

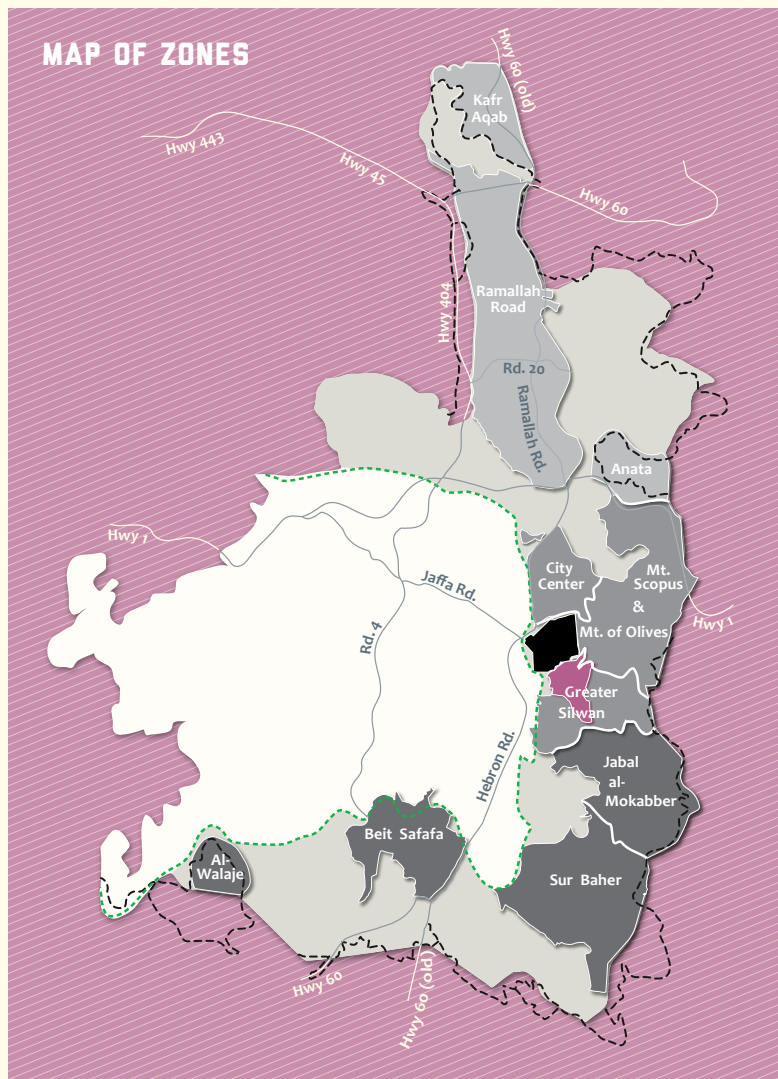
ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Silwan Center is located to the south of the Old City, on lands bearing significant historical, cultural and scenic value. This is the heart of the Visual Basin of the Old City, a fact that carries with it severe building restrictions. The neighborhood sits in Wadi an-Nar (the Qidron Valley) and on the slopes that descend into it from the west and the east. Bordering on the walls of the Old City and the outskirts of the Mount of Olives to the north, on Mount Zion and Abu Thor (ath-Thori) to the southwest, on Jabal al-Mokabber to the south, and on Ras al-Aamud to the east (where the border is least defined), Silwan Center is comprised of a number of sub-neighborhoods – Silwan al-Wusta, Wadi Hilwe, al-Bustan, and Batn al-Hawa.

In the 16th century, Silwan was a small agricultural village on the outskirts of the Old City. At first, people settled in Silwan al-Wusta, in natural caves and in ancient burial caves carved into the slope. Later on, small houses were built on the facades of the caves, forming the protective front line of the settled area. The village was rich in natural springs, and the village's livelihood was based on irrigation agriculture. From

the beginning of the 20th century, the population of the village grew, density increased significantly, and many inhabitants moved out to more distant village lands (today the abovementioned sub-neighborhoods, as well as the adjacent neighborhoods – Ras al-Aamud, Ein al-Lawza, Wadi Qaddum, ash-Shayah, Abu Thor, and Hayy al-Faruq).

