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Modernizing Planning and Development Regulations in the Gaza Strip, Palestine

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Abstract

The current planning and building regulations and by-laws prevailing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip do not fit the existing and the future Urban Development needs, hence reviewing and amending the existing planning by-laws becomes a must to achieve sustainable urban development in Palestine. The current building regulations depends mostly on determining the minimum setbacks and the maximum height limit the ability of architects to shape the urban form. This paper sheds light on new experiences to develop new set of regulations that the municipal councils have the ability to endorse in order to improve resilience of Palestinian communities through sustainable local development, building rights and access to basic services. These new attempts to update building and construction laws in the Palestinian territories will boost the efforts in the future to adopt regulations and standards that will achieve improved housing affordability, housing quality and sustainable human settlements.

Key Words: Participatory spatial planning, Building and construction laws, Integrated urban development and spatial planning, Affordable housing, Sustainable urbanization.

1. Introduction

Urban law and building regulations are the collection of policies, laws, decisions, and practices that govern the management and development of the urban environment. Inadequate regulations can be among the major barriers preventing innovative mayors and urban managers from creating reforms and overcoming the pressing challenges of their cities and urban systems. Many cities are burdened by laws that do not match the prevailing urban reality. Worse still, the capacity to enforce laws and regulations that are already in place is often lacking. Municipal authorities often have limited access to specialist legislative expertise, and struggle to respond to these situations. Reviewing and amending the existing planning laws and regulations becomes an important necessity; the planning and building laws prevailing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are old and needs to be adjusted to fit the existing and the future Urban Development needs. The adequate percentage of public facilities and green areas and the optimal ratio between built-up area and open spaces cannot be achieved within the existing building regulations which are mostly out of date.

Palestine was administrated by foreign powers: The Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians, the Egyptians and the Israelis. These foreign powers put the basis for the Palestinian local government system, but each was not able to empower the system in order to familiarize with local people interests and insights. Instead, local government was led by the central authority and used as means of control by the governing power rather than as a stimulator for social and economic development. These various administrations have affected the current building and Palestinian planning system, so that the existing laws, regulations, and orders looks like a mixture or composition of different previous laws and orders (Abdelhamid, 2006). Therefore, old laws govern many aspects of urban planning and have not been updated to reflect modern realities.

Urban planning in Gaza Strip has been ruled mainly by the British Mandate's 1936 TPO (Town Planning Law No. 28), where Egyptian and Israeli administrations approved it. The PA has considered it as the functioning urban planning law in Gaza Strip. However, the law stated that "A District Commission shall have power from time to time to make by-laws in respect of all or any town planning area within its District". The Palestinian Housing Council, in cooperation with UN-Habitat exerted great efforts to make use of this right and develop new by-laws and adopt new set of building regulations that correspond with the local condition of each town or city in the Gaza Strip.

Indeed, the partnership between UN-Habitat and the Palestinian Housing Council (PHC) has been strongly consolidated by their joint engagement in post-conflict activities started in the 2014. The joint efforts started to update the master plans of eight municipalities and to prepare sixteen detailed plans across the Gaza Strip, through Gaza Participatory Spatial Planning Program funded by the Swiss Agency for Development (SDC). Local communities have been heavily involved in the process with thoughtful consultation with

Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), municipal staff and other stakeholders. The team has developed a comprehensive business method and urban design guidelines to finalize the plans depending on local and international standards appropriate to the Palestinian built environment in the Gaza Strip. This paper sheds light on new experiences to develop new set of regulations as part of this project in order to improve resilience of Palestinian communities through sustainable local development, building rights and access to basic services.

The main character of the new sets of regulations is that it enables architects to design diverse urban forms as the new regulations fix Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and leave the possibility to shape varying forms in terms of heights and geometric arrangements. Thus, encourage residents to increase heights and minimize plot coverage area so that max. open space can be provided; this is especially important in the Gaza Strip where land is scarce, and the region is highly populated.

