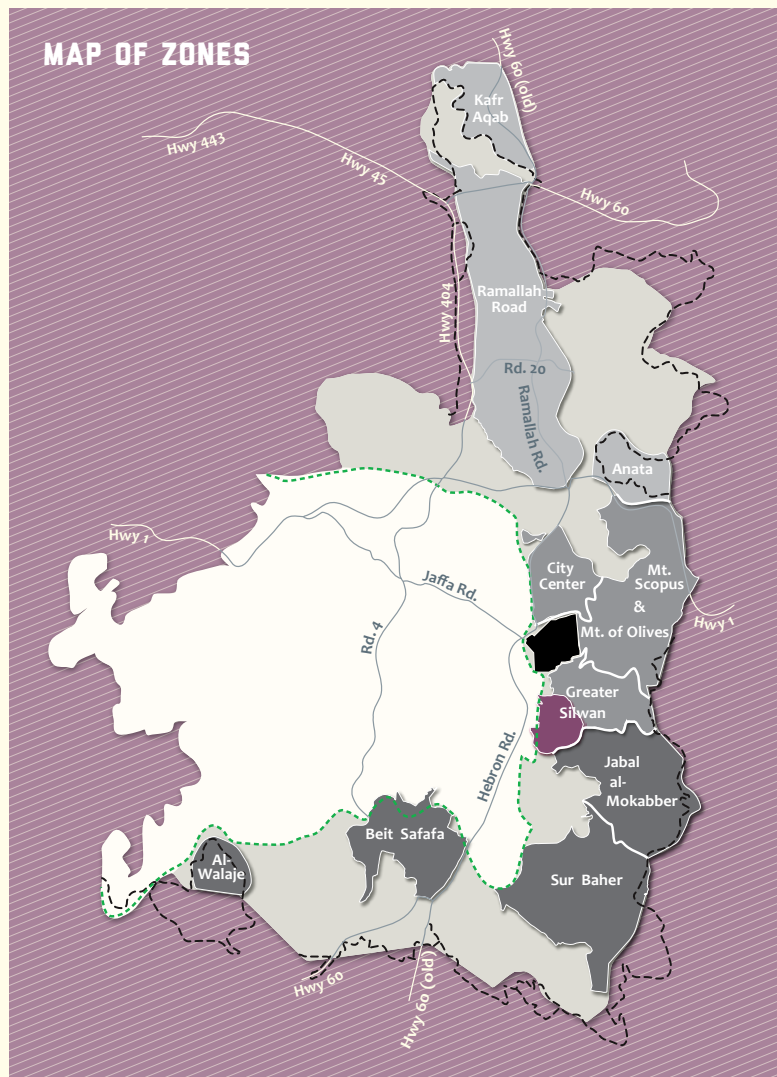


ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Abu Thor (also known as ath-Thori), is located in central East Jerusalem, south of the Old City and southwest of Silwan. The parcel of land on which the neighborhood developed was given to Ahmad Ben Jamal ad-Din towards the end of the 12th century, by the noted conqueror, Salah ad-Din – a gift for helping conquer Jerusalem. Ahmad Ben Jamal ad-Din was renowned for being inseparable from his ox (in Arabic: Thor), and his epithet gave the place its name. The area began to develop during the last decades of the 19th century, attracting upper-class as well as working-class families of all faiths. At the time of WWI there were already a few dozen houses in the area. By 1948 and into the Jordanian period, most of the residents of the neighborhood were considered well off. As the years went on, migrants from Hebron also purchased land in the neighborhood and settled there.

After the 1948 war, Abu Thor was divided, with part of it being occupied by Israel and part by Jordan. On the west side, at the top of the hill, in homes belonging to uprooted Palestinian families, a small Israeli neighborhood (renamed Givat Hanania) grew

and developed. On the eastern slopes of the same hill – spreading contiguously from the Green Line in the west to Silwan in the northeast, from the Hinnom Valley in the north to the Yasool Valley in the south – a large Palestinian neighborhood developed. Today, although under single administrative control (following the application of Israeli law to East Jerusalem after 1967), the two parts of the neighborhood continue to function as separate entities. The Palestinian part with which this study is concerned, is essentially a sub-neighborhood of Silwan, sharing its problems and neglect. Located within the area known as the Visual Basin of the Old City, Palestinian Abu Thor suffers today from extremely restrictive building rights and no land reserves. Despite this, the neighborhood is characterized mostly by dense, urban fabric. An exception to this is the unrecognized sub-neighborhood of Wadi Yasool, located in the southeastern section of the neighborhood.



