



MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
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Republic of Vanuatu



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République Du Vanuatu

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Thursday 18th June 2025

Consultation for the Redevelopment of Port Vila CBD Post-Earthquake

The Government of Vanuatu is currently undertaking a consultation and planning process for the redevelopment of Port Vila's Central Business District following the December 2024 earthquake.

Overview

The Government of Vanuatu's post-earthquake recovery plan for Port Vila CBD focuses on reconstructing physical assets and restoring socio-economic conditions and livelihoods to pre-disaster levels, while embracing principles of building back better and greener.

The 7.3 magnitude earthquake of December 2024, which struck near Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, resulted in 14 fatalities and caused the partial or complete destruction of approximately 245 houses and 200 businesses in the Central Business District (CBD). This has resulted in the loss of 900 jobs to date.

However, this tragedy presents a unique opportunity to reshape the planning and redesign of the Port Vila CBD.

The government is currently implementing a 100-Day Plan that includes a post-2024 earthquake recovery activities. The principles set out in the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) and Guidelines for Post-Disaster Recovery Planning form the basis for rebuilding the significantly affected area.

Led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs through the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP) and Port Vila City Council (PVCC), with technical and financial assistance from the World Bank, the planning activity aims to prepare a concept design for the reconstruction of Port Vila CBD to create a vibrant, resilient, green, and liveable city. An Urban Planner and Design expert has been engaged to support this activity.

Additionally, the government will review CBD land leases, particularly those expiring within 5-6 years, to allow for greater flexibility and scope in CBD design concepts.

Scope

The purpose of the planning activity is to prepare a concept design for the reconstruction of Port Vila CBD to create a vibrant, resilient, green, and liveable city.

The design will align with the existing urban fabric, infrastructure, and land uses, ensuring consistency while fostering economic, social, and cultural opportunities for residents and visitors.

The CBD Concept Design will identify and propose key priority projects, both short-term and long-term, while addressing legacy and post-earthquake challenges within the CBD and its immediate surroundings.

All design concepts will incorporate principles of risk-informed redevelopment, the incorporation of Port Vila's natural features and tropical climate, links with existing planning concepts and recovery activities, enhancement of tourist economy opportunities, creation of a vibrant business environment, cultural celebration and identity, improved traffic circulation, and increased pedestrian access.

The concept designs will incorporate:

Sites - There is a 'triage' process ongoing, to identify damaged buildings and infrastructure. Some to be condemned while others to be repaired. This mapping process will clarify the distribution and scale of the impact, helping prioritise building projects and providing a better understanding of their role as catalysts for surrounding areas.

Places - Another layer of mapping will analyse the public domain in the city. Some areas may be prioritised because they will have areas of demolition with medium or long-term vacant sites, or be disturbed for major infrastructure work, flood mitigation, etc. The analysis will include a qualitative review: before the earthquake, some parts of the public domain were already successful (waterfront & market), others were less successful. Narrow and congested footpaths, missing links, difficult access. This mapping could identify the and prioritise public places to be improved.

Precincts - Port Vila's geography and its history make it a city of very distinct precincts. One way to proceed with the strategic planning work is precinct-by-precinct. This would allow stakeholders and landowners to be grouped and to act collectively. It would also allow a standardised approach to be formulated in one or two precincts, that could then be rolled out to other precincts.

Networks - Traffic and pedestrian networks are being considered. This relates to the pre-earthquake situation. This strategy will consider opportunities to improve circulation and linkages within the CBD. This may include ideas about changing traffic movement or making links that are missing or needing improvement.

Issues and Challenges

The preliminary investigation phase has identified the following post-earthquake issues:

Fault Lines

Cracks that appeared through the Centre Point, NBV, and fuel station sites downtown are likely the result of a subterranean limestone cliff on one side of the crack and 20-meter-deep fine sedimentary deposits on the other.

No buildings can safely be constructed across this division of ground materials as they behave differently during an earthquake.

However, building on either individual ground material is possible and will determine the structural design elements as part of a building permit application.

A Geotech survey, sponsored by the Government of New Zealand, will be undertaken in the coming months using core boring samples across the CBD to identify other sites where this may be occurring and to inform safe building designs.

Disjointed Urban Fabric and Public Domains:

The post-earthquake demolitions have created gaps and voids in the streetscape, disrupting continuity and weakening the identity and cohesion of the CBD.

This has led to visual and functional disconnection between remaining structures.

There is a lack of connectivity between civic, commercial, and recreational spaces, limiting the CBD's capacity to serve as a true public domain.

The CBD concept design addresses risks

The CBD concept design addresses earthquake risks through several strategies:

Risk-informed redevelopment: All design concepts incorporate principles of risk-informed redevelopment, ensuring that reconstruction considers the vulnerabilities exposed by the earthquake.

Fault line avoidance: Areas with identified fault lines, such as the Centre Point, NBV, and fuel station sites, are deemed unsafe for construction. A geotechnical survey will further identify other risky sites to inform safe building designs.

Structural design adaptations: Buildings will be designed based on the specific ground materials (limestone cliff or fine sedimentary deposits) to ensure stability during seismic events.

Mapping and prioritization: Damaged buildings and infrastructure are being mapped to identify strategic sites for reconstruction, focusing on safe locations and priority projects.

Improved networks: Traffic and pedestrian networks are being reconsidered to improve circulation and linkages, which can enhance evacuation routes and overall safety.

Public domain analysis: The design includes qualitative reviews of public spaces to address gaps and voids created by demolitions, ensuring better connectivity and resilience. Public domain areas will be analysed to prioritize improvements, such as addressing narrow footpaths, missing links, and difficult access.

Traffic and pedestrian networks: The redevelopment will improve circulation and linkages within the CBD, including changes to traffic movement and pedestrian access.

Legacy challenges: The concept design will address pre-earthquake issues, such as congested footpaths and limited access, while enhancing the tourist economy, business environment, cultural identity, and public spaces.

The public and stakeholders are currently providing input on the draft Concept Plan.

For further information, please contact the Department of Urban Affairs on Tel: 22500 or the Port Vila City Council on Tel: 22113.