These new attempts to update building and construction laws in the Palestinian territories will boost the efforts in the future to adopt regulations and standards that will achieve improved housing affordability, housing quality and sustainable human settlements.

2. Planning Laws and Regulations in Palestine

2.1 History

Palestine was administrated by foreign powers: The Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians, the Egyptians and the Israelis. These foreign powers put the basis for the Palestinian local government system, but each was not able to empower the system in order to familiarize with local people interests and insights. Instead, local government was led by the central authority and used as means of control by the governing power rather than as a stimulator for social and economic development. Laws and regulations that were issued mostly for the benefit of these authorities and the impose of their power or control over land. These various administrations have affected the current building and Palestinian planning system, so that the existing laws, regulations, and orders looks like a mixture or composition of different previous laws and orders, including (Abdelhamid, 2006):

- British Mandate laws (between 1918-1948).
- Jordanian laws in the West Bank (between 1948-1967).
- Egyptian administration and orders in Gaza (between 1948-1967).
- Israeli military orders for the West Bank and Gaza since 1967.
- Orders issued by the Palestinian Authority since 1994.

According to the Israeli-Palestinian Agreements, all legislation existing prior to the advent of the Palestinian Authority (PA) will remain in force unless otherwise revoked by a joint Israeli-Palestinian legal committee,

thus most previous laws remain applicable in the West Bank and Gaza. Furthermore, any new legislation to be announced by the PA must be approved by the Israelis. So far, no new legislation has been approved through this procedure (Abdelhamid, 2006).

Indeed, with the formation of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 as a result of Oslo Peace Agreement, the planning responsibilities as well as other civilian issues and services were transferred to the related Palestinian ministries and institutions. The planning responsibilities and duties were mainly divided between the Ministry of Planning (MoP) and the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG). The physical planning activities at MoP concentrated on development of land and land use on regional (West Bank and Gaza) and national levels. During (1994-1998), MoP (previously named Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC)) has prepared two regional plans for the West Bank and Gaza with the pre-1967 borders. These plans represented the basis for the National Policies for Physical Development. Comparatively, MoLG took the responsibility of planning at the local level (municipalities and villages) within the areas under the Palestine Authority control (Abdelhamid, 2006). Figure 1 shows the regional plan of the Gaza Strip.

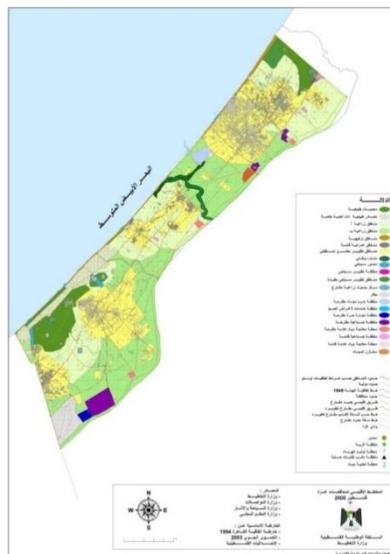


Figure 1: The regional plan of the Gaza Strip

Source: Ministry of Planning & International Cooperation (2005).

2.2 Planning structure in Palestine

The planning structure in Palestine is based on three main levels: National Plan, Regional Plan and Local Level Plans. Therefore, municipalities and village councils are the third level of action at the local level and are controlled by the MoLG. In 1994, there were thirty-one municipalities (twenty-six in the West Bank and five in the Gaza Strip), eighty-six village councils, and (225) localities without legal status. Nowadays

there are (136) municipalities (111 in the West Bank and 25 in the Gaza Strip) and (345) village councils. Table 1 below demonstrates the number of Governorates and municipalities in the Gaza Strip.

Table 1: Gaza Local Governments Geographic Distribution

Governorate	No. of municipalities
North of Gaza	4
Gaza	4
Deir Al-Balah	7
Khan Yunis	7
Rafah	3
Total	25

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics-PCBS (2018).

