

BIMKOM – PLANNERS FOR PLANNING RIGHTS

The Kaminker Project in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Issawiya. Report of the First Two Years of Activity

Background

The **Kaminker Project** is a three-year initiative with the community of Issawiya to develop and secure the authorities' approval for a new master plan which reflects the residents' long-term needs and preferences in terms of housing, basic services, economic development and infrastructure. The project was established in January 2004 to honor the memory of Sarah Kaminker, an advocate for social justice and equality for disempowered communities, a driving force behind many initiatives promoting public participation in the planning process and one of the founders of *Bimkom*- Planners for Planning Rights.

Through the project, the residents of Issawiya are for the first time playing a central role in the development of their community and have a real opportunity to improve their quality of life. It is our hope that this new approach to planning in Israel will be replicated in other communities and will serve as a tool to foster equality and promote co-existence between Arab and Jewish populations.

Issawiya faces numerous social and economic challenges resulting from its current, obsolete master plan which places severe limitations on the physical development of the community and in particular regarding housing capacity. The new master plan also addresses other significant planning deficiencies within the community, including:

- ❖ The lack of basic public services, such as a fully planned water system, sewage and electricity system;
- ❖ The inadequate level of community services and spaces – health clinics, schools, parks, community centers and so on;
- ❖ The poor state of Issawiya's road network which urgently needs to improve access to and within the neighborhood.



Demolished Home in Issawiya

The report below describes the activities of the project team during the first and second year of the program, it explains our achievements and the challenges we face, and outlines the next stages of the project.

Empowering and Involving the Community

For *Bimkom*, public participation in planning is key to the promotion of a more transparent and just planning system in Israel. Ordinarily residents do not get the chance to participate in the development of plans that may have major impact on their lives until a relatively late stage in the process. By the time they can submit their objections, it is often too late to make major changes. Moreover, the ability to object requires an awareness of the existence of the new plan and an understanding of the plan and its ramifications, as well as skills, know-how, time and money which disadvantaged communities such as Issawiya generally lack.

From the very beginning, *Bimkom* tried to develop a close working relationship with the community. *Bimkom's* professional staff met regularly with the community to gauge their responses and receive their concerns, their feedback and suggestions, and all in all to ensure their needs are properly taken into account. We have held open meetings for all the residents, as well as individual meetings with each of the Issawiya clans in order to go over the details of the plan and examine with them how they will be affected. A conscious effort was made to seek the voices of women, youth and other individuals outside of the traditional leadership positions that would not typically be heard. Furthermore, a semi-official group comprising of representatives of all of Issawiya's clans has been established and regular meetings with them have taken place. We have also prepared leaflets to explain the plan to the residents, its rationale and advantages, in order to maximize awareness and enhance consensus among the residents.

At the end of May 2004, after initial meetings with members and leaders of the community, there was a large public event to raise further awareness of the program and to recruit as many people as possible to participate in planning workshops.

As well as preparing a new and updated master plan for Issawiya that will properly take into account the needs of the community, the **Kaminker Project** also seeks to empower the residents themselves with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to continue to actively participate and protect



Members of the community participating in a workshop

their rights in matters of planning. For that reason, workshops have been designed to cover a wide range of planning matters, from how the planning process operates in Israel, to how to read and make a map, to planning rights. The workshops also provided participants with a terrific opportunity to exchange and pool their ideas,

experience and views about the community in which they live and discuss ideas for future developments.

Developing the new master plan

Whereas the first year of the Project was dedicated to fostering a close relationship with the community and carrying out the background research and technical groundwork necessary for the preparation of the new plan, in the second year, we proceeded with the actual development of the new plan for the Issawiya community.

