

3.2 AS-SAWAHRAH

Jerusalem South - Jabal al-Mokabber Zone

SURVEY OF PALESTINIAN NEIGHBORHOODS IN EAST JERUSALEM

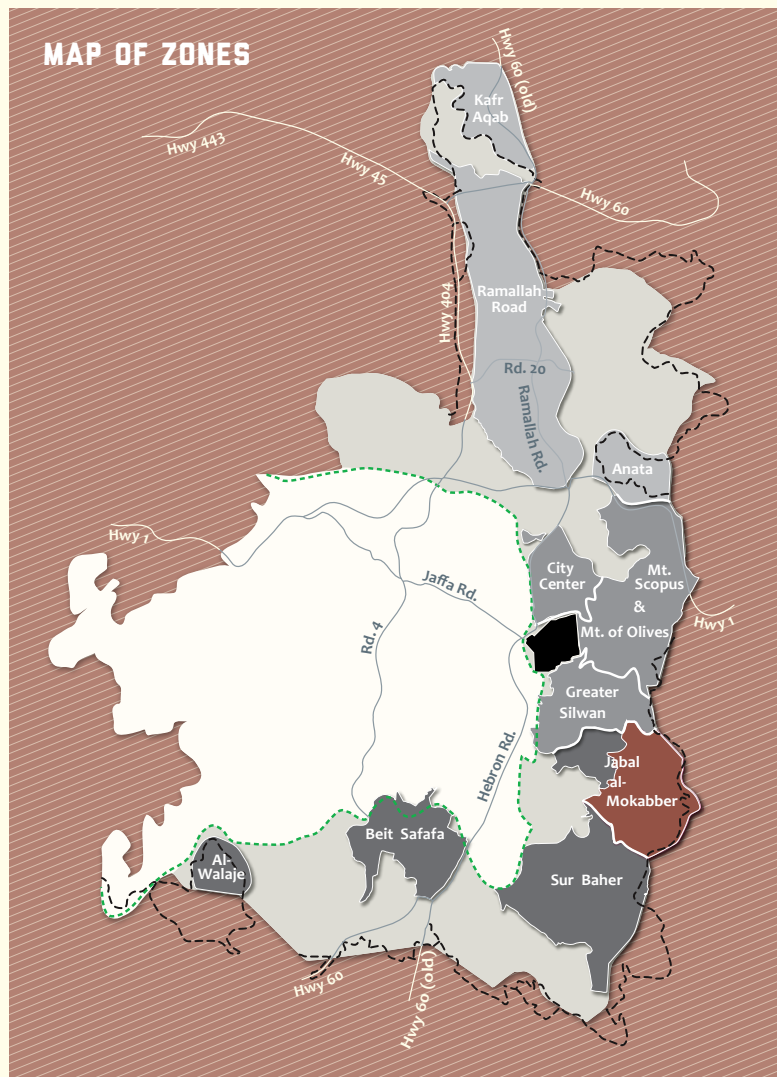
ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD

As-Sawahrah covers a large area stretching from Jabal al-Mokabber in the west, to the Jerusalem municipal boundary in the east, and from Wadi Qaddum in the north to Umm Laysoon in the south. The residential areas of the neighborhood are scattered over a number of ridges, between which the valleys are used for agricultural activity, primarily the cultivation of fruit-tree orchards. The ridges descend into the Wadi an-Nar (Qidron Valley) river bed, which runs north-south through the eastern third of the neighborhood.