Accordingly, Gaza Strip is administratively divided into (5) governorates; each governorate consists of a number of municipalities. The total number of municipalities is (25); each of them is responsible for a number of localities. The total area of Gaza Strip is about (365) km², and the total population by the Mid of (2017) is estimated by 2 million (PCBS, 2017).

Table 2 shows the main palestinian cities in the Gaza Strip, their governorates, their areas and their populations according to the 2017 census estimate by the PCBS.

Table 2:Gaza Strip main cities population/area

Name	Governorate	Area in dunum	Population
Abasan al-Kabira	Khan Yunis	7,028	26,448
Bani Suheila	Khan Yunis	5,170	40,945
Beit Hanoun	North Gaza	11,670	51,615
Beit Lahia	North Gaza	14,373	88,768
Deir al-Balah	Deir al-Balah	15,300	74,237
Gaza City	Gaza	45,000	583,447
Jabalia	North Gaza	17,897	170,646
Khan Yunis	Khan Yunis	53,803	202,682
Rafah	Rafah	30,500	169,851
Az-Zawayda	Deir al-Balah	7,010	23,557

Source: PCBS, (2018).

The central areas of Gaza Strip were mostly dedicated to agricultural purposes. While the core agricultural area remains critical to Gaza’s sustainability, Gaza City/Jabalia (in the north) and Khan Younis/Rafah (in the South) are the two largest urban centres in Gaza Strip, with smaller villages in between. In addition to the city centres, Gaza Strip is home to eight refugee camps, each of which is extremely dense. Of the 2 million Palestinians living in Gaza Strip, 1.3 million are registered refugees with UNRWA.

Further, the growing population is estimated to rise to an estimated 2.13 million by the year 2020 which will only serve to exacerbate the current poor living conditions. The population density of urban settlements in the refugee camps is the largest in the Gaza Strip, further compounding risks to people during times of war and disaster, settlement patterns in the Gaza Strip are demonstrated in table 3. Outside the refugee camps, poorly planned communities are emerging in response to the growing population of Gaza Strip, which is barred from further expanding its territory (Reynolds. E., et al, 2015).

Table 3: Settlement patterns in the Gaza Strip

Governorate	Urban	Rural	Camp	Total	% of population
North Gaza	225,502	2,811	41,933	270,246	19%
Gaza	449,221	12,542	34,648	496,411	35%
Deir al Balah	129,050	1,873	74,612	205,535	15%
Khan Younis	218,061	15,213	37,705	270,979	19%
Rafah	132,506	6,308	34,558	173,372	12%
% of population per settlement type	81%	3%	16%	1,416,543	

Source: PBCS, (2009).

2.3 Landuse and Key Challenges

When the area, in dunums, of developed land at Governorate level in the Gaza Strip was calculated in GIS from the different time series layers, the analysis showed that all Governorates have experienced a significant increase in their built-up area. This noticeable urban trend could be due to the prevailing social conditions that have led to a horizontal urban expansion to take place instead of a vertical one to accommodate newly married families who prefer to split from their core families and live in separate houses. Table 4 represents the area of lands according to land use classifications.

Table 4: Landuse in the Gaza Strip

Landuse analysis	Area in dunums
Arable Land	119,620

Heterogeneous agricultural areas	943
Permanent crops	62,819
Permanently irrigated land (greenhouses)	14,544
Artificial non-agricultural vegetated areas	29
Industrial, commercial and transport unit	4,416
Mine, dump and construction sites	1,424
Open spaces with little or no vegetation	34,546
Open spaces with little or no vegetation (Shaved Area)	36,814
Shrub and/or herbaceous vegetation associations	7,589
Inland waters	891
Israeli Evacuated Settlement	2.66
Palestinian Built-up Area	76,410
Total Area	362.708

Source: Applied Research Institute - GIS Database, (2005).

