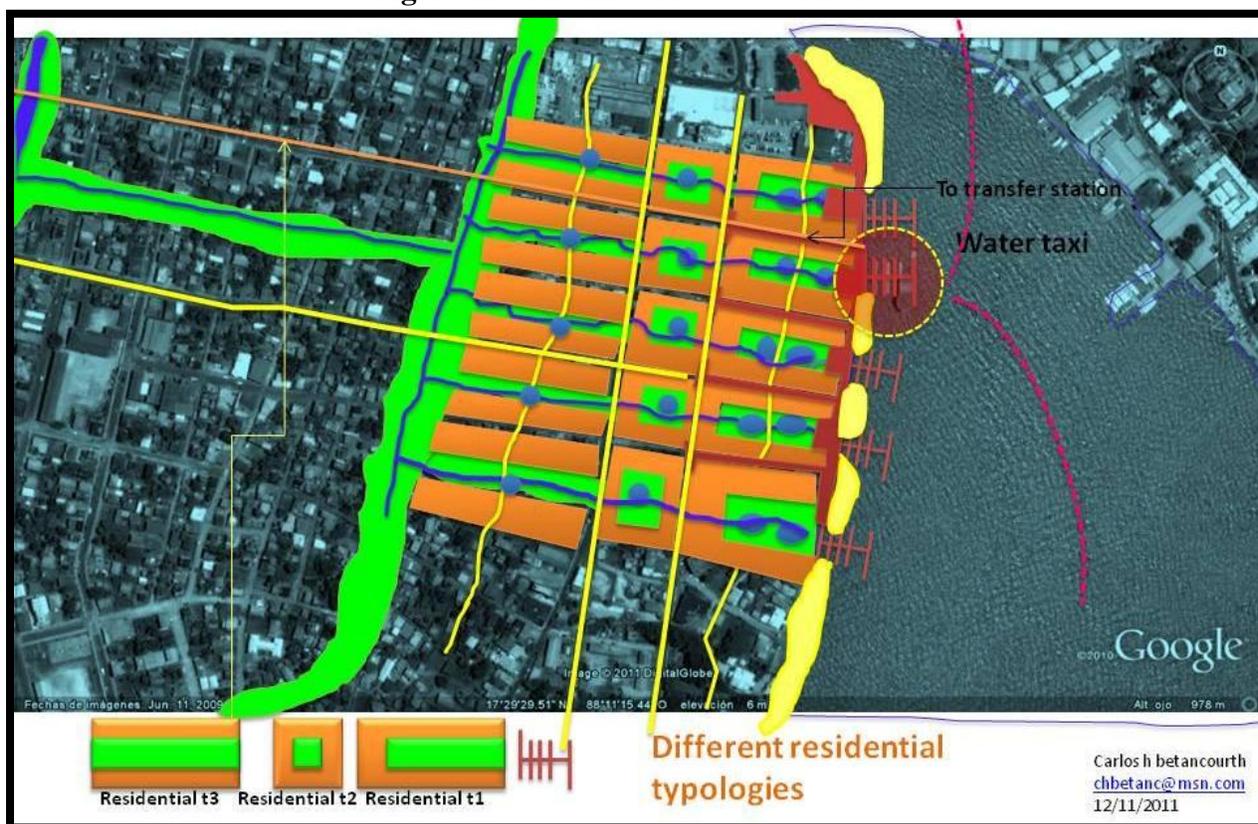
Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

The Master Plan for Belize City downtown recommends a phasing strategy that will start with the redevelopment of the marina basin, which may require relatively modest investments in public infrastructure. One of the focuses here would be an unsightly building at the corner of the moving bridge and the Mule Park that would be re-organized around a new park and public plaza. It would be activated at the street level by restaurants, retail activities, and public events.

