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(Re)building Old-New Jerusalem

By Charles M. Haar

FCAMBRIDGE, MASS. FIVE YEARS ago, the original plan for the future development of Jerusalem, reflecting the conventional wisdom of the 1960's, stressed the cleaning of large areas, the construction of expressways, the tearing down of the old central business district and the substitution of more modern (and therefore, by definition, higher) buildings. Soon, thereafter, fortunately, there was a period of intellectual withdrawal from the bigger-is-better syndrome, and we could benefit from the perceived mistakes of the old planning theories as already applied in the metropolitan centers of the United States and Europe.

Hence, the first report of the Jerusalem Committee, an international advisory board, recommended a plan based on the strengths and values of the city as developed over time (its delicate social fabric, its intercommunal cooperation, its unique hills and lovely light and special local stone) and on the human scale of life that has cast a spell for centuries.

But while the report was accepted in principle by the Mayor, Teddy Kollek, and political administrators, they still had to contend with countervailing forces for large-scale building, the economic trends of the land market, and the experience of national defense as envisioned by certain ministers.

How could planning principles withstand the pressures, and in the detailing and in the day-to-day solution of problems how could a general vision of the city be preserved? These were the basic questions at a recent meeting of the committee, in Jerusalem.

What we found is most encouraging to report. The planning of Jerusalem has indeed been turned about, and the overall goals for the future have been formulated as organizing principles.

• To impose a coherent form upon the city's future growth, a green belt is being established around the urbanized area itself, and a necklace of parks and landscaped areas, designed for active use, has been interspersed around the walls of the Old City. Accomplishing these open-space objectives involves both considerable public expense and the ingenious use of donations from landowners.

• Heights have been scaled down on many proposed developments. On the whole, the bowl-shaped contour and human scale of the city promises to be preserved, although here and there building proceeds at a scale criticized by some experts. Laws of private property and development rights have meant, however, a continuous struggle between the expectations of individual developers and the new planning goals and needs of society.

• Eleven hundred buildings have been registered for special protection, to insure the preservation of monuments and historic districts. The Aksa

Mosque is being restored by the Moslem community, whose craftsmen are demonstrating that medieval skills are not totally lost.

• The city's unique architectural heritage is not only being preserved but actively enhanced. Diggings continue, under the supervision of distinguished archeologists. Of special note is an archeological park that will enable the 20th-century visitor to experience historical buildings, districts and ways of life.

• Planning and development activities under way recognize that Jerusalem after all is not a monument or a sterile museum but the vibrant and cosmopolitan capital of a modern nation. The central business district is being restored and new territory set aside for commercial facilities. Industrial-development plans emphasize job creation in electronics, pharmaceuticals and medical technology to supplement the employment base furnished by the Government.

• The lessons of our model-cities and poverty programs have been carefully distilled by the Jerusalem administrators. One result is the creation of planning districts for different economic, ethnic and religious groups, as well as the setting up of smaller decentralized city halls where local needs and desires can be expressed in the details of planning.

While the present redirection of the city's planning is encouraging, certain developmental issues still require more careful attention: retention of the vitality of the diverse cultural groups; accommodating the automobile, al-

ready the ruin of some of the world's greatest cities; harnessing of the forces of industrial development and mobility and migration; the specific means used to set priorities for capital expenditures.

However, beneath the committee's deliberations is a question of far larger import—the fate of the entire city and the nation of which it is a part. Most communities planning their future do not face such a question.

Given Israel's precarious position, a sense of uncertainty and danger necessarily intruded, at least subconsciously, into the meeting of the Jerusalem Committee.

In this light, the plan assumes a heroic stature by addressing the long-range and more pressing needs of Jerusalem's citizenry (for housing, jobs, green spaces) as if the nation's larger fate were not at stake.

After all, Jerusalem is an international center in which competing forces—political, social and religious—are at work, a city that has resonance far beyond its own borders and Israel's. Jerusalem's fate, depending on the larger world picture, is not at this time absolutely clear. Obviously, the national leadership proceeds as if things will work out well, and everyone hopes they will. This hidden concern gave the committee's entire proceedings a special poignancy.

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