The overall infrastructure of Gaza has suffered greatly through the last war; however, it is further weakened due to restrictions imposed by Israel on the import of building materials and the other necessary tools for development. The infrastructure of Gaza can be divided into four sub-sectors: housing and urban-development, energy, water and sanitation. Each of these sub-sectors is in critical need of support and recovery to significantly improve access for people and goods, living conditions and the livelihoods of ordinary Gazans.

Refugee camps also have high numbers of persons per housing unit and overcrowding in the refugee camps is a significant concern. High levels of poverty, disorganized planning, and lack of public spaces and green areas are the main challenges in the camps. According to UNRWA statistics, in Gaza, an average of 50 per cent of camp shelters are in poor conditions. Dwellings are mostly structurally unsafe, with walls poorly insulated and not water proof. Roofs are frequently irreparable and consequently in need for replacement. Ventilation is inadequate, and shelters are damp and musty, cold in winter and hot in summer. Many families are crowded into too few rooms and most of the roads are narrow, inaccessible and unlit (UNRWA, 2013).

3. Institutional structure issues

3.1 Role of local government units (LGUs)

Municipalities are responsible for preparing and implementing development plans (including physical plans), table 5 clarifies the main roles of LGUs. This potential role of local authorities allows them with considerable impact towards sustainable development. In order to fulfill these plans, it is important to have

the necessary resources which include human capital, the cost of the materials for producing the plans, and the cost needed for the implementation of investment plans (Elrantisi, 2013).

Table 5: Mandated activities held by municipalities

Activity field	Activities
Technical Field	Town planning and road construction
	Building licensing and control
	Water supply, construction and management
	Sewage management, construction and control
	Building demolition
	Public transport
Financial/Health/Technical	Public markets management
	Licensing of trades and businesses
Health/Technical	Public health, collection and disposal of solid waste
Administrative/ Health/Social	Public entertainment control
Social/Health	Hotel operation control
Technical/Administrative/ Social	Public parks
Cultural/Social	Cultural and sport activities
Administrative/Financial	Control of peddlers and open markets
	Advertisement control
	Budget and LGU personnel
	Management of LGU assets
Mixed	Weights and measures control

Source: CHF, (2010).

One of the main purposes of any planning process is to advance principles of transparency and accountability for municipalities in order to assist them in leading by example in their own governance and practices. Municipalities form part of an overall legal and constitutional system within their respective bodies, and are accountable to various parties, including legislative bodies and the public. Municipalities are also responsible for planning and conducting the scope of their work and using proper methodologies and standards to ensure that they promote accountability and transparency over public activities, meet their legal mandate and fulfill their responsibilities in a complete and objective manner.

Good governance is a key factor in underpinning the integrity and efficiency of a municipality. Poor municipality governance can weaken a municipality's potential, can lead to financial difficulties and in some cases can cause long-term damage to a municipality's reputation. A municipality which applies the core principles of good governance; fairness, accountability, responsibility and transparency, will usually outperform other municipalities and will be able to attract donors and investors, whose support can help to finance further growth and development. Transparency and accountability need each other and can be mutually reinforcing. Together they enable citizens to have a say about issues that matter to them and a chance to influence decision-making and hold those making decisions to account. Each concept is part of a strategy used for and by citizens to have the means, resources and opportunities to influence decision-making and affect development outcomes.

4. Modernizing the Current Planning Laws and Building Regulations

The proposed amendments of the current planning laws and regulations aims at supporting citizens to achieve proper access to good health, dignity and citizenship through assisting residents to access sufficient, affordable and good quality housing. Moreover, it is expected that new regulations can stimulate the national economy through investment, the absorption of labor, the development of new technologies, and the creation of sustainable development, including more compact urban growth and prudent management of land, water and other natural resources. To attain the vision of "sustainable human settlements" the planning laws and regulations should promote a new sustainable growth model for human settlements in Palestine in general and in Gaza Strip in particular, where it is necessary to recognize the region's limited land and natural resources. Thus, the sustainability aspect relates to the need for compact urban development that respects Gaza Strip environment and scarce natural resources.