4.7 Illustrative Plan: The Historical Waterfront Area

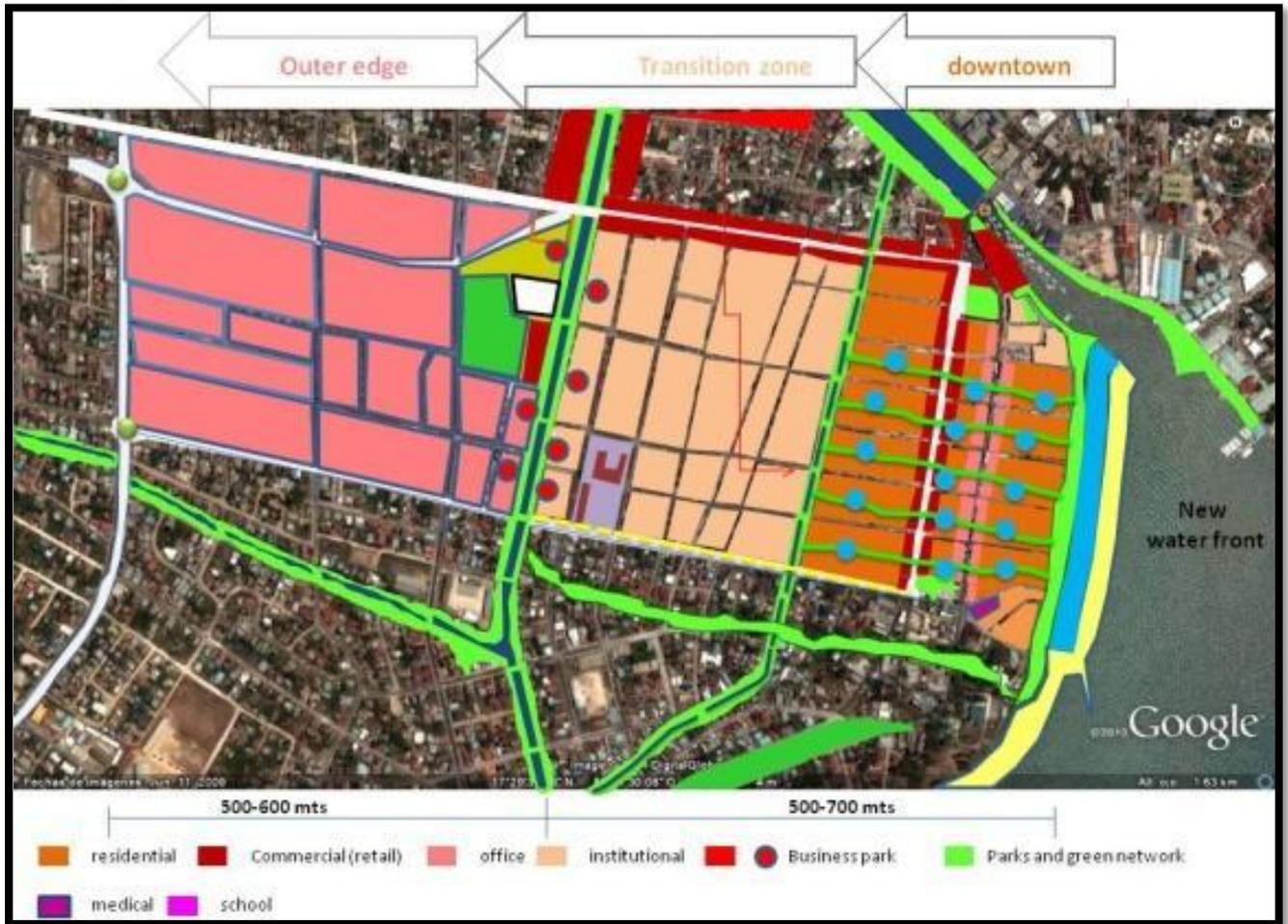
The historical waterfront area (Figure 12) is one of the most complex, rich and highly developable sections of the waterfront. It is anchored by substantial existing buildings, including significant historical structures. Albert and Regent Street are major north-south historical streets that provide a connection across the city. For the purposes of the strategy, the historical waterfront area may be divided into two sections: the area around the moving-bridge (see the previous Section 4.6) and the area along the coast stretching from the mouth of the river to the House of Culture and beyond to Bird’s Isle. The strategy proposes that a specific study be commissioned to redevelop the area along the coast into a compact, mixed-use residential community (using the rich built heritage) that will be surrounded on one side by the sea front and on the other, by the built heritage of historical downtown (Figures 12 and 13). The strategy plan also recognizes an opportunity to create a wetlands park and a wall defence, between the mouth of the river and Birds Isle.

Figure 12: The Historical Waterfront



Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

Figure 13: The historical waterfront and its relation the western part of the city



Source: PADECO/iE adapted from Google Earth

The area contains many existing historical buildings, as well as vacant and underutilized land. The Master Plan proposes that the intimately scaled and historical street system, including the uniquely shaped and historic Regent and Albert Streets be extended to the west creating small blocks for conventional residential development, small parks, and recreational facilities as shown in Figures 12 and 13. On the waterfront in this location, a marina and new development could also be proposed. This area could be made more attractive for private investment by working to design and install an attractive series of streetscape improvements on Albert, Regent and Orange Streets including artistic and impactful lighting. In terms of phasing, the Master Plan proposes that the city begins the redevelopment of the moving bridge sites as well as of the historical colonial waterfront.

