

Masyaf Building Permits Suspended for Years as City Awaits Zoning Plan

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Construction work in Masyaf, a city in the western part of the Hama governorate, has been suspended for years after the city council refused to grant new building permits pending the release of amended zoning plans.

The suspension of construction permits in Masyaf has contributed to overcrowding in the city, which hosts many IDPS spurring a spike in real estate sale and rental prices, as demand has increased while supply remains low. At the same time, the city has not witnessed an increase in informal construction, as it has sought to [demolish buildings that are in violation](#) of construction codes.

Masyaf is the centre of a district including dozens of villages that are home to a diverse mixture of Ismailis, Alawites, Sunnis, and Christians. The size of the population currently residing in the district is unknown due to several large waves of displacement since the war began. The 2004 census recorded 170,000 residents.

In 2015, the Hama governorate council's executive office approved an amendment to the city's existing [zoning plans](#), which was meant to be completed by 2019. However, disagreements within the Regional Committee prevented the issuance of the amended plans. The Regional Committee is a technical body formed and chaired by the governor to hear objections to zoning plans. Its members include the directors of the technical services and antiquities departments of the governorate, as well as officials and engineers specialised in urban planning, and real estate experts affiliated with various government ministries.

The most vocal objector to Masyaf's amended zoning plan was the Director of Museums and Antiquities in Hama city, who represented the [Ministry of Culture](#) in the Regional Committee. The crux of his objection was that construction for the new zoning plan would cause damage to the Old City centre of Masyaf and threaten its historic souq with demolition. Messages sent by the [Ministry of Culture](#) to the Hama governorate, as well as decrees issued by the Directorate of Museums and Antiquities, asserted that Masyaf including the souq, must remain categorised as a historic site.

Owners of properties that fall within areas that would be included as parks and public utilities under the modified zoning plan also rejected the city council's proposal, which would require them to give up 50 percent of their equity shares in the zoning plots for the benefit of the council.

The first zoning plan for Masyaf was issued in 1961 and was amended several times until 1978. Under the 1961 plan, Masyaf was divided into two residential zones in addition to the Old City centre. Since then, however, the city has expanded outside the boundaries of the original zoning plan and its subsequent amendments; there are now five residential neighbourhoods in addition to the Old City.

Delays in releasing the city's updated zoning plan were reflected in the issuance of the plans for the new industrial zone, within Decree No. 1741 of 2010. The industrial zone plans were completed, and the technical services approved it in 2019. The zone is expected to extend over an area of 35 hectares--23.7 of which have been expropriated for the project so far, with work ongoing to expropriate the remainder.

Although the planned industrial zone is located outside Masyaf's city zoning plans, the two plans are

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linked in calculating the value of industrial shops that will be demolished within the city, as well as the shares belonging to the owners of those shops and the subsequent application process for plots within the new industrial zone.



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