Sound planning policy is based on guiding principles that maintain socio-economic sustainability; mainly the urban areas should cover the human need for adequate basic services and infrastructure, transportation, environmental sustainability, community, and social facilities, such as schools, healthcare centers, etc. To ensure environmental sustainability, urban areas and neighborhoods should be integrated in spatial plans at national and local levels that emphasize the need for compact urban growth rather than unregulated sprawl. This is particularly important in Gaza Strip, which has the highest population density of the region and a fragile ecosystem.

Adapting new building regulations should also enable developers and contractors to produce more affordable housing including the development of the apartments and high-rise property law of the year 1996. The overall vision guiding the review of legal and regulatory instruments should be the promotion of sustainable human settlements. Human settlements are more than just housing units alone; they encompass also the vital physical and social infrastructure for households, including bulk infrastructure (water,

electricity, roads) and access to transportation and key social amenities, such as schools, markets, and attractive living environments, including safe public spaces, which should encompass need for gender sensitive spatial planning.

Governments must create mechanisms and institutions to develop and implement such a policy. At the national and regional levels, human settlements planning should be coordinated with the vision, goals and concrete plans to be formulated under the National Spatial Plan for Palestine (NSP) and relevant sector policy processes that concretely relate to planning in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, it is important to integrate spatial planning at national and regional/local levels with human settlements planning and reviewing the legal and regulatory framework in all domains; and adapting planning policies to promote greater consistency between lands needed for future development and natural resources protection. In addition, a human settlement policy must seek harmonious integration or co-ordination of a wide variety of components, including, for example: population growth and distribution, employment, shelter, land use, infrastructure and services.

The legislative and regulatory framework governing construction and planning in the Gaza Strip needs to be reviewed and reformed. Several important laws and standards date from the British mandate period and require updating to reflect current conditions and new policy challenges, including the need for affordable housing and sustainable human settlements. This legislation from the 1936 is no longer adequate to regulate current construction in the Gaza Strip.

4.1 Institutional capacity and human resources

At present the Ministries lack the institutional capacity and human resources to properly fulfill their role as enablers, and the coordination between Ministries is required to be promoted. It is important to improve the technical, administrative and coordination capacities of central and local government institutions to better guide human settlement planning and development. At local level, the policy framework for local government units is still unclear and the performance and human resource capacities of LGUs are still weak. The PNA should commission a review of the current institutional structure as well as the institutional capacities of the main public sector bodies involved in urban planning. The review should assess, first of all, to what degree the institutional structure as a whole is set up to produce integrated sustainable human settlements policies and planning. Second, the review should identify the main capacity gaps within key central and local government institutions active in the planning issues. Central government bodies, led by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MoPWH), have the task of creating an appropriate climate for a sound housing sector, through policymaking, spatial planning at national and regional levels, regulation and oversight.

Furthermore, efforts should be exerted to improve the institutional capacity of planning sector bodies. Improvement of institutional capacities is required at two levels: through capacity development of key public sector institutions and through better coordination and cooperation between key planning sector institutions, including between Ministries and between central and local government. Citizen participation in local development plans, including plans for housing projects, is essential to ensure social sustainability and community support. Participation should become better institutionalized in the local planning process. The review should propose recommendations for institutional reform, capacity improvement and human resource development.

First: **at central government level** there are several capacity development priorities:

- Creation and institutionalization of a clear policy framework for achieving sustainable human settlements;
- Information exchange, coordination and cooperation between Ministries and other central government bodies;
- Creation of a clear policy framework and instructions for local government units and joint service councils, in the areas of development planning and land use planning;
- Integration of institutional reforms and capacity development measures with the review and reform of the legal and regulatory framework for housing supply, housing finance and the construction sector.

Second: **at local government level** there are also significant capacity development priorities:

- Institutionalization and communication of the policy framework and instructions for local government units and joint service councils, in the areas of development planning and land use planning;
- Addressing shortcomings in the function and quality of master plans: emphasize importance of master plans as instruments of guided planning and development control;
- Development and institutionalization of mechanisms and instruments to enhance community participation in the planning and evaluation processes;
- Human resource development measures aimed at all of the above, to enable LGUs and joint service councils to carry out their tasks.