4.8 Illustrative Plan: The Port Waterfront

The Port Waterfront is an active port facility with supporting land uses. The continuation of this port activity is important for the city's economy and for the vitality of adjacent neighbourhoods. Whilst further analysis is required, it could be suggested that there exists a significant unmet demand in the port area for large tracts of land that can be used as light industrial space. This may include the flex building use that combines office space, assembly or light manufacturing, and/or distribution, uses that would create a job centre on the waterfront that has been absent for decades.

The Master Plan proposes that parcels and sites be determined to be used to accommodate this potential demand, as there are enough underutilized lands within the port area itself that could be used for this purpose. The intention of the Master Plan is for new flex buildings to incorporate principles of sustainable design, including energy efficiency, green roofs, and innovative treatment of storm-water runoff. This type of development is compatible with the waterfront's public realm of parks and trails; given the acreage of these parcels, generous setbacks for the public realm can be created.

The public realm elements recommended include the following:

1. New parks to be developed at the aforementioned every half kilometre frequency;
2. Preservation of the existing wetlands and their integration with the waterfront trails,
3. Creation of a 50-foot trail and linear park that would run along the waterfront's edge, providing continuous public access from the historical waterfront, the Yarrowborough waterfront, and the sea port, to old Belize.
4. Streetscape improvements to Fabers road and Central American Boulevard, to make these important connector streets more attractive to people seeking access to the new park/trail system.

The redevelopment of the port waterfront is by definition a longer-term element of this Master Plan. The timing of development of the flex commercial/ industrial parcels will be a function of market conditions and decisions made by private developers and tenants. The government can help catalyze this development by implementing portions of the recommended public realm, and BID and other international agencies may have an array of loan programs and financing mechanisms that can help accelerate this development.

4.9 Illustrative Plan: The Collet Canal waterfront key investment restoration project

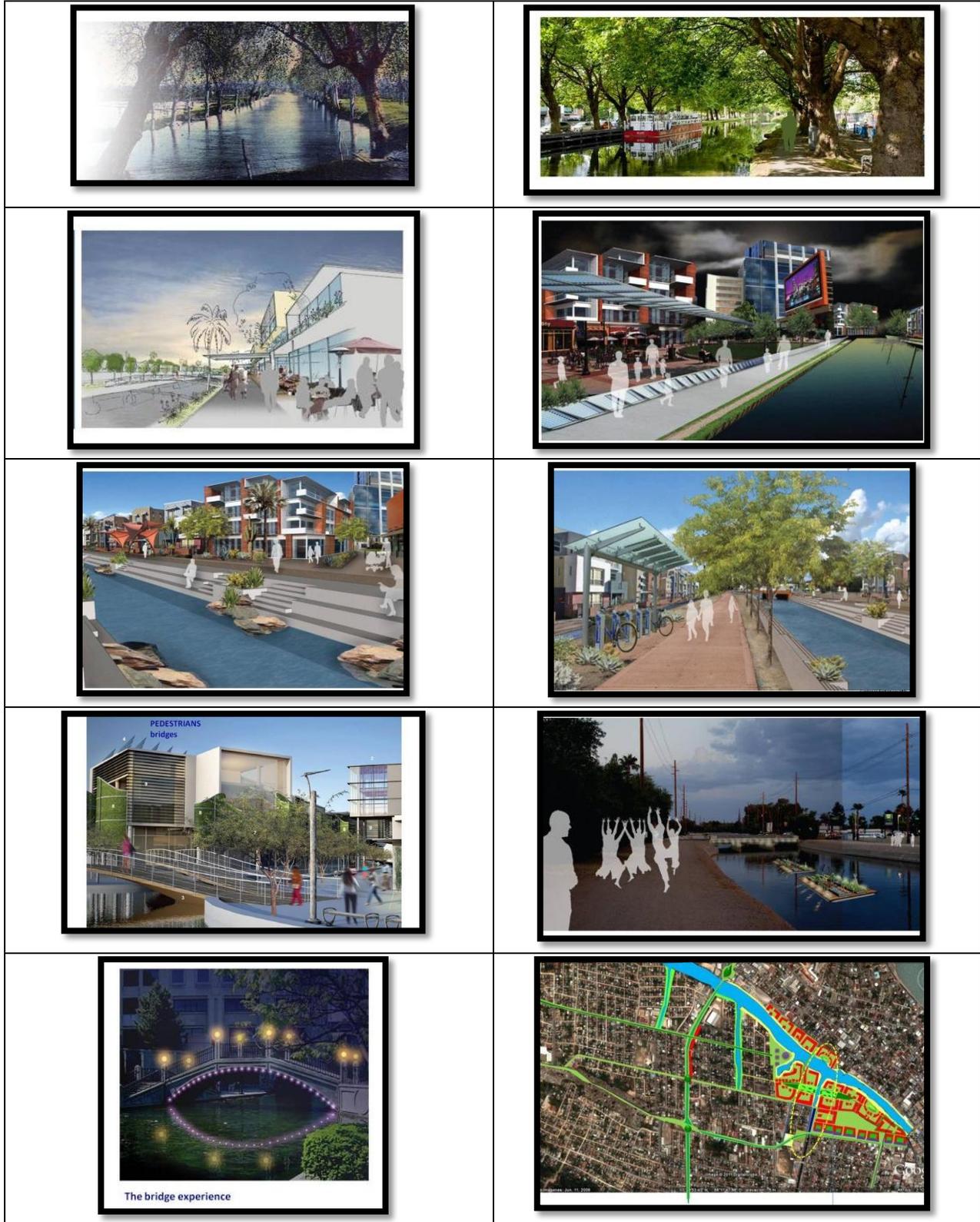
The vision is for the canal(s) and waterways to no longer function as sewers, but aesthetically pleasing assets that enhance development (see Figure 14). They will appear more natural while retaining their important flood-control role; their walls will be replaced with a semblance of a natural river. Like the river and ocean waterfronts key investment projects above, the canal can also become part of this natural ecosystem functioning for flood control, a green lung for the city and an ecological attraction. It will also be a recreational and a cultural place.

