
Three New Touristic Settlement Plans On Tomorrow's Local Committee Agenda

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Tomorrow, the Local Planning and Building Committee will discuss three plans for development of park and heritage sites on the Mount of Olives. As in other cases, promoters of the plans – which are directly linked to nearby settlement projects – are attempting to circumvent the customary planning process in order to bypass requisite procedures for hearing of public objections.

Two of the plans relate to construction of a promenade across the western slope of A-Tur, overlooking the Haram al-Sharif, intended to link the Beit Orot and Beit HaChoshen settlements in the center of the neighborhood. The plans are being submitted by the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA) and Jerusalem Municipality, which hired architect Arie Rachamimov to prepare the plans. Rachamimov is the "in-house architect" of the ELAD settler organization who, among other credits, designed the plan for ELAD'S flagship Kedem compound in Silwan.

The third plan would establish a visitor center at the Mount of Olives cemetery, located directly opposite the settlement of Ma'ale Zeitim – currently distinguished as the largest private settlement inside a Palestinian neighborhood of East Jerusalem. Here, too, the Local Committee attempted to approve the plan without sending it to the District Planning and Building Committee for discussion, ultimately necessitating court intervention. If approved, the Rachamimov planned tourist destination will be located just north of an existing ELAD run visitors' center.

The simultaneous promotion of these three plans is one of a series of recent developments demonstrating the use of national park planning and touristic settlement to buttress private settlement in the Old City and surrounding Palestinian neighborhoods – in settler vernacular, the "Historic Basin" – as well as the increasingly overt support of the Israeli government in sanctioning and encouraging settlers' encroachment on Palestinian neighborhoods.

PARALLEL DEVELOPMENTS

The Kedem Compound

In January, the Jerusalem District Court (sitting as the Court for Administrative Affairs) dismissed the second of two Ir Amim court petitions challenging approval of the Kedem Compound (TPS 13542), a 5 story state-of-the-art visitor complex that will serve as the ELAD settler organization's base of operations.

In his January 8, 2018 ruling, Justice Sobel rejected Ir Amim's arguments against privatization of the Kedem center – to be built within the Jerusalem Walls National Park – maintaining that a public planning goal may in fact be realized on privately owned land. Referencing an earlier court decision on Ir Amim's 2010 petition against privatization of the City of David, the judge further asserted that while it will be possible to take legal action if the public purpose of the site is not fulfilled, only once the compound is operational will it be possible to claim that the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA)'s mandate to operate the park has been compromised.

Ir Amim's first petition, rejected in September 2017, attempted to challenge the [political influence of the Ministry of Justice](#) in inducing the National Planning Council to overturn its decision to limit the scope of the plan, as revealed through responses to freedom of information requests submitted by Ir Amim. Following the apparent intervention of the Justice Ministry, the National Planning Council reversed its decision to scale back the area of the plan by half; in so doing, validating the District Committee's original 2014 approval of the full plan (but for a one story height reduction).

The Kedem mega-complex will be located directly across the street from its counterpart, City of David, completing a corridor of settler run sites running from Palestinian neighborhoods north of the Old City, through its center, and terminating south of its walls in Silwan. For years, Ir Amim has strenuously challenged this future showpiece of the ELAD enterprise, completion of which will further facilitate its intensifying grip on Silwan, its erasure of the Palestinian presence in Silwan, and the normalization of a singular nationalist Jewish narrative promulgated in tourist sites that attract hundreds of thousands of visitors from Israel and around the world every year.

Cable Car Project

The Kedem decision also has implications for the new cable car project, designed to expedite the flow of tourist traffic from West Jerusalem to the Old City and surrounding holy sites ([link here for background](#)) by funneling up to three thousand tourists per hour into the historic center of the city. One of the stations for the cable car will be situated on the fifth floor roof of the complex (exceeding a maximum height stipulated in three separate planning committee discussions), thereby blocking views of the Old City walls. Locating the station on top of ELAD's new headquarters will further normalize settlement operations in Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem in and around the Old City and by directly linking to West Jerusalem, the cable car will further obscure the distinction between East and West Jerusalem.

Loosening National Park Planning Policy to Enable Settler Construction

On January 10, the Interior Committee of the Knesset convened to discuss a bill promoted by Roi Folkman (Kulanu) and Nurit Koren (Likud) aimed at creating a new category of national parks to open the way for construction for urban purposes. The law currently allows only for construction "required for the functioning of the national park."

The chairman of the committee opened the session by inviting ELAD founder David Be'eri to elaborate on the settler organization's needs. Be'eri submitted that because the master plan required to greenlight ELAD construction projects has been stuck for years, new legislation is needed to ease impediments to ELAD's expansion. Though the discussion closed without any immediate steps taken to promote the bill, representatives of relevant ministries openly extended their commitment to supporting Be'eri's agenda.

It is clear from the discussion in the Interior Committee that future legislation would be used to benefit settlers while precluding any form of Palestinian community development. This is one of many examples of the malleability of planning and building law as it pertains to government support of settler projects, including the fast tracking of the cable car project through the National Infrastructure Committee to evade the public hearing process; and the justice minister's intervention in the planning process to pressure the National Planning Committee's reversal of its own decision to limit the scope of the Kedem Compound.

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