4.2 Legal and regulatory issues

Why is it important to amend the current planning laws and regulations?

Present land and housing development in Palestine are driven for the most part by individual owner-builders and is largely spontaneous, with only minimal state regulation. The resulting urban development takes the form of low-density urban sprawl characterized by a lot of irregular building activity. In a small territory with severe land pressures and high population density, this type of “informal” development represents a

grave threat to Gaza Strip future development prospects as it eats up precious land and puts added pressure on Gaza limited water and other natural resources. Therefore, it is necessary to promote a new sustainable growth model for human settlements in Gaza Strip that recognizes the region’s limited land and natural resources. Legal and regulatory issues to address should include the following: consolidating existing laws, bylaws and regulations in the areas of licensing, comprehensive land management (including Land registration), investment, finance, local government and property from different historical periods (including Ottoman, Egyptian, Jordanian, Israeli military orders, and current Palestinian regulations and legislation).

The Palestinian planning systems is governed by an incomplete policy and regulatory environment and institutional fragmentation. On the one hand, old laws govern many aspects of urban planning and have not been updated to reflect modern realities. For example, according to the still valid laws from British mandate period (No. 28, 1936) the percentage of parcels (being redeveloped) that should be devoted for public domain should be 25% of the total area. This percentage was adequate at that period when road network was occupying small fraction of the land. However, and at the period of automobile, the road network itself occupies most of the 25%, leaving no space for other public facilities such as schools, clinics, green areas, etc.

Another problem in the current building regulations in the Gaza Strip is the issue of building densification. Actually, building density is increased by increasing plot coverage area rather than increasing the height (No. of floors). For example, residential areas class (B) and (C) have the same number of floors and just differ in the plot coverage area which is (60%) and (80%) respectively as shown in table 6.

Table 6: The legal considerations of the different land use in the structural plans in Gaza Strip

Land use	Min. parcel area (m ²)	Max plot coverage area (ground floor)	Floor no.	Maximum height	Setbacks		
					Front	Side	Back
Residential (B)	250	60%	G+4	20	According to street line	2	2
Residential (C)	250	80%	G+4	20	2	1	1
Sub-agriculture	2500	200m ²	G+2	10	5	4	4

Agricultural	5000	200m2	G+1	8	5	4	4
Commercial axes	250	70% (land specified for commercial shops)	G+4	22	According to street line	0-to depth 12 m, then 2m setback	2
Public areas	Building is not allowed in this area until a detailed plan is prepared						
Green areas	Building is not allowed in this area at all						
Light industrial area	Building is not allowed in this area until a detailed plan is prepared						
Roads (existing-proposed)	Building is not allowed in this area at all						

Source: Ministry of Local Government

Residential areas class (C) usually exist in the core of the cities and the building intensity has been increased there by increasing the plot coverage area due to the existence of traditional buildings and to correspond with the high price of the land inside the city center. In new urban centers, the building intensity have to be increased by increasing the number of floors while at the same time decreasing the plot coverage area to keep enough open spaces for recreation, lighting and natural ventilation. Such new housing pattern is expected to intensify the building in the area and at the same time save more lands for agriculture, open spaces, and green areas.

As residential area class (A) is un-implementable in practice (due to its low-density character) and class (C) is used in exceptional cases (old urban centers or informal settlements and slums), most of Gaza Strip residential areas are class (B). Using the same class/building regulations produces the same building intensity and encourages the construction of similar housing patterns and hinders the creation of residential units that corresponds with deferent levels of family incomes and all types of family background.

In addition, the current building regulations which depend mostly on determining the minimum setbacks and the maximum height (No. of floors) limit the ability of architects to shape the urban form. A new set of regulations that depend on determining the maximum allowable built volume can be examined to formulate better urban space relationship.