To avoid the waterfront being used as an unglamorous drainage system, a comprehensive flood control plan to restore the river, the canal and the ocean water fronts original capacity to handle flood waters will be initiated. The project will replace floodwalls and levees with terraced marshes, wider wetland barriers, and restored riparian zones and create a unique park between them. The project will create an economic revitalization of the Collet Canal area, the waterfronts and of Belize City downtown, instigating the development of several hotels and housing along the river, the canal and the coast, which today are viewed as blighted areas. Sculptures, fountains and murals will dot the river banks, the canal and the sea front. Long buried foundation stones will be restored and reinstated. Fish and birds will start migrating to this urban sanctuary, thanks to the biotypes introduced through the park and the city. The park will be credited with reducing the temperature on the surrounding area and of the city by certain percentage.

The value of nearby land and buildings (residences and apartments) may increase by a considerable percentage. Cafes, restaurants, and other lifestyle businesses will certainly increase in the new attractive setting. The amount of residents and tourists visiting this park will increase yearly, drawn by its various attractions, namely heritage, bridges, fountains, flower wetlands, museum, canals, the sea, the mangrove forests and the reefs.

The Master Plan and the integrated development for Collet Canal will help to create a sustainable destination, that will deal with residents needs and activities, protect and develop the environment, and sustainably meet the needs and aspirations and impacts of tourists. Collet Canal is envisioned as a multifunctional infrastructure and integrated destination that mixes nature and human habitation, environment and development, business and tourism at the local and global level. Collet Canal is the centre of connectivity of the city: at one extreme of an extended Collet Canal we find the national airport, at the other we might find the cruise terminal, and a water taxi station, in the middle the bus multimodal transfer station. The Master Plan must connect people into this integrated destination so as to capture new international tourism trends. Collet Canal will be at the heart of a new destination that captures the unique environmental factors and assets of the city, that show-case the ocean, the river, the lagoons, the canals, the land, the earth, the air, the sun, and the humans. In summary, Collet Canal is envisioned as becoming a new modern icon for Belize City (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Experiencing Collet Canal of the past as a multifunctional infrastructure of the future



Source: PADECO/iE

4.10 Illustrative Plans: The lagoons waterfront key investment restoration project

The final illustrative plan focuses on another Belizean icon that would be the design of green and public spaces-a necklace of projects- around the lagoons water-fronts. This will be an important component of the urban park to be made out of the waterfronts above and the canals. The area around the lagoons could be developed as an alternative settlement pattern (with residential, commercial and economic functions with diverse water and wetlandscapes expressions), including parks and a network of walkways around the lagoons and connecting with trails along the river, the canals and the ocean. The open space around the lagoons will become a major draw for visitors.

All these waterfront destinations working together will help initiative Belize City's first viable urban park. They will be an important part of the city's efforts to brand itself as a waterfront city and a fitting home for foreign investment just as the park itself will help to restore ecosystems around these three types of waterfronts. This urban park will be an amenity for residents and a dynamic tourism destination.

5. NEXT STEPS

This report has set out a strategy for the Belize City Waterfront areas based on an overarching framework of guiding principles and illustrative plans. However, the next step as part of a follow up work will be to elaborate the main elements of waterfronts strategy into a detailed Waterfront Master Plan. The elements of the detailed Waterfronts Master Plan should include a more detailed discussion of the public realm; a description of waterfront activation strategies, including recommendations for recreation, public art, and historic preservation; detailed transportation recommendations; and, an economic strategy. This will in turn be followed by an implementation plan that will include land use policies and strategies; sustainability and short term projects.