In the last two decades Silwan has become a target for Jewish-Israeli settlers, who have settled in the area of the archeological site in Wadi Hilwe, and in the area of the Yemenite Neighborhood in al-Wusta, where Yemenite Jews had settled at the end of the 19th century and left at the beginning of the 20th century following violent clashes between Jews and Arabs. The residents of Silwan Center are caught between a rock and a hard place, because all new plans for the neighborhood link the legalization of Palestinian homes to the formalization and expansion of Israeli settlement in the area.



FACTS
Population 23,500
Area 678 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 SILWAN CENTER

Plan # 9

The entire Greater Silwan zone is included in the area of the Visual Basin of the Old City and about half of it, mostly in Silwan Center, still comes under the directives of Plan # 9. Approved about a decade after the 1967 war, the plan was aimed at preserving the Old City walls and the historical landscape around the Old City, and thereby placed severe restrictions on development in the surrounding valleys and ridges. Various types of open spaces were determined, and restrictions were imposed on the development of preexisting residential clusters. Over the years, about ten neighborhood plans have been approved for the development areas included in Plan # 9, though with no area for expansion and no additional building rights. Such plans were approved in al-Wusta and Batn al-Hawa but not in Wadi Hilwe and al-Bustan, where the most restrictive directives of Plan # 9 are still in force. To this day, all attempts by the residents of these sub-neighborhoods to achieve planning formalization have failed. The as-yet unapproved Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan was a missed opportunity to grant planning formalization to Silwan, where dozens of houses have been built spontaneously over the years. The outline plan did not propose any additional area that could retroactively legalize existing construction or enable future construction.

Silwan al-Wusta and the New Plan

The sub-neighborhood of Silwan al-Wusta is the largest and oldest neighborhood in Greater Silwan, constituting its historical core. Sitting on a steep slope descending from Ras al-Aamud to Wadi an-Nar, al-Wusta covers an area of about 320 dunam (including Batn al-Hawa; see inset) and has a population of about 12,000 inhabitants, who live in extremely dense conditions with practically no public infrastructure.

According to the neighborhood plans, most of al-Wusta is zoned for residential construction with low building rights. In the north of the neighborhood, facing the Old City, it is not permitted to add to the existing sparse construction, with the exception of negligible building rights. In the center of

the neighborhood there are areas where no building additions are allowed, and areas where construction of up to two storeys is allowed, in keeping with the strict preservation limitations of the Plan # 9 (see previous entry). The residential building capacity according to the plan is about 1,200 housing units. De facto, al-Wusta has about 2,000 housing units, built in many dozens of houses that deviate from the stipulations of the plan and whose height exceeds two storeys and sometimes even reaches six. The building known as "Beit Yonathan," which was built for Jewish-Israeli settlers in the Yemenite Neighborhood at the initiative of the settler organization "Ateret Kohanim," towers at seven storeys.

It is on this background that Plan # 18001 was drawn up, under the current mayor. In keeping with the Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan, the plan proposes a height increase in the neighborhood of up to four storeys, adding the stipulation that the upper storeys of houses that are higher than four storeys be taken down. In addition, the zoning in a number of areas that in the past were zoned as residential but were not yet built, was changed to open. The plan, done at the initiative of the Jerusalem Municipality without consulting the Palestinian residents, provides a reasonable solution for part of the housing shortage and allows the retroactive approval of most of the construction that was done without permits. The catch, however, is that the plan also allows the Israeli settlement that was built in the heart of the neighborhood to remain.

Al-Bustan and the King's Garden

The sub-neighborhood of al-Bustan ("the orchard," in Arabic) sits in Wadi an-Nar in a small sub-valley where Wadi an-Nar meets the Hinnom Valley. A mere 43 dunam in area, al-Bustan is surrounded by Silwan's other sub-neighborhoods. In the past, water from Silwan's springs irrigated the orchard that gave the place its name. Al-Bustan today is home to close to 1,000 residents, living in about 90 residential structures. The neighborhood is zoned as open public area in Plan # 9, and, indeed, the Jerusalem Municipality is interested in restoring the site to its previous function as a garden, due to its identification as the garden where King Solomon supposedly wrote the Song of Songs.