The residents of the neighborhood originate from the as-Sawahrah Bedouin tribe, which in the early 20th century settled on either side of Wadi an-Nar. At first they lived there seasonally, in the natural caves in the area, but gradually the members of the tribe settled permanently and built their homes there. The east bank of Wadi an-Nar is called as-Sawahrah ash-Sharqiyah (Eastern as-Sawahrah) and the west bank is called as-Sawahrah al-Gharbiyah (Western as-Sawahrah). After the 1967 war, most of the area of as-Sawahrah al-Gharbiyah was incorporated into

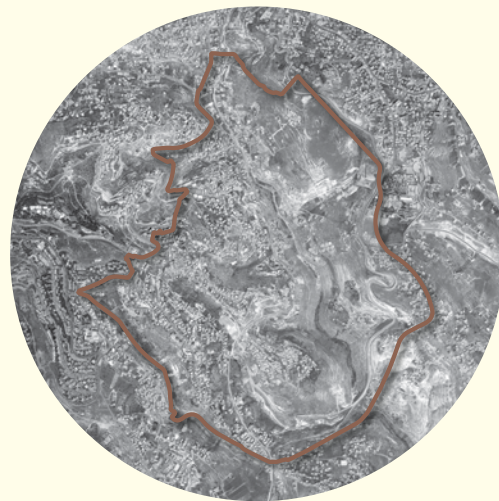
the municipal area of Jerusalem, while the lands of as-Sawahrah ash-Sharqiyah remained outside of the new city boundaries.

As-Sawahrah is defined in neighborhood plans as a village within the city, and accordingly it is zoned with large open areas and sparse, rural-type building rights. The topography and settlement patterns in as-Sawahrah – with different families living on separate ridges – have effectively created a neighborhood with no clear center. Rather, the neighborhood is built from seven sub-neighborhoods, each named after the extended families that live there. Lacking a single historical center, an unofficial center developed along the main road of Hayy al-Madaris (literally, “the schools neighborhood”). The residents of as-Sawahrah continue to struggle for recognition by the authorities of the structure of their neighborhood.



FACTS

Population 18,500
Area 3,552 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 AS-SAWAHRAH

The Contaminated Valley

Most of the waste from the Palestinian neighborhoods in southeast Jerusalem does not feed into a sewage treatment facility. The sewage from the neighborhoods in the Wadi an-Nar (Qidron Valley) basin, which includes the Old City and Silwan, drains into main pipes laid at the bottom of the valley, and flows toward the Dead Sea. The wadi passes through as-Sawahrah, after which it exits the Jerusalem municipal area. Next to the point at which the valley exits the municipal boundary, the pipes come to an end and the sewage flows freely, causing bad odors and mosquitoes all year round. Bacteria from the Jerusalem sewage were discovered in the well water as far as the Jericho area. It should be noted that most of the houses in as-Sawahrah are not connected to the municipal sewer system, and their sewage is collected in private cesspits, posing a health hazard and a danger to the ground waters. The ravine also serves as an unofficial dumping site for construction waste, surplus soil, scrap metal, and even household waste. In recent years the Dead Sea Drainage Authority and the Jerusalem Municipality, in coordination with the Palestinian Authority and the al-Abedieh Municipality, have been working on a plan to clean up the area and to

find a solution for the sewage problem. But political barriers hinder the process.

The American Road

The American Road stretches along the foothills of the slopes descending into Wadi an-Nar. The road takes its epithet from the American company that began to develop it at the end of the Jordanian period (though it was never completed due to the outbreak of the 1967 war). The road was meant to serve as a main traffic artery from Jerusalem to the cities of Bethlehem and Hebron, replacing the steeply inclined Old Bethlehem Road that runs through the heart of the neighborhood; the latter served as an alternative to the Hebron Road, which remained on the Israeli side of the divided city after 1949. Later, at the height of the Oslo period, the route of the Old Bethlehem Road was blocked entirely by the construction of the Israeli neighborhood of Har Homa. Thus, the neighborhood was left with no main artery. In the neighborhood plan, the American Road was designated for expansion, to serve as a rural scenic route. The plan was never implemented, and instead, along the completed parts of the road there developed a spontaneous mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Attempts by the residents of the road to regularize their houses and businesses, and to transform the road into an official urban commercial street, were rejected. Meanwhile, the municipality has done nothing to formalize the road, so while informal activity continues along it, the street benefits from none of the basic municipal services (street lighting, garbage collection, etc.) that are granted on statutory roads. Of late the municipality is working towards the completion, expansion, and physical upgrading of the road, though without recognizing its existing character as an urban street.