For example, a new pattern which has the same FAR (floor area ratio) as class C can be considered (both can have FAR = 4); this new proposed pattern can have plot coverage area = 50% and Max No. of floors = 8 (in contrary to class C which has plot coverage area = 80% and Max No. of floors = 5). Such new housing patterns are expected to intensify the building in the area and at the same time save more lands for agriculture, open spaces, and green areas. Figure 2 clarifies the building flexibility offered by FAR pattern.

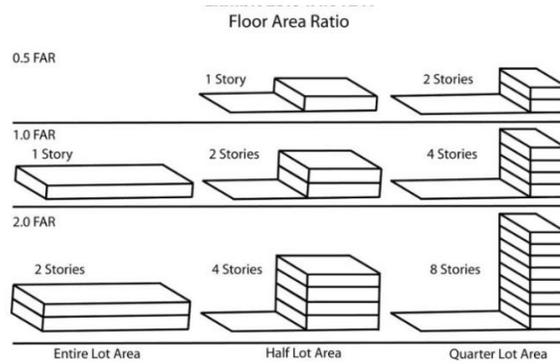


Figure 2: FAR as a tool for land densification through vertical resettlement

Source: Saint Paul Minnesota. (2015). RM2 multifamily residential to T2 traditional neighborhood. Retrieved January 10, 2019, from <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-economic-development/planning/current-activities/snelling-avenue-south-zoning>

One of the examples to introduce this kind of regulations is the new urban development areas which have been proposed by UN-Habitat/PHC project in Wadi Gaza master plan. The main character of the new sets of regulations in these areas, shown in table 7, is that both enable architects to design diverse urban forms as the new regulations fix FAR and leave the possibility to shape varying forms in terms of heights and geometric arrangements.

Table 7: New set of regulations in Wadi Gaza master plan for the proposed urban development areas

Area	Min. plot area	Plot coverage area	FAR (Floor Area Ratio)	Max. height	Setbacks (as in the plan)		
Urban Development Area (A)	500	40%	1.6	18	-	-	-
Urban Development Area (B)	400	50%	2	20	-	-	-

Urban Development Area (C)	300	60%	2.4	22	-	-	-
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Source: Developed through the Participatory Spatial Planning Support Programme, UN-Habitat and PHC.

As these new classes do not exist in the current building practices, it is necessary to discuss this matter and other related issues with the upper level administration related to urban planning in the Palestinian Territories to adjust the current norms to allow for more building density in the future development, while maintaining a good proportion between the residential blocks and the open spaces within it.

