American University of Beirut  Campus Master Plan

prepared by
SASAKI

in association with
Dar Al Handasah Consultants (Shair & Partners)
MGT of America
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March 15, 2002

The American University of Beirut
Members of the Board of Trustees

Dear Trustees,

I am truly delighted to present to you, via the Buildings and Grounds Committee, the final draft Campus Master Plan, prepared by Sasaki Associates in collaboration with Machado Silvetti, MGT, and Dar al-Handasah. This document represents the culmination of over a year of intense work between the consultant team and the Master Plan Steering Committee of AUB, and several “users” groups. I want to take this opportunity to salute both the consultants and the members of the Steering Committee for the long hours and the real intellectual and analytic vigor that they brought to the table. We now know far more about our University than we did going into this exercise, and I personally found the process enormously exciting.

I want particularly to acknowledge the outstanding work of our project manager, Solcieh Mahbouf, who is with us today, and of Dennis Swinford (aka Abu Luka), the project manager for the consultants. I hope Abu Luka is also with us today.

The purpose of this letter is not to salute colleagues and sigh with relief at a job well done. The hard work truly begins now. In programmatic terms, the Academic Review and the JCW report on the AUBMC have shaped all our initiatives since 1999. Now the Master Plan will carry us forward in physical terms for as long as two decades.

Because of that time horizon, I think we must all be clear about the nature of our commitment today. If you approve this plan, I hope it will be in the same spirit that you approve by-laws for the University. The Master Plan is not merely the compilation of many good and well-integrated ideas; rather it is a binding (but not straining) framework that will guide and constrain current and future generations of administrators and Trustees of the University.

We recognize that the future will bear many surprises, that strategic objectives may shift and new priorities imperatively assert themselves. Such shifts and priorities will have to be accommodated, and the Master Plan cannot block them nor paralyse the administration in the future. However, if the administration concludes that a departure from the plan is required, then it must do the following. First it must examine the reasons why the original component of the plan was adopted in the first place. It must then demonstrate why those reasons no longer apply or should be overridden in light of more compelling circumstances. It must then make a fully documented and justified recommendation to the Board of Trustees, through the Building and Grounds Committee, that the Master Plan be amended in the ways proposed. The Board of Trustees must approve the recommendation(s).

These constraints we believe are necessary because we are convinced that we, collectively, have thought out the issues facing us carefully and responsibly. We have reasons for everything recommended here. We also have reasons for rejecting certain options. It is incumbent on us, the Steering Committee, to document why we adopted what we did and why we rejected what we did. In that way we and our successors can consult a complete record before recommending amendments.

In this Plan we have an excellent decision-making tool that will guide and protect us in the future. It will orient all our fund-raising efforts. It supports our academic mission, and it states, loud and clear, that AUB and its Trustees believe that the campus is one of our greatest assets in providing the kind of education that has always made AUB unique in the region. The Plan aims to protect and enhance this, our most precious legacy.

Sincerely,

John Waterbury, President
Chair of the Campus Master Plan
Steering Committee

1 We have prepared a separate document, "Paths Taken and Not Taken", that outlines our reasons for certain options that we endorse or reject.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Campus Master Plan for the American University of Beirut defines a vision for the physical development of its site in Ras Beirut. The implementation of this vision was planned to include three phases potentially spanning twenty years. The master plan was created over a period of seventeen months using a process consisting of the following phases:

- Inventory, Assessment and Program
- Alternative Master Plan Concepts
- The Preliminary Master Plan
- The Final Master Plan

The master plan addresses matching the existing condition of the campus with the needs of the AUB community in an inspiring plan that will guide this world-class institution into the future. It is designed to forward AUB's academic mission.

Existing Conditions

The following conclusions were reached regarding the existing condition of the campus:

- Location on the Mediterranean and within Beirut is spectacular.
- Topographic conditions create Upper, Middle and Lower Campuses.
- "Connections" between the four distinct areas of AUB are weak.

The Master Plan

The following are the key recommendations contained in the master plan:

- Provide appropriately sized, state-of-the-art facilities by renovating approximately 140,000 square meters of existing academic, residential, support and sports facilities, and administrative buildings over the next twenty years.
- Preserve the function of the Upper Campus as the historic center of the campus by developing a new University Overlook and creating an upper-level pedestrian promenade.
- Embrace the Medical Center as part of Upper Campus through site improvements and building renovations. Continue to renovate and develop the Medical Center to ensure that AUBMC remains a leader in the delivery of medical care in the region.
- Ensure the quality of the Middle Campus through active landscape management, amplifying its importance on the campus with an active improvement program.
- Transform the Lower Campus with the construction of the Hostler Center and the School of Business along with the seafront facade of the Lower Campus, totaling 30,100 gross square meters, and include site improvements of plazas and pedestrian promenades, creating multiple well-connected, distinct centers.
- Create pedestrian links among the academic, administrative, student quality-of-life and support facilities by locating parking on the perimeter of campus and developing well designed pedestrian links.

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Master Plan Alternatives

After studying several alternative plans, the following conclusions were reached for the organization of the new buildings, renovations, site improvements and infrastructure improvements:

- New buildings should selectively enhance the campus, building upon the existing pattern of uses.
- Site improvements provide the best opportunity to "connect" the diverse areas of the campus and provide the largest immediate positive impact on campus life.
- Infrastructure improvements should be technologically advanced and provide for sustainability.

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