

Israeli Mayors' Institute on City Renewal
Half-Year Summary Report, July 2010



שלום עם הסביבה

Synopsis

The Israeli Mayors' Institute on City Renewal, a unique and groundbreaking project, took off this year at the initiative of Merhav – the Movement for Israeli Urbanism (www.miu.org.il), in partnership with the Union of Local Authorities in Israel, the Ministry for Protection of the Environment, Joint Distribution Agency-ELKA, The Heschel Center, Maf'am (Regional Center for the Development of Administration in the Sharon Region), The Green Environmental Fund, The Samuel Sebba Charitable Trust, The Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, Israeli entrepreneur Nachman Shelef and the Jewish Funders Network.

The project aims to equip Israeli mayors with the knowledge and professional tools to advance sustainable urban renewal and local economic development, through intensive workshop sessions involving an experienced and multidisciplinary professional staff.

In 2010, the project's pilot year, workshops were scheduled in June and November. The workshops are modeled after sessions of the Mayors' Institute on City Design (www.micd.org), a reputed program in which, to date, 800 mayors from throughout the US have participated over the past 25 years. In each workshop, 7 mayors and 8 leading professionals in their fields come together at a quality location for a fully-funded opportunity to examine projects and issues they are facing in their city.

Our first workshop took place on June 1-3, 2010, with the participation of the mayors of Ashkelon, Nazareth, Giv'at Shmu'el, Bnei Brak, Kiryat Bialik, Hura and Mazkeret Batya, alongside a team of professional consultants and two planning experts from the US. In the months leading up to the workshop preparations included the hiring of a project coordinator, meetings of the steering committee, setting of criteria for selecting the mayors, meetings with the mayors chosen to participate, and promotion of media coverage on the project. Additionally, a workbook was produced containing all of the information on the agenda of the workshop, the mayors participating, and the members of the expert team, as well as details on the projects to be presented. This workbook was distributed to each mayor and member of the professional team ahead of the workshop to assist preparation.

The workshop was held successfully according to the preset schedule and within the planned budget. Mayors participating filled out a questionnaire on their expectations before the workshop and a feedback questionnaire at the end. They rated their general satisfaction at 5 on a scale of 1-5, and noted that they personally benefitted from the workshop and that it was very relevant to their work.

- The Mayor of Ashkelon: "[These were] new and instructive ideas that I had never heard before, and which I will implement in projects in the city."
- The Mayor of Mazkeret Batya: "In my whole seven-year service as mayor until now I've never been in as important a program as this workshop."
- The Mayor of Giv'at Shmu'el volunteered to continue working with the other mayors for the success of the workshop and the sessions to follow.
- The Mayor of Bnei Brak: "Active and successful participation was not a given, and you succeeded to keep the 7 mayors participating actively in all the discussions; they didn't leave and weren't passive."

The second session is scheduled to take place on November 14-16, and preparations on it began immediately following the end of the first workshop.

We wish to thank all of partner foundations and organizations for their support, in the hopes that we will continue on our shared path to promote a better urban environment for Israel.



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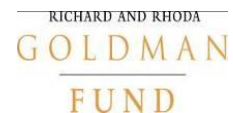
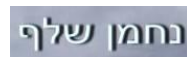


Introduction

The Israeli Mayors' Institute on City Renewal, a unique and groundbreaking project, took off this year at the initiative of Merhav – the Movement for Israeli Urbanism (www.miu.org.il). Merhav is part of the community of environmental organizations in Israel, yet is the only one focused on changing the urban built environment and working to develop the policies and professional tools needed to make a difference.

The Israeli Mayors' Institute on City Renewal is a project designed to promote change in the urban built environment in order to improve quality of life in existing cities and towns, by providing Israeli mayors with tools and knowledge. The Institute is based on the Mayors' Institute on City Design (www.micd.org), a reputed program in which, to date, 800 mayors from throughout the US have participated over the past 25 years.

This project was made possible by the support of the following foundations and bodies: The Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, The Green Environment Fund, The Samuel Sebba Charitable Trust, Israeli entrepreneur Nachman Shelef and the Jewish Funders Network. Additionally, partnerships were forged with the following organizations, which joined Merhav in order to advance the project: the Union of Local Authorities in Israel, the Ministry for Protection of the Environment, Joint Distribution Agency-ELKA, The Heschel Center, Maf'am (Regional Center for the Development of Administration in the Sharon Region).



2010 is the Institute's first year of activity, and was deemed the project's pilot year, in which two workshops would take place, the first in June and the second in November. The first workshop, summarized in this report, was determined to be a success by the mayors who participated, by external observers, and by the professional team involved. As such, the aim of this report is primarily to survey the achievements of the first workshop and inform the foundations and organizations who supported and helped advance the project. For us, this report is also an important opportunity to thank again those foundations and organizations for their support, in the hopes that we will continue on our joint path to promote a better urban environment in Israel.