FACTS

Population 15,500
Area 911 dunam



MAP LEGEND

East Jerusalem	Old City
Expropriated Land	Green Line
Northern Zones	Separation Barrier
Central Zones	Roads
Southern Zones	West Jerusalem

MAIN PROBLEMS IN ABU THOR

Insufficient Schools

There is an acute shortage of structures for public schools in the neighborhood, and private educational institutions, operating out of rented residential buildings, provide only partial relief. The elementary schools, in particular, are extremely overcrowded; the girls' elementary school literally overflows into an adjacent structure that is not adequately outfitted. New classrooms being planned for the girls' school, when eventually built, will provide some relief to this problem. (For information about the boys' school, see inset.) There is no high school in the neighborhood. This is particularly problematic for the girls, who are often not permitted to leave the neighborhood for high-school education.

Housing Shortage

The low building rights allotted in the approved neighborhood plans have been virtually exhausted and exceeded. In addition, apartments have been built in areas not zoned as residential. As a result, many homes face the threat of demolition. For lack of better options, homes are often built very close to, even attached to, their neighbors', resulting in a sort of modern-day Casbah (old town), not unlike Silwan. Blocked by Israeli Abu Thor to the west, Silwan to the east, the national park to the north (see expansion), and the Peace Forest in the Yasool Valley to the south (see: The Unrecognized Neighborhood), the neighborhood is left with no land reserves for expansion (see: The Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan).

The Unrecognized Neighborhood

To the south of the main neighborhood, in the Yasool Valley, on some 45 dunam designated mostly as open public area (in Plan # 9), lies the unrecognized sub-neighborhood of Wadi Yasool. Since 1967, a few dozen homes have been built in the valley, on private land owned by residents of the neighborhood, to alleviate overcrowding in the rest of the neighborhood. Because the land is not included in the neighborhood plans and therefore is not designated for development, the residents suffer from a severe lack of access roads, services, and infrastructure, and the threat

of demolition constantly lurks. In addition, the Jewish National Fund is promoting a plan to incorporate the un-built part of the valley into the adjacent so-called Peace Forest. The residents are in the midst of the process of seeking recognition by the planning authorities. However, their attempts at promoting a statutory plan have so far been unsuccessful.

Roads

The main road in Abu Thor, connecting to the Hebron Road on one end and Silwan on the other, is an important route for East Jerusalem thru-traffic. But it is narrow, steep, and in poor condition. The situation of the inner neighborhood roads is even worse. Most of them are not statutory and are therefore not serviced by the municipality, even though they are used by the residents regularly. As a result of the high density in the neighborhood, the existing road network is basically in a state of collapse. Two loop roads at the western edge of the neighborhood, connected to the Hebron Road at either end, are shared by Givat Hanania. Their condition shifts starkly each time the virtual Green Line is crossed.

Infrastructure and Services

Due to the state of the roads, many homes in the neighborhood are not connected to the municipal water system, and the sewerage network is meager. Also, drains for rain water appear only along the main road, and in most places there are no street lights. In addition,

the volume, scope, and distribution of garbage collection bins is scant, with large walking distances to overflowing collection points. As a result, residents resort to burning garbage at certain focal points, and the streets are quite filthy. One of these points is adjacent to the boys' elementary school (see photo).

The National Park

The Jerusalem Municipality and the Israel National Parks Authority (INPA) intend to expand the National Park Surrounding the Old City Walls, declared as such in the mid-1970s, at Abu Thor's expense. At the moment, the edge of the declared national park is in the Hinnom Valley, just north of Abu Thor, however, the intention is to extend its border so that it reaches the edge of the northernmost homes.



Unpaved and Neglected (photo Mohamed Sijaj, resident)



Wadi Yasool (photo Bimkom)

This is despite the fact that a steep cliff separates the valley from the homes, rendering the added part completely disconnected from the rest of the national park. Part of this area is owned by the Haqel Dama Church, built into the cliff overlooking the valley. A few years ago, as proof of the seriousness of their intentions, the INPA erected an observation post on the site, which stands neglected today. In December 2011, an agricultural structure of roughly 300 square meters that had been there for years was destroyed, and some ten olive trees were uprooted. Though it is designated as open public area, the plot in question, at the edge of the cliff, has not been developed for the use of the residents. It is clearly valuable land for Abu Thor, being flat, accessible, and adjacent to the main road.

The Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan

A close study of the expansion area allotted for Abu Thor in the Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan (awaiting deposition for public review) reveals that most of this area was already designated for development in previously approved plans. Only a small part of the expansion was not previously designated for development and it is already entirely built-up. Meanwhile, the low-density sub-neighborhood of Wadi Yasool remains outside the marked expansion area (see: The Unrecognized Neighborhood). A group of landowners submitted a plan for some six dunam of their land, included in the expansion area. Their plan was rejected by the District Planning Committee, on the claim that a general plan for the entire expansion area must precede the approval of any detail plans. The residents continued their struggle with a court petition. The judge, unsatisfied by the unreasonable timeframe (14 years) given by the state for its completion of the general plan, ordered in January 2013 that the detail plan be re-examined by the District Committee. The Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan also stipulates densification of the urban fabric of the neighborhood by allowing construction of up to four storeys. However, since only two floors may be added to existing structures, single-storey homes could only become three-floor structures. Moreover, since many of the buildings already have four floors or more, the suggested mechanism for increasing density is all the more irrelevant.