Barriers to the East

To the east of the American Road, on either side of the Wadi an-Nar channel, is a large, partly vacant area zoned as open scenic area. In the early 2000s, the Separation Barrier was built on the eastern side of the valley, more or less along the municipal line. On an adjacent (and sometimes overlapping) route, are plans for the Eastern Ring Road, a main urban artery, with tunnels and bridges, that, if implemented, will bypass the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. The central part of the road was planned on private lands that are to be expropriated from the residents of as-Sawahrah and Greater Silwan, despite the fact that the road will virtually not serve them. In addition, the Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan (see following) proposes to expand the neighborhood up to the planned ring road. The proposed expansion area would in effect be trapped between the Eastern Ring Road and the American Road, covering over only two thirds of the vacant area and leaving a partially built-up enclave stuck between the route of the ring road and the Separation Barrier. On the eastern side of the barrier is another enclave – a built-up area within the municipal boundary but separated physically from the city by the barrier. These two enclaves will not be included in the plan for the expansion of the neighborhood (see inset); the houses in these enclaves will receive no formal planning, and the threat of demolition will continue to hover over them.

The ash-Sheikh Sa'ad Enclave

The neighborhood of ash-Sheikh Sa'ad is found to the east of Hayy al-Madaris (the schools neighborhood), outside of the Jerusalem municipal boundary. The neighborhood, which is in effect an inseparable part of as-Sawahrah al-Gharbiyah, was not included in the borders of Jerusalem after 1967. Sitting on a hill and covering about 1,650 dunam, the neighborhood is surrounded on all sides by the deep channels of Wadi an-Nar. Its only point of access into Jerusalem is to the west, through as-Sawahrah. For years the municipal boundary had little meaning for the residents of the neighborhood. They continued to maintain family and day-to-day contacts on both sides: Jerusalemites could find convenient housing in ash-Sheikh Sa'ad while their children continued to go

to the schools within the municipal boundary. The Separation Barrier put an end to this. The route of the barrier was set along the municipal boundary, rendering ash-Sheikh Sa'ad an enclave, cut off from all sides. The residents petitioned the court with a request to be included on the western side of the barrier. The court rejected their request and suggested instead that a

road be paved across Wadi an-Nar, connecting the isolated neighborhood with as-Sawahrah ash-Sharqiyah. The road was indeed paved, and since then residents of the neighborhood who do not hold a Jerusalem ID are forbidden from entering Jerusalem. For the Jerusalem-ID holders in the neighborhood, a pedestrian-only checkpoint was built.

PLANNING IN THE LARGE "GREEN" AREA

The large area designated as open scenic area, between the American Road and the Eastern Ring Road, spreads over about 1,500 dunam. Over the years, dozens of houses were built in the area, with no formal planning or building permits, though most of the area remains vacant. In the wake of this spontaneous construction, demolition orders were served, court cases were opened, fines were meted, and in some cases, homes were destroyed. Residents trying to prevent the demolition of their homes attempted to change the zoning of their land by submitting private detail plans. Thirty such plans were drawn up and reached different stages in the planning and authorization process. In the mid-2000s, however, this momentum came to a halt, when the planning authorities declared that the land would be included as an expansion of the neighborhood in the Jerusalem 2000 Outline Plan (which still awaits deposition), and that a general plan was needed for the entire area before any private detail plans could be authorized. But the planning authorities have not hurried to prepare the general plan, and it is difficult for landowners to do so on their own. Two years after the freezing of the private plans, a planner was chosen by the municipality,

and a budget allocated for the initiative, but this was small and insufficient. Although the area has a capacity of about 5,000 housing units (according to a professional assessment done at the residents' request), the planner was instructed to include only 2,500 housing units, and this number later dropped to 1,500. These facts did not prevent the municipality from using the project as a flagship project and mentioning it when asked to prove that it was doing enough to develop the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. The architect worked to advance the plan, with the limited means at his disposal, and even presented it to the Local Planning and Building Committee. Most of the city council members on the committee, who have little interest in developing Palestinian neighborhoods, intended to oppose the plan, despite the fact that it was being promoted by the municipality itself. In order to prevent such an embarrassing situation, the municipality decided not to bring it up for a vote. The plan remains in its preliminary stages. Of late, two private plans have been approved for continued consideration, after being stalled for several years, and the general plan is scheduled for a hearing at the District Planning Committee.