Aims and goals

Mayors are the primary planners of Israeli cities and serve as chairperson on local planning and construction committees. Their role is extremely important, since mayors are responsible for setting the urban agenda and have the real power to influence the future development of cities in Israel. As such the aim of the Israeli Mayors' Institute on City Renewal is:

To provide Israeli mayors with knowledge and professional tools to promote sustainable urban renewal and local economic development through intensive workshops involving an experienced and multidisciplinary team of professionals.

Workshop structure

In each workshop 7 mayors of cities and urban local authorities and 8 leading professionals in their fields come together at a quality location for a fully-funded opportunity to examine projects and issues they are facing in their city. Each workshop also includes the participation of a well-known professional from abroad.

In the course of the workshop, each mayor personally presents the project in his city that he is interested in advancing, and then the mayors and the professional team examine each project and suggest tools and ways to bring it to successful fruition. In addition to the project presentations, several professional lectures will be given on urban planning issues by members of the professional team participating.

Mayors' participation in the workshop is free of charge, and mayors selected must commit themselves to the process and to full participation throughout the two-and-a-half days of the workshop.

Preparations for inaugural workshop

Assembly of Israel Mayors' Institute on City Renewal project team

- In January 2010 Eran Ravid was named as the Project Coordinator, part time for one year.
- In April 2010 Lilach Damti was named as assistant to the Project Coordinator and editor of the session workbook, full time for two months.

Establishment of Steering Committee

The Steering Committee includes representatives of the partner organizations involved in the project. At the two meetings held by the Steering Committee decisions were taken on the process for selecting mayors, recommendations on mayors to approach were voiced, criteria for evaluating success were set, as well as methods for cooperating in preparation of the first workshop. During preparations for the workshop, the Steering Committee was updated via email on a bi-monthly basis on the mayor selection process and on progress towards preparing the workshop. The Steering Committee was invited to the opening event of the workshop, and also to serve as observers during the workshop sessions in order to have a first-hand impression of the participants and products.

Selection of Mayors

1. The Steering Committee defined a list of criteria for selecting mayors, with an emphasis on composing a varied group that would enrich the workshop's learning process:
 - The urban character and size of the city or town
 - The city or town's geographic location
 - The mayor's seniority in the position, and chance of having an influence
 - Uniqueness of project offered by the mayor and whether it can still be altered
 - Extent of each project's effect on the city
 - Mayor's commitment and desire to learn
2. Several months prior to the workshop an invitation to participate in the workshop was circulated. The announcement was sent through the distribution list of the Union of Local Authorities in Israel and Joint Distribution Committee-ELKA. At the same time, several mayors recommended by the Steering Committee were contacted directly.
3. During March and April personal meetings were held with mayors who had expressed interest in the workshop in order to evaluate the possibility of their participation in the first workshop.
4. Once a mayor was selected for participation he was required to sign a commitment form detailing the obligations involved in participation in the workshop.

Selection of Professional Team and Guests from Abroad

Members of the expert consulting team were chosen following personal meetings with a number of candidates. The professionals who participated in the first workshop were: Prof. Hillel Schocken – architect and member of the Board of Directors of Merhav; Marc Render – transportation planner, consultant and director of AMAV planning office; Orly Ronen Rotem – consultant on environment and sustainability and Vice President of the Heschel Center; Dr. Dafna Carmon – jurist and urban planner; David Soket – architect and Vice President for planning and member of the Board of Directors of Africa-Israel Housing; Irit Solzi – architect and urban planner, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Merhav; Dror Gershon – architect and urban planner, Director of Merhav; Yonit Smolash – organizational consultant and senior program manager at JDC-ELKA; Steven Zecher – economist; Mordechai Zeid – real estate assessor.

Two planning professionals from the US were also invited to participate in the debut session: John Norquist – President and Director of the Congress for New Urbanism, former mayor of Milwaukee; Architect Neal Payton.

Preparation of the Mayors and Professional Team for the Workshop

In March and April, it was decided together with each mayor which project he would present at the workshop. In April and May, materials were collected on the cities and projects, including graphics and digital copies (via mail, email and visits in the various cities including meetings with the City Engineer). The materials were integrated into the workbook, which included: the workshop program and schedule, information on the host city (Tzefat), bios of the consulting professionals, bios of the participating mayors, background information on the cities and information on the projects each mayor would present, including maps, aerial photos and sketches. The workbook included 64 pages in total.