As a first step towards developing the "King's Garden," at the beginning of 2005, the Jerusalem Municipality distributed demolition orders for the Palestinian houses, two of which were destroyed that year. News of the plan to displace about one hundred Palestinian families from their homes and lands aroused international intervention, which halted the plan. Then Jerusalem mayor, Uri Lupolianski, gave the residents the opportunity to formalize their houses. In 2006, the residents of al-Bustan submitted a detailed outline plan for the neighborhood, which proposed the various land designations (residential, educational institutions, commercial, parks, parking, etc.) that make up a proper living quarter. In 2009, although the plan had been coordinated with the planning authorities, it was rejected in the District Planning Committee without any concrete discussion, on the claim that it contradicts the Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan. The residents kept their hope alive and began working on a new plan, but it did not even reach the discussion stage (despite Mayor Nir Barkat's repeated declarations about his intentions to invest in the development of the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem). The residents' efforts came to an end when the mayor announced a new plan for the neighborhood – Plan # 18000 for the King's Garden.

The plan, which was drawn up by the municipality without coordinating with the residents, includes the demolition of about 35 structures on the western side of the valley, and the creation of a tourist park there. In exchange, the plan offers the regularization of the houses built on the eastern side of the valley (some of which have received demolition orders), along with increased building rights. The residents of the homes designated for demolition are meant to rebuild their houses adjacent to or on top of the houses on the eastern side. The plan was approved by the Local Planning Committee but has not yet come before the District Committee. Not only is the development of one half of the neighborhood conditioned on the destruction of its other half, but the plan also stipulates that "no access will be allowed to the residential or commercial areas from the direction of [the Garden]."

Wadi Hilwe and The City of David

Wadi Hilwe covers an area of about 314 dunam on the slope to the south of the Old City, and is included almost in its entirety within the National Park Surrounding the Old City Walls. Many archeological layers, found alongside and underneath the houses, testify to the many cultures that have lived in the area from the Canaanite period to the present. The site is known among the Jewish-Israeli public as the City of David, and a visitors' center, run by the Elad settler organization, exclusively highlights the Jewish layer of its diverse history. Today some 4,000 Palestinian residents live in Wadi Hilwe, with no formal planning and no basic public services such as health clinics, kindergartens, schools, or playgrounds.

Two sometimes contradictory plans apply to the neighborhood, zoning the land, alternately, as open areas, special open areas, and a national park. Both residential construction (Palestinian and Israeli-settler) and the tourist facilities are built without permits. On this background, Outline Plan # 11555 for Wadi Hilwe and Mount Zion was prepared by the municipality, asking to change the restrictive zoning of Plan # 9 and to legalize a significant part of the existing houses in the area. The plan also included the legalization of public structures and streets and the allocation of additional areas for these purposes. Although the neighborhood is home to thousands of Palestinians and only a few dozen Israeli settlers, the Palestinian residents were not included in the planning process as the Jewish settler residents were. The plan was approved in the Local Planning Committee in 2007 but never came before the District Committee, and therefore is not valid.

Moreover, in recent years a number of development and construction projects have been advanced by the Israeli establishment, also in contravention of plans and discriminating against the local Palestinian residents. These have no choice but to turn time after time to the courts to try to stop the ongoing development around them, which undermines the chances of a fair planning solution in the future.



General View (photo Bimkom)

THE STRUGGLE FOR AN ACCESS ROAD

The sub-neighborhood of Batn al-Hawa is located in the southeastern part of Silwan al-Wusta. The steep inclines and unique cliffs characterizing the neighborhood make for a dramatic landscape on the one hand, and difficult living conditions on the other. The feeling in Batn al-Hawa, reflecting its name ("stomach of the air") is like a breath of fresh air, especially in comparison to the overcrowded conditions of the rest of al-Wusta. However, the neighborhood suffers from a basic lack of accessibility, with dozens of houses and hundreds of people virtually trapped in the mountainside. The residents have to leave their cars at a great distance from their houses and walk on crooked and dangerous paths to arrive home. The children of the neighborhood endanger themselves every day in a long and dangerous trek to their far-away schools. The neighborhood plans delineate main roads and village roads, running along the ridge, with pedestrian paths connecting them. However, all this is just in planning. In reality, the existing streets include a combination of partially paved roads, dirt paths, and staircases. These have been developed over the years, sometimes by the residents themselves, and they only very partially correspond with the roads that appear in the plans. Needless to say, they are not maintained by the municipality. This situation makes life difficult for the residents of the neighborhood and prevents them from conducting a normal and independent way of life. The situation is particularly grave for people with physical disabilities. Mahmood Qara'in, who has to carry his handicapped daughter up and down the hill on a daily basis, decided to lead a struggle to improve the situation. Alongside ongoing media exposure, the residents, in cooperation with two NGOs (Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights, and Bizkhit, the Israel Human Rights Center for People with Disabilities), sent a letter to the City Engineer in September 2011. The letter emphasized the severity of the problem and demanded an optimal solution and an alternative solution, in accordance with the approved plans, while mobilizing the agreement of the neighbors. Whatever the case would be, the residents demanded that the solution take into account the situation on the ground and try to improve it in creative ways. In January 2013, after a prolonged period, the works to complete the alternative solution came to a close. The neighborhood now has a new road. It is narrow and steep but serves the residents with dignity.