Vacant Plots (photos Bimkom)



The Large "Green" Area (photo Bimkom)

APPROVED PLANS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Part of Outline Plan # 2683a for as-Sawahrah	2,709.8 dunam
Part of Plan # 4585f for the Eastern Ring Road (pending approval)	592.5 dunam
Part of Outline Plan #2886 for Ras al-Aamud	142.6 dunam
Plan # 2064 for the laying of sewerage pipes	67.9 dunam
Part of Outline Plan # 2691 for Jabal al-Mokabber	14.0 dunam
Part of Local Outline Plan # 9 for the Visual Basin of the Old City	4.8 dunam
Total planned area	3,531.6 dunam
Unplanned area	20.4 dunam
Total area of neighborhood	3,552.0 dunam

In addition, some 37 detail plans have been approved over the years, on a total area of 210 dunam, with no added area for the neighborhood.

ZONING STRUCTURE ACCORDING TO APPROVED PLANS ▪ DESIGNATION VS. USE

Designation	Plans		Land Use
	dunam	%	
Residential*	883	25	Only one quarter of the neighborhood is zoned for residential construction in the neighborhood plans. Nonetheless, there is overall correspondence between residential zoning and actual residential construction. Outside of the designated areas, houses were built, though mostly abutting the authorized residential areas or in the large area to the east of the American Road. Yet many houses deviate from the permitted building rights and number of storeys. The neighborhood suffers from a severe housing shortage; young people put off marriage or choose to continue living in their parents' house after they get married.
Open Spaces	1,913	54	The large amount of open areas designated in the neighborhood plans is unusual, even in comparison with other Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. These areas are zoned mostly as open scenic areas. In the existing neighborhood plans, only one area, of less than one dunam, is designated as open public area, which means that it can be expropriated from its owners and developed for public use. Additional playgrounds were zoned in the detail plans, when landowners were asked to set aside lands for public use. Neither these, nor the large original plot, were actually developed. As for the land designated as open in the valleys: agricultural activity takes place on part of it; another area is barren stony ground; and yet another area is de facto built-up.
Public Buildings and Institutions	56	1.5	In keeping with the low housing density stipulated in the neighborhood plans, very little area is allotted for public buildings and institutions. The three areas zoned for schools were built only partially and the schools are overcrowded and in shameful condition. The plots designated for kindergartens were never built. Classrooms and kindergartens operate out of mobile structures, in shelters, and in rented structures not suited for this purpose. The municipality has deemed some of the plots designated for the construction of kindergartens as not feasible due to the steep topography, which will incur high development costs, or to the fact that the planned access road was never built.
Local Roads	299	8.5	The neighborhood contains many operative but unstatutory roads while the neighborhood plans contain roads that cannot be implemented. Most of the streets are in bad physical condition: they are extremely narrow and steep, and have no sidewalks.
Main Roads	324	9	The area designated for expropriation, for the purpose of developing the Eastern Ring Road (whose primary beneficiaries will be people from outside of the neighborhood), is larger than the total area of neighborhood streets (above).
Other	77	2	Nearly two thirds of this area was designated for above-ground sewerage pipes in Wadi an-Nar. A third of this area has no planning whatsoever.
Total	3,552	100	

* The most common residential zoning type n as-Sawahrah allows a 37.5% building ratio, with up to two storeys. In detail plans, residents have received building ratios ranging from 50% to 125%.