
Revival of dormant private settlement plans in East Jerusalem continues

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In the second recent case of long dormant settlement plans being revived in the planning committees, on Sunday, August 10 the Local Planning and Building Committee is expected to approve six building permits for 178 housing units in Nof Tzion, located in the heart of Jabel Mukaber. Nof Tzion ([see southern section of map](#)) is one of numerous private settlement projects sitting not adjacent to Palestinian neighborhoods but actually within the neighborhoods themselves. Because this controversial real estate project has long been a financial hot potato due to its failure to attract residents (units have been sold at market rates rather than being underwritten by a settler patron), plans for expansion have been approved but suspended for years.

Granting of building permits will be the last step in greenlighting construction of 13 new buildings, which will triple the size of the settlement, currently housing 91 units. The expansion will raise the status of Nof Tzion to the largest settlement compound within a Palestinian neighborhood since completion of construction of the Ma'ale Zeitim settlement in Ras al-Amud (home to city councilman and Israel Land Fund director Arieh King) in 2011. Since building permits were awarded for Ma'ale Zeitim – and for the Shepherd Hotel in Sheikh Jarrah in 2009 - there has been no approval of building permits for private settlement projects in East Jerusalem on the scale of what is expected for Nof Tzion. The anticipated approval will be another indication of the sharp change taking place in settlement promotion in East Jerusalem since multiple plans for settlement expansion in She ikh Jarrah were advanced in July. This week's eviction of the Shamasneh family from the apartment they have inhabited since the mid-1960s further corroborates this trend.

The primary objective of the settlers' infiltration into the Palestinian neighborhoods in and around the Old City is to undermine the possibility of dividing Jerusalem, thereby foiling the possibility of a political resolution on the city and an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The building permits will issue a clear statement that the Israeli government sanctions and supports the establishment of new facts on the ground designed for this purpose. Ir Amim has reported extensively on the symbiotic relationship between private settlers in East Jerusalem and the Israeli government, most recently in its joint Ir Amim-Peace Now report on the [massive takeover campaign in Batan al-Hawa](#). [As data from October 2016 attests](#), the pace of private settlement in the core of East Jerusalem – both the volume of units and of settlers – has burgeoned under the last two Netanyahu administrations.

Nof Tzion is sorely illustrative of this pattern: the Municipality has allocated millions of dollars for the construction of a new mikveh and synagogue for the settlement while Jabel Mukaber continues to lack sufficient public buildings to meet community needs. Symbolic of the gaping socio-economic disparities between the settlements and the Palestinian neighborhoods in which they sit (distinguished by an 80%

poverty rate), the one playground in the area was built for the use of Nof Tzion's residents. Although it is located in the very center of Jabel Mukaber, a municipal sign marks the entrance to "Nof Zion," literally changing the designation of the neighborhood on the map of East Jerusalem.

While recent promotion of plans in East Jerusalem has not included the two internationally designated red lines of E-1 and Givat Hamatos, the ramp-up of private settlement activity in the Old City and surrounding belt of Palestinian neighborhoods – known in the settler lexicon as the "Holy (or Historic) Basin" – is of urgent significance to both the fabric of its neighborhoods and the two-state solution. Developments in this highly contested and volatile area should be serious cause for alarm, particularly given the volume and pace of new plan promotion.

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