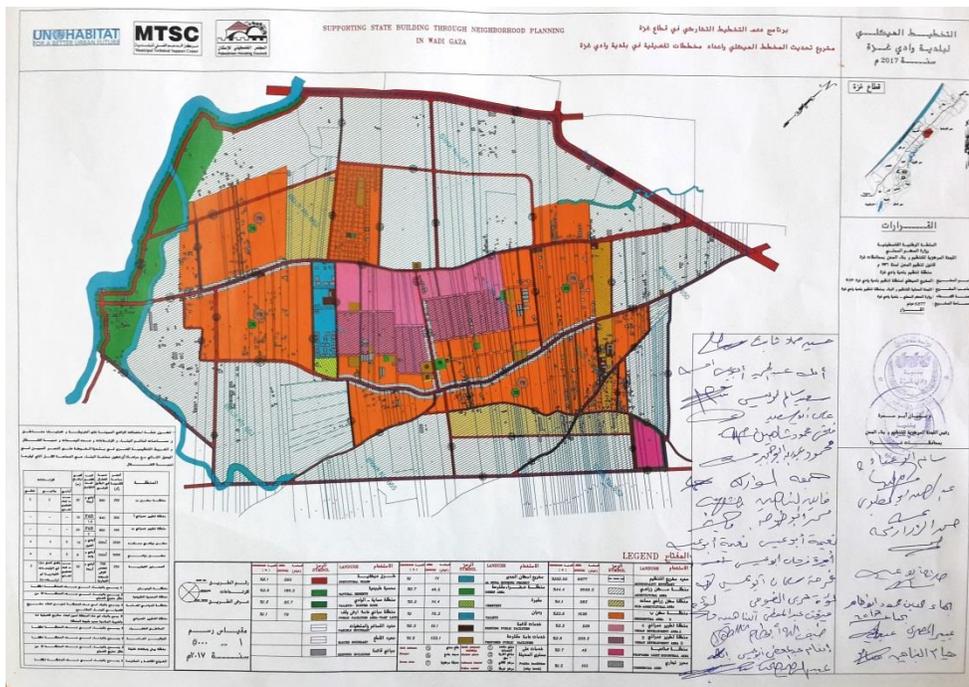


Figure 3: The new proposed urban development areas in Wadi Gaza updated master plan

Source: Developed through the Participatory Spatial Planning Support Programme, UN-Habitat and PHC.

4.3 New planning laws and regulations main principles

The following are key human settlement planning principles that have to be achieved in the new planning laws and regulations:

- Effective spatial planning (in regional and local contexts) prior to development;
- Housing development based on “smart growth”, including more compact cities, with higher densities, and guided land development based on national and regional spatial plans (National Spatial Plan);
- Coordinated public policymaking (i.e. across Ministries) to offer incentives (financial, land or otherwise) to the private sector to achieve new housing projects (at small as well as large scale), in urban infill locations and in urban expansion locations, including affordable housing;

- Integrated policymaking and implementation related to planning of land development; infrastructure provision; transportation networks; housing construction; and servicing;
- Effective solid waste management.

In order to increase the effectiveness of planning, the following interventions are needed:

- Spatial plans (“master plans”) must become more flexible and future oriented instruments, not rigid and static blueprints, as they are in many municipalities today;
- Residents, landowners, affected communities, and other local stakeholders should be involved and actively consulted in the spatial planning process;
- Decent alternatives—in the form of planning alternatives and/or just compensation, as determined by law—should be offered to landowners and other parties that will be affected by proposed human settlement schemes;
- Detailed plans should be prepared, within applicable spatial plans, outlining proposed housing projects and should be accessible to the public.

5. Conclusion

The objective of outline planning is to improve resilience of Palestinian communities through sustainable local development, building rights and access to basic services. Update building and construction laws in the Palestinian territories will boost the adoption of regulations and standards that will achieve improved housing affordability, housing quality and sustainable human settlements.

The PNA needs to integrate housing and urban development with effective national, regional and urban spatial plans. Spatial planning has a critical role in the process of urban and regional development. However, the multiplicity and rigidity of laws and regulations compel citizens to pursue informal routes to conduct land and property transactions, to do business, to acquire means of a livelihood, and even to access basic services. As a result, parallel systems flourish, and urban legal informality becomes the norm. Therefore, urban policies must be an essential component of an overall development strategy, linking and harmonizing them with policies on industrialization, agriculture, social welfare, and environmental and cultural preservation so that each supports the other.

Finally, the current planning laws and building regulations have served the Gaza Strip over the years; however, the time has now come to reflect on the growth and development which has occurred over the years, to consider current development issues and challenges, and to forecast how the region can be expected to grow into the future.

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List of tables

Table 1: Gaza Local Governments Geographic Distribution.....	6
Table 2:Gaza Strip main cities population/area	6
Table 3:Settlement patterns in the Gaza Strip.....	7
Table 4:Landuse in the Gaza Strip.....	7
Table 5: Mandated activities held by municipalities.....	9
Table 6: The legal considerations of the different land use in the structural plans in Gaza Strip.....	13
Table 7: New set of regulations in Wadi Gaza master plan for the proposed urban development areas	15

List of figures

Figure 1: The regional plan of the Gaza Strip.....	5
Figure 2: FAR as a tool for land densification through vertical resettlement.....	15
Figure 3: The new proposed urban development areas in Wadi Gaza updated master plan.....	16