

**Press Briefing with Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem Naomi Tsur
23.06.10 at TIP, Jerusalem Office**

Briefing Highlights

Introductory remarks:

- Deputy Mayor Tzur: there are various misunderstandings of the municipality structure and system. We have an elected city council, currently held by Nir Barkat, without a political affiliation/political party. This is different to other parts of the world as you can have a municipal organization running a city without a specific leading political party affiliation.
- As an environmentalist, believe the municipality system is developed, with public participation in all processes in city affairs.
- There are three major sectors in Jerusalem: 35% Arab population, 22% Ultra-Orthodox, liberal Jewish and others make up the rest.
- The planning system: Here, there is a triple layer, like a legal system, but running parallel to it. There is a local planning committee – members of the city council, after recommendations headed by the city engineer.
In Jerusalem, I head as a political representative with the engineer. Before something reaches local planning committee, it goes to the urban planning committee. Most plans, especially with a wider context...wide participation.
- As an environmentalist... nothing to do with politics before elected at the end of 2008. Always fighting the system in those years. Everyone knows not going to have everyone satisfied...but can get all views out there to have a more informed decision. Can be appealed, even when planning sectors make a decision.
- The regional planning committee can be compared to regional or district court in legal hierarchy. Another level is national planning council, which will address major national plans and will deal with appeals in local or regional plans.
- Checks and balances – a result of the system introduced by the British Mandate... would like to see the public more...
- All this planning, even major plans, take quite a few years, with changes along the way... hopefully what they get at the end of this is the right plan...

- The city of Jerusalem area includes the most important world heritage landscape – visible basin of the old city. When came into office – informed about Silwan neighborhood... illegal buildings that hadn't been through a planning process. Hundreds of court orders existed to demolish illegal structures.
- Mayor asked in the beginning, a feeling of not wanting to start his term with that type of action. Called in for strategic planning. **Don't think should look at how many buildings need to be pulled down, need to look at what can leave up.**
- Brought in expert planners and thinkers on historic significance of the area - important to the three monotheistic religions.
- Came up with plan in which by looking at the contour of the hillside and the valley, could allow about 4 stories for Silwan and neighborhood, and 2 stories in valley if wasn't in area where flooded when rains. Because put up illegally...
- Sad reason: two watersheds (east and west) West – state of the art sewage system – both from Palestinian and Israeli neighborhoods. East – after Oslo Accords, possibility for German funding for a joint project shared by Palestinians and Israelis... and Palestinians did not feel able to go for it at the time. – as a result, 30,000 cubic meters of raw sewage are flowing into the Dead Sea on a daily basis.
- After joint project didn't happen, Israeli government took sewage and placed an under ground pipe to remove serious hazard... - lose-lose cycle for everybody.
- Vision: Would take us out of this place for a new plan for legalizing hundreds of building 66 of 88... in Bustan area that could be legalized and will be.... To add about 500 housing units for Arab-Palestinians of neighborhood and need to remove 22... however alternative housing will be provided.
- A lot work done for consensus in local population. Prospect for bringing prosperity to the region.
- Route Dead Sea to Old City – pilgrim route for Christians, Muslims and Jews. They used that route for different occasions and festivals – had different stations. 32 monasteries concealed in the desert landscape.... Live in poor conditions – but stations.... Would like to consider a time for that to be a prosperous route again.
- Exciting vision of Jerusalem - network of world cities that are a destination for pilgrims. Jerusalem one of founding cities of this network – China, Sikhs in India, raj Hindus, Acisi Italy if this sounds way out of why pulling 22 structures – we should first consider vision, tune into it and try to do what we can to get groups to tune in with it... this positive approach may radiate out from Jerusalem to the rest of world

Questions and Answers:

Q: Difference between planning and legal process?

DM Tzur: Planning is separate from legal. Civil society/individual can intervene at any point with appeal to high court... as a democracy very proud of this process ... also court has said when it can't deal with the process. If someone feels injustices being done – can appeal.

Q: Court can't stop process?

DM Tzur: Court usually, in cases of develop, would encourage a greater dialogue, true in most court systems. See if can reach an agreement.

Q: But they do have the power to stop process if can't come to an agreement?

DM Tzur: High court has tremendous authority.

Q: Alternative housing for the 22 residents... not being offered/will be fully subsidized?

DM Tzur: Would be offered new housing in the area...