Before



After

APPROVED PLANS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Outline Plans # 2783a, b & c for Silwan al-Wusta	321.0 dunam
Part of Local Outline Plan # 9 for the Visual Basin of the Old City	340.0 dunam
Detail Plan # 4146 for al-Ein Street	14.8 dunam
Detail Plan # 6436 for a school and a kindergarten	1.5 dunam
Total planned area	677.3 dunam
Unplanned area	0.7 dunam
Total area of neighborhood	678.0 dunam

In addition, three detail plans were approved in the neighborhood on a total area of about one dunam, with no added area for the neighborhood.

ZONING STRUCTURE ACCORDING TO APPROVED PLANS ■ DESIGNATION VS. USE – SILWAN AL-WUSTA

Designation	Plans		Land Use
	dunam	%	
Residential	194	60.5	In contrast to the sparse construction allowed according to approved plans, the neighborhood is heavily built-up. For more on the building rights in the neighborhood, see: Silwan al-Wusta and the New Plan.
Open Spaces	27	8	Only two significant open areas are planned in the neighborhood. One area, adjacent to the existing school, is designated for a playground but was never developed. Another area is a strip that goes along the road on the Wadi an-Nar channel. This area was never developed, and more than ten residential buildings are built along it.
Public Buildings and Institutions	17	5	Seven plots, of varying sizes, are zoned for public buildings and institutions. Of these, one plot is in the northern part of the neighborhood. It was not developed and functions de facto as a parking lot. The rest of the plots are dispersed from the bottom to the top of the slope in the southern part of the neighborhood. Of these, two plots were developed and have operational schools on them. On another of these plots, houses were built and on another one, adjacent to Batn al-Hawa, a dirt road was cleared so that the security services could reach the settler houses. The rest of the plots are vacant and unused. Overall, the neighborhood suffers from a lack of public buildings and institutions. A partial solution to the problems may be provided upon the completion of construction of schools in neighboring Ras al-Aamud.
Roads	67	21	Due to the steep topography of the neighborhood, there are very few planned streets. These mostly appear as dead-end streets on the plans, and not all of them actually exist. The existing roads, which are narrow and steep and do not meet modern standards, were designated in the plans as pedestrian paths (see inset). In actuality, these roads serve the residents for vehicular traffic but they are not maintained. In the northern part of the neighborhood, about three km of existing pathways were designated as a tourist trail, leading to the burial caves, to be paved in stone. Effectively, however, these paths are no different from other passageways in the neighborhood.
Cemetery	9	3	An isolated part of the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives is located between the houses of the neighborhood.
Other	7	2.5	Including unplanned area and small rock cliffs dispersed throughout the neighborhood, which are designated as an open element for visual preservation.
Total	321	100	

SUB-NEIGHBORHOODS

Name	Plans		Land Use
	dunam	%	
Al-Wusta	321	47.5	The neighborhood is included in Plans 2783 a, b & c, which were approved in the late 1980s. For a detailed description of zoning and land use, see above table.
Al-Bustan	43	6	About 90 houses, surrounded by courtyards, a mosque, a cultural center, a protest tent, and pedestrian paths exist on area zoned as open space (see: Al-Bustan and the King's Garden).
Wadi Hilwe	314	46.5	About 250 residential structures (about 700 apartments), a mosque, archeological sites, two visitors' centers, a protest tent, roads, and pedestrian paths exist in an area zoned as special open space and as a national park (see: Wadi Hilwe and the City of David).
Total	678	100	