Towards Affordable Housing and an Inclusive City
A competition for housing scenarios and alternative building practices

Short Description
In an effort to advocate for affordable housing and the right of long-time residents to remain in the neighborhoods where they have always lived, this competition seeks innovative and alternative ideas that challenge the dominating model of urban development and address the displacement of low and middle income residents from the city. Teams of multidisciplinary practitioners and/or students are invited to articulate innovative, feasible and inclusive proposals that respond to housing and urban issues in 5 case studies from 5 different neighborhoods in Beirut. We urge colleagues, friends, and city dwellers invested in the possibilities of an inclusive, socially responsible, and socially diverse urban futures, to respond to this call.

The competition is organized as a collaboration between Public Works Studio, The Order of Engineers and Architects, and UN-Habitat, under the patronage of the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH).

To be launched during the 3rd week of June.

THE COMPETITION

The role of the public sector in the housing sector in Lebanon is characterized by its withdrawal from social responsibility in providing affordable housing, by relegating all housing provision to deregulated private housing markets, and failing to set and enforce a socially-motivated housing strategies or programs, let alone a comprehensive housing and land policies. Additionally, the adoption of a new law on old rents was supposed to be an opportunity to establish a comprehensive housing policy and not limited to "liberating old rent contracts", without looking at the social and political implications of a similar law. This has had a direct impact on the urban and social fabric of the neighborhoods of Beirut, which constitute a high percentage of long-time residents, ie, who have lived in the neighborhood for more than thirty years.

In an effort to create a new housing market and alternative building practices that preserve the city's social fabric and cater for low and middle income inhabitants, the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH) is working towards an “Affordable Housing and Inclusive City” initiative with a number of concerned organizations. The initiative operates as a short-term scheme, within a wider effort towards legislative changes and novel policies for affordable housing and an inclusive city.

As a pilot intervention in this initiative, a competition has been organized by the Public Works Studio, Order of Engineers and Architect and UN-Habitat to act as a platform to advocate for affordable inclusive housing in the city and the right of long-time residents to remain in the neighborhoods where they have always lived. The competition seeks innovative and alternative
ideas that challenge the dominating model of urban development and address the displacement of low and middle income residents from the city. Teams of multidisciplinary practitioners and/or students are invited to articulate innovative, feasible and inclusive proposals that respond to housing and urban issues in 5 case studies from 5 different neighborhoods in Beirut, where a variety of factors and considerations are at stake. By utilizing existing planning and legal tools, the proposals should work towards implementing affordable housing scenarios and market-based alternatives to counter the current wave of eviction and displacement occurring in Beirut.

We urge colleagues, friends, and city dwellers invested in the possibilities of an inclusive, socially responsible, and socially diverse urban futures, to respond to this call. We encourage participants to channel their professional skills and imaginations in the formulation of actual schematic designs, programs, and feasibility studies. We expect these proposals to be starting points for visioning exercises that can build broader coalitions advocating for livable and inclusive cities, ruled by the principles of social justice rather than narrow economic interests. The proposals will also act as pilot cases for the forthcoming PCH housing initiative.

1. Understanding the Challenges in Beirut's Old Neighborhoods
In order to enable the existing urban fabric in Beirut to maintain its current role and enhance its potential as affordable housing stock in the city, the key challenges that need to be respected and addressed in the context of any intervention include the following:

First, there are legal challenges that stem from the lack of land or housing policy. Ongoing building practices and development patterns prioritize large scale urban renewal projects at the expense of social, historic, and cultural factors.

Second, there are economic challenges that emanate from unaffordability, in a context of skyrocketing land prices and escalating rents compared to minimum wages and overall household expenditures.

Third, vulnerability to displacement caused by market forces, and since 2014 largely caused by the new rent law.

Fourth, escalating social tensions between old tenants and old landlords, caused by the fact that the state did not carry corrections to the law by the end of the civil war not play its role in the provision of housing.

Fifth, growing socio-economic inequalities, segregation and spatial fragmentation inside Beirut’s historically and socio-culturally rich neighborhoods.

These challenges signal the necessity of rethinking ongoing patterns of development, land use, functions, and institutional organization, in ways that can protect the urban fabric, secure affordable housing, and maintain a sufficient level of urban renewal and the flow of new residents.

2. An Open Call for Alternative Visions
This competition is an open call for architects, urbanists, and planners to articulate a framework of intervention that would respond to the challenge of affordable housing and alternative building practices that preserve the city’s social fabric and cater for low and middle income inhabitants. Economists, lawyers, sociologists and other disciplines, are encouraged to participate as members
within architect/planning-led teams. We are soliciting creative, sensitive, and feasible visions that should include spatial configurations as well as programmatic and institutional proposals capable of balancing between social, legal, and economic needs.

More specifically, participants are encouraged to:

- Preserve the social fabric of residential neighborhoods. The neighborhoods in questions are economically, culturally, and religiously diverse. The preservation of this social fabric contributes to the development of a more inclusive and equitable city.
- Provide affordable housing units for diverse social groups
- Enhance class and sectarian diversity in Beirut.
- Maintain in place the elderly, retirees and persons with disabilities
- Non-discriminate among residents (be it on the sectarian, national, or other levels)
- In case of eviction, provide a decent relocation and housing alternatives
- Avoid demolition. A good proportion of buildings in question are in need of renovation or rehabilitation, and can become part of the housing stock in the city.

3. Competition Objectives
- To position the proposals as a platform to open a public debate about affordable housing and an inclusive city. Selected proposals will be pilot cases for the PCH’s housing initiative.
- To develop alternatives in which the existing fabric of the city continues to be present and play a role in the housing of all city dwellers.
- To situate the debate on the new rent law within a broader debate on the right to housing and the city, rather than a struggle between tenants and landlords.
- To engage professionals in the cause against displacement through their contribution in order to develop a sense of ownership to the city.
- To inform city officials and governmental bodies of possibilities for the future of Beirut’s residents and engage them in the debate about the right to housing.
- To provide exposure to professionals’ work that engages urban issues, hence expanding their presence and role in contributing to the future of the built environment in Lebanon.
- To broaden our collective understanding of the meaning of place within a highly individualized market-driven urban geography in Lebanon.

COMPETITION CASES

1. Bachoura: Can urban renewal with a socio-spatial integration approach be led collectively by old landlords?
2. Moussaitbeh: Can this case be a model for an affordable housing program?
3. Roum / Mar Mkhael: Can housing conditions and urban environments ameliorate in the city for disadvantaged/vulnerable socio-economic groups without increasing gentrification?
4. Hamra: Can keeping old residents in place contribute to increasing opportunities for affordable housing and generating income/profits for landlords
5. Ein El Mraisseh: Can a mixed land use approach integrate needs at multiple scales: the city, the neighborhood, the stakeholders (residents and owners)?

6. Tareeq Jdeede: Can neighborhood interventions provide security of tenure for elderly?