Q: For price? Though some of issues, wont offered free.. would be able to move for no cost?

DM Tzur: An illegal structure is an illegal structure without any permit. Once we have a plan easy to get approval in that zoning. Someone who builds illegally shouldn't necessarily get compensation. But human case... so every intention in making easy process... "no one will be left on street."

Q: But, not offered free alternative housing

DM Tzur: Will be alternative arrangements made... no one will be out on the street.

Q: There is already an alternative plan from the residents, why not consider it?

DM Tzur: Two years ago – plan for valley. Residents met with an architect but they didn't bring plan to the city hall. Outside system can outflank and go to regional level which is what they did – regional plan examined and rejected the plan.

Q: What does the municipality system offer them [East Jerusalem residents]?

DM Tzur: issue of what happens to people while a large scale plan underway – have to be given place to live.... Light railway project (a national level initiative) – pulled down houses in Jaffa Road – of Israelis – had to provide with alternative places to live....

Vision: I'd like to give the dream – gave one aspect of possibility to regenerate basin.. to solve hazard . 30,000 cubic meters sewage.... Dead Sea is candidate for 'Seven wonders of world' – vision for Jerusalem... it is a city to be shared for all communities and interests of the city... shared, but not divided...

. Old city... need to try to do more with.

A potential with new housing 15000 units for each of three sectors including Gan Hamelch and Silwan... Equal in West and East Jerusalem.... Houses pulled down... Residents in East Jerusalem – don't engage in municipality politics- more bluntly - boycott municipality elections... think it's a pity for democratic society – should be a third of members ... if Ultra Orthodox could bring in mayor, they (Arabs) should be able to... Certainly a possible scenario...

Second... I opened up my committees...dialogue opened to all communities... think with our democracy and use of public domain – clinics, hospitals, zoos, deaf school (Arabs and Jews with same sign language together), parks... on Saturday.. see Arabs in Rose Garden, Orthodox on Shabbat walks.. secular Jews.. barbeque... all alongside each other.

Although (the city) has many problems, the vision is to build on our assets and build positive energy... in the city.... Everyone asks, how see the future status of the city? No one is asking us – been discussed at different political levels. What could be taken into account – what to be taken into account – three sectors – to be asked – what is there vision? I so deeply believe... shouldn't be basis – but very useful info that could influence decision.

Needs to cure some of wrongs from the last decades – we are a new administration.... No political alignments... one problem in east Jerusalem – when anyone planned on their property – personal development... and 100 or so do same – there is no community infrastructure, clinics, community centers etc.... important to take larger area – and to have necessary community structure... 45000 (housing) planned. Abdel ... architect; graduate of bezalel – East Jerusalem – how to join and go to build...

Q: (translated question from Arabic): You represented a very pink and positive image, in terms of what the municipality is offering East Jerusalem. Isn't there a policy of discrimination, for example process in Har Homa or Tzur Ba'hir?

DM Tzur: First going to speak about the security fence. Problem in the city...not a local planning decision (national)... would like to have one (city) without a fence... both sides would agree that would be a nice city without... but that's a fence that has saved lives – needs to be a primary consideration. From municipality – difficult to do anything beyond security fence within boundaries of Jerusalem... visited beyond – seen what conditions like – brought home to me dangers of illegal building... say building collapses – municipality is responsible...

Regarding, Tzur Ba'hir – visited two weeks ago – met with community leaders there – a non-profit green organization “only green” in neighborhood to try to set up model with residents to solve garbage issues and infrastructure issues – brought a whole team → garbage/health sanitation – whenever there is a possibility - we are trying to address those issues.

Situations created partly because of underdetermined status of Jerusalem in the international community.

As an administration, desperately trying to change... as poorest city in country – basic wrongs... not a perfect system... positive engagement... can create a positive environment to improve things...

Years of terrorism/intifada – once will be peaceful and calm ambiance in city. Now mature enough to enter in-depth dialogue.

Tzur bacher – little world of its on – doesn't want to be in general city dialogue... someone in charge of that area to make sure cleanliness/garbage dealt with and community issues are addressed. A kind of mini city... doing our best to make things work better... what I presented before... sounds pink because it is a vision – but not going to stay here stuck in the mud... Need a “sustainable Jerusalem.”