A SCHOOL IN SEARCH OF A HOME

The Ahmed Sameh Elementary School for Boys operates out of a residential building in the center of Abu Thor. The Jerusalem Municipality, while renting the building from its owner for use as a school, has never outfitted it accordingly. Density is unbearable, hygiene is disgraceful, and safety conditions are alarming: improvised classrooms on balconies, boys having to climb over desks to enter and exit classrooms, few toilets for hundreds of students, young pupils having to walk on the road to reach the schoolyard, and insufficient heating in the winter. The parents' committee has been putting pressure on the municipality to improve the conditions of the school and to find it a new home. The municipality has responded with incremental improvements that do not solve the root of the problem. Recently, out of despair, one of the leaders of the committee decided to transfer his children to a private religious school, where the conditions are only slightly better. The appropriate solution depends on a thorough renovation of the building and/or mobilization of all the relevant bureaucratic bodies to the cause of building a new elementary school in the neighborhood, and the sooner the better.



The Walk to School (photo Mohamed Sijaj, resident)

APPROVED PLANS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Outline Plans # 1864a & 1864b

634.0 dunam

Part of Outline Plan # 2783a for Silwan al-Wusta

1.0 dunam

Part of Local Outline Plan #9 for the Visual Basin of the Old City

276.0 dunam

Total Planned Area

911.0 dunam

Unplanned Area

0.0 dunam

Total area of neighborhood

911.0 dunam

In addition, Outline Plans # 5222a & 5222b have been approved, changing the zoning of about 100 dunam of Plan # 1864. Some 15 small-scale detail plans were also approved, with no added area to the neighborhood.

ZONING STRUCTURE ACCORDING TO APPROVED PLANS ▪ DESIGNATION VS. USE

Designation	Plans		Land Use
	dunam	%	
Residential*	363	40	Allotted building rights do not correspond with the actual urban density of the neighborhood. Most of the neighborhood is built up far beyond its planned capacity, and remaining implementable building rights are few and far between. The area defined as the village core was allotted higher but still insufficient building rights. In addition, there are no land reserves. The entire sub-neighborhood of Wadi Yasool remains unrecognized, and residential construction there is not permitted (see: The Unrecognized Neighborhood).
Open Spaces	438	48	Forming a buffer zone to the north, east, and south of the neighborhood, the planned open spaces do not serve as effective public spaces. The southern and eastern portions are designated for open public area, but they are already built-up (see: The Unrecognized Neighborhood). In the north, part of the land is included in the National Park Surrounding the Old City Walls, and another part of it is included in the proposed expansion of the national park (see expansion). In addition, there are six small plots designated as open public area inside the fabric of the neighborhood. Only one has been developed as a playground, but it was regularly vandalized and stood neglected for many years, until being renovated in September 2012. The rest of the plots are either geographically inaccessible due to topography, or negligible in size.
Roads	90	10	The approved roads that appear in the neighborhood plans, do not correspond with the existing roads. Some of the existing roads are designated as public pathways, even though they serve vehicular traffic on a daily basis. At the same time, many of the planned roads have never been implemented, and, for the most part, their implementation is not possible or necessary; improvement and recognition of the existing roads is much more crucial. Unpaved and having no sidewalks, the existing roads, statutory and non-statutory alike, are in generally poor condition and do not reach all places. The situation is by far the most acute for the sub-neighborhood of Wadi Yasool (see: The Unrecognized Neighborhood).
Public Buildings and Institutions	20	2	Out of the seven plots designated for public buildings, only three were developed: the girls' elementary school, the boys' junior high school, and a kindergarten. All facilities are over-crowded (see: Insufficient Schools). The boys' elementary school functions out of a rental building that is extremely run-down (see inset). There is no apparent reason why two of the four remaining plots cannot be implemented; the other two are small and inappropriately located. The plot where the neighborhood mosque stands is indeed designated for institutional use. There are no additional institutional plots in the neighborhood.
Total	911	100	

* In 60% of the area allotted for housing, the building rights (12%-50%, with two floors) meet only rural standards. The rights allotted to the rest of the area (70%-90%, with three floors), meet a semi-urban standard. In the detail plans, allotted building rights reach 4 floors at an average building ratio of 100%.