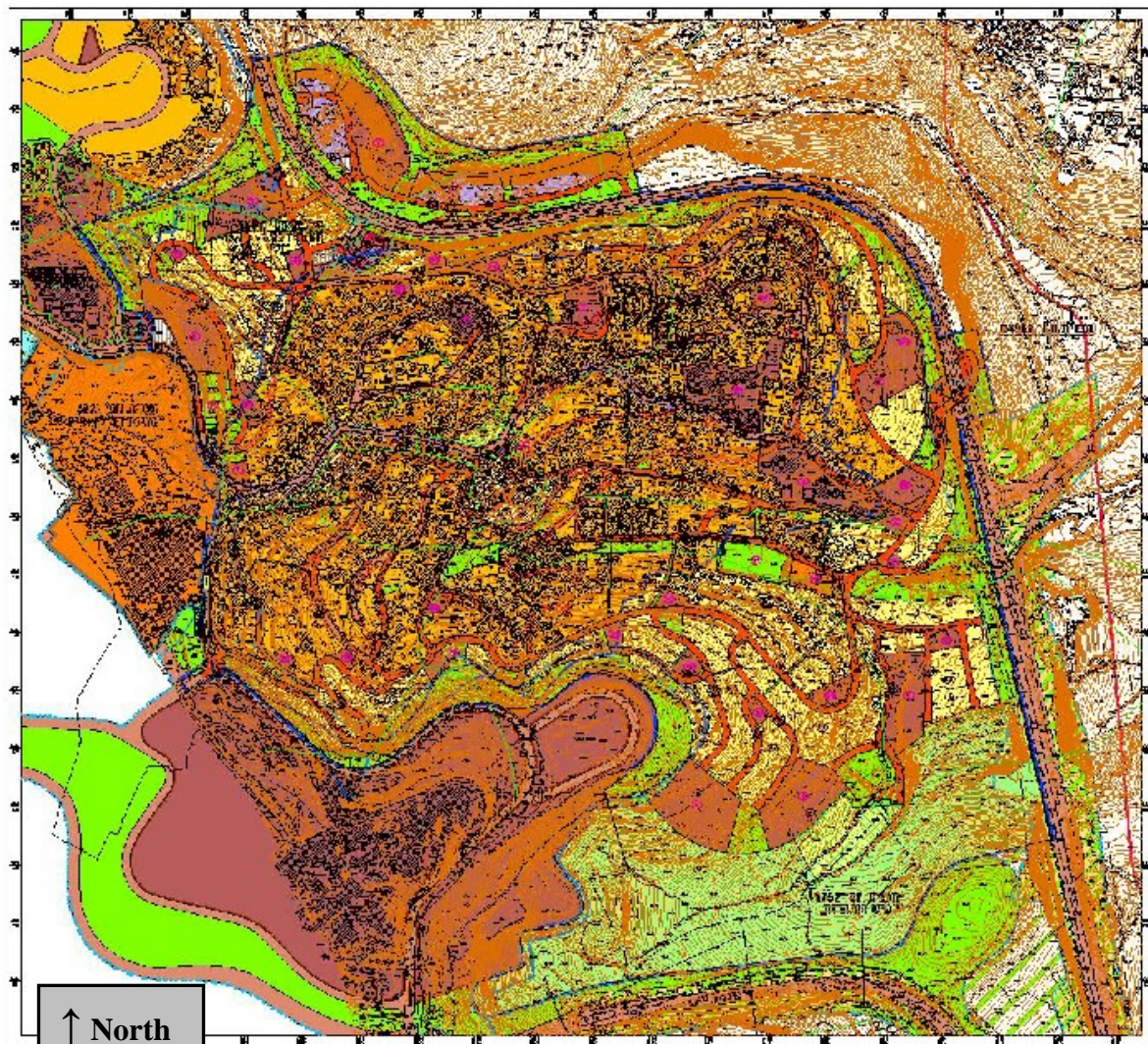
At the end of 2004, two options – the 'Northern Plan' and the 'Southern Plan' – were selected for further consideration. Taking into account population projections for 2020, both these plans almost double the amount of land available for housing in Issawiya and involve the retroactive approval for those houses already built without the required permits. Of the two draft plans prepared in the first year, the project team in conjunction with the residents and the local planning authority chose the 'Southern' option, which was considered the more feasible option of the two. A more detailed plan has since been produced. This plan (subject to approval by the relevant authorities) offers a close to twofold increase of Issawiya's housing capacity by suggesting retroactive approval of houses that have already been built or expanded without permits and by zoning new areas for residential development.



Meeting with Issawiya Residents to discuss the new master plan

In Issawiya, unlike most Jewish localities in Israel, the vast majority of land is privately owned. The relative lack of public land raised difficulties when determining the location of public spaces and facilities such as roads, schools, health clinics, parks and community centers. For this reason, the new master plan strives, as much as possible, to fairly 'share out' the public spaces between each of the families and clans so that no clan or family loses out proportionally more than any other.

We believe, the plan offers the best possible solution to the planning and development challenges faced by the community of Issawiya. In Israel, in general, and in Jerusalem, in particular, all too often political and economic interests drive planning decisions. The planning decisions of the **Kaminker** team were based, however, on objective planning criteria, namely, the needs and constraints of Issawiya residents. Thus, for example, the special topography of Issawiya makes planning roads, in particular, a real challenge. Yet, under the new plan, special efforts were made to minimize necessary demolitions, and indeed, just one house in Issawiya will have to be demolished in order to lay a vital road to a new residential neighborhood.



The Kaminker Master Plan for Issawiya

Negotiations with Decision-Makers

For the Project to make a difference to the community of Issawiya it must be more than a theoretical exercise. The very essence of the **Kaminker Project** is that the plan be accepted by and acted upon by the Jerusalem municipality and the Ministry of the Interior. For this reason, regular meetings are held with key personnel from both offices as well as the Jerusalem City Planner, and other relevant authorities.

As the program has progressed we have also sought to raise awareness and support for our work in Issawiya among other parties. Important public figures who support the project include Vice Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Professor Sari Nusseibeh, President of Al Quds University in Jerusalem. Visitors we have hosted include Peter Carter, the Deputy Head of Mission and Consul General of the British Embassy; Amir Cheshin and

Maurice Zilka, former advisors to the mayor of Jerusalem on Arab affairs; and students and interested planning professionals from Israel and abroad.



December 2004 Advisory Committee meeting attended by Vice Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (right). Also pictured (right to left) are Darwish Darwish, Halil Toufakji, and Dalia Dromi.

The Next Steps

Bimkom is currently engaged in the process of working to obtain approval for the new plan for Issawiya. We have presented the first documents to the local planning committee at the Jerusalem Municipality. Upon approval, the file is then passed onto the regional committee for their approval. The plan is then open to public objections. Once this stage is successfully over, the plan may receive final approval and be implemented.

It is noteworthy that even at this stage the new plan has already had an impact on the lives of a number of Issawiya residents. Based on the retroactive approval for homes built without the required permits in the new plan, the courts are granting 'stays' on current demolition orders.