Q: From international perspective, hearing mainly political talk... when talk Jerusalem and east. Jerusalem – annexed.... Not recognized internationally... any movement there is political... legal aspect...

Very visible for both sides off the street- diff sides of world.... Asked for more participation – residents have come up with a plan – has there been a discussion on this plan in the municipality?

DM Tzur: all voices heard – in democracynot one voice in press... legal entities don't always agree, which is why high court is important... dilemma “damned if u do, damned if you don't”...

Could have possibly made peace in 1967. Half a century on... can't leave the city in a limbo... if it's illegal should we not do it? Difficult to get plan (they hear)... prime minister and defense minister... think not good timing. [Is every step] going to sour talks ?

We need to start yesterday with direct [peace] talks - more reason to engage than to sour and step back...

Q: Mayor told to have more discussions with residents.... What has happened?

DM Tzur: spoken to team/attended meetings – heard responses to plan – happy to concept being developed and imagine that not everyone will be happy at all time.... Alternative plan they have will be presented... part of process

Q: What about the municipal legal adviser who's not on board...

DM Tzur: Several people – interesting democratic system – engineer doesn't have to agree with mayor etc... plenty of leeway of argument in system – personally see this as a healthy system with debate going on.... We'll all discuss it. Will take time for all process.

Q: 22 structures – is there a demolition order? Still Discussions?

DM Tzur: No order. Important part of the plan is adding additional housing/prosperity trying to engage in residents this... may be negative things in past, but really trying to do things right.

Q: Now down to 22?

DM Tzur: Explained before, how mayor had 100s of orders... I suggested to look at what can leave there and disregard stack of orders... that was when expert thinking got us down to 22 so there is proper drainage... because flooding etc.. in that neighborhood... that's when change took place. Began to rethink planning in that whole

area – I think positive also takes into account community, world heritage and economic ...

Q: Could go down even further...?

DM Tzur: Of course. The planning process is a complex one... many developments can be changed....

Q: Part of plan to do with sewage ...

DM Tzur: being an enthusiastic environmentalist.... No joint solution when 1993 were given German funding... doesn't mean the Jerusalem municipality should leave alone... idea to move to western pipe which is state of the art... but now believe that problem – one hand removing environmental hazard, but removing resources for Palestinians – sewage is water... Water is one of most important sources..... Jerusalem wants to be a resilient city - needs to purify and save as much water as can... don't need lawns and swimming pools – need to change policies on water in Jerusalem– could be on of elements of prosperity would like to work with Palestinian partners to make this happen. There are plans.... Steering committee convened – in-depth discussions and different ways of doing this... plan to pump to west or to be used in eastern watershed... intermediary stage – hope will have greater dialogue with Palestinian leaders/Palestinian Water Authorities ... intermediary would do primary purification... would not be to standard required... but an improvement.

Q: When?

DM Tzur: Want to do as a state process....

Q: Has to go again twice to regional committee?

DM Tzur: can be lengthy time – approved/not approved... residents plan can be reviewed at this time... see what can be done together... can take years.

Q: Do you expect any more process/discussion in next two three weeks?

DM Tzur: No... municipality finished... city will conduct whatever interest/resident committees ask...

Q: Now moved to regional level?

DM Tzur: Yes

Q: What is power of the cabinet on not going ahead? After Ramat Shlomo, has pressure from the US to stop building in East Jerusalem?

DM Tzur: Ramat Shlomo is an ultra orthodox neighborhood that needs housing just as much as Arab population – not for PA state unless want 25,000 ultra orthodox in Palestine... can cabinet stop it? any point government, specifically regional and national council can say – lets change this/halt it ... entitled too – democratic system doesn't encourage that. There are countries where capital city is planned by national government, this change could also happen.

Q: Cabinet no pressure to stop?

DM Tzur: Not as of now....

Q: Before I came I was in Silwan at a press conference where they spoke of Israel confiscating 75% of land – 95% of houses...?

DM Tzur: The residents are grossly misinformed – park and road – are needed...

Q: Will try to legalize 66 of the 88?

DM Tzur: plan – to legalize most of illegal structures. If have a plan – that has 66 structures – then they become legal – healthy situation... with municipality... brave and right thing to do is to go into this plan... About 60% of land – not owned by people living on it – e.g. Greek Orthodox/Ethiopian and Armenian church.. land and house ownership are different things... entitled infrastructure that goes with that...

Eli: Thank you.