Three weeks before the workshop, a preparatory meeting was held with the members of the professional team, at which they were given copies of the workbook and expectations and explanations on the how the workshop would be run were discussed. All professional team members were asked to study the material, visit the participating cities and prepare suggestions and comments ahead of the workshop. Two weeks before the workshop the workbooks were sent to the mayors with a letter asking them to read through it in preparation for the workshop and prepare their presentations in accordance with it. During the week leading up to the workshop most of the mayors' presentations were received in order to ensure that the mayors would come prepared.

The inaugural workshop

The evening prior to the workshop, which was held in Tzefat, an evening to increase awareness of the workshop was held in Tel Aviv, to which members of Merhav and the participating mayors were invited. About 100 people came to the event, which took place at the Beit Ha'ir Museum, including planning professionals, students and other guests.

The first workshop took place in Tzefat on June 1-3, 2010, with the participation of seven mayors (Ashkelon, Nazareth, Giv'at Shmu'el, Bnei Brak, Kiryat Bialik, Hura and Mazkeret Batya), alongside a consulting team of professionals. The workshop took place as planned according to the preset schedule (as detailed in Annex 1). Workshop discussions were held in Hebrew and English, with simultaneous a translation service available through personal headsets. At the end of the workshop certificates of appreciation were presented to the participating mayors.

It should be noted that the mayor of Kiryat Bialik unexpectedly left half-way through the second day of the workshop (June 2) without notifying anybody, and therefore broke his commitment to attend the workshop in its entirety.

Public relations

One of the challenges of the first workshop was to spread word of the project and bring it to the awareness of the public. Towards this end, the leading project staff decided to make use of the services of public relations consultant Moni Mordechai. To summarize activity in this matter:

1. Public relations activity took place in April-June 2010
2. Public relations activities included:
 - Press releases in two versions, circulated both after the date of the workshop was set and following selection of the mayors
 - Initiation of breadth articles and interviews with the leading professionals on the team
 - Circulation of the press release on social networks and on internet sites like The Marker Café, News1
3. Media coverage before the workshop:
 - In April an interview with Dror Gershon was broadcast on the economic magazine of IBA radio - Reshet Bet
 - On April 8 an article was published in the Jerusalem Post, "Nation's first institute for mayors to teach urban renewal"
 - On April 26, an article appeared in The Marker
 - In May an item appeared in Yediot Aharonot
 - Yonit Smolash was interviewed on the Social Hour radio program 2 weeks before workshop
 - Director of Union of Local Authorities on Path to Nature radio program 2 weeks before
 - May 30: John Norquist interview in Globes financial paper's Real Estate section
 - May 31: Neal Payton interview in Calcalist financial paper
 - June 1: A long article on the Institute published on Ynet (Yediot Aharonot online)
 - June 3: An article on the Institute in Haaretz newspaper's Galeria arts section
 - June 3: Israel TV Channel 1 covered the Institute on "From Any Place" program
4. Media coverage following the workshop:
 - June 16: 40-minute panel discussion aired on Micky Miro's Social Hour radio program (IBA Reshet Bet) with heads of Merhav and mayors of Ashkelon and Bnei Brak
 - An article in the Contractor and Builder professional periodical is expected in July
 - Mekor Rishon newspaper expected to publish interview with Giv'at Shmu'el mayor in July
5. Following completion of summary and feedback, there could be continued coverage in The Marker and/or Calcalist. Public relations work could continue ahead of the second workshop, particularly regarding media which did not meet their potential.
6. Micky Miro committed to continuing to follow the Institute until the workshop catches on
7. Conclusions and insights:
 - All in all there was wide media coverage, positive and thorough
 - Not all media covered the workshop: Environment writers did not find it interesting, Galei Tzahal was not interested, and neither were current events shows or other journalists. The reasons are varied but understandable: It would be hard to link the workshop into a current events program that chases daily happenings.

- Nonetheless, we were given a podium in Real Estate sections, on various Reshet Bet programs, and almost every kind of media covered the Mayors' Institute in some way
- We are very satisfied with the media coverage, given the fact that the Mayors' Institute is very focused on a small target audience, and its influence on the general public is as yet more hypothetical than factual. We should resist making conclusions regarding future coverage based on a specific media organ's lack of interest; future coverage depends on factors that are not always in our control.
- The experience accumulated, operational informed assumptions, and changes on the ground, are liable to increase the chances of continuing to float the Mayors' Institute in the media. Another factor that could help would be the formation of some kind of public relations mechanism for the Mayors' Institute that would publish opinion articles and position papers.

Mayors' Feedback

The participating mayors answered a questionnaire on their expectations prior to the workshop, and a feedback questionnaire at the end, in order for the project team to see any changes in the mayors' positions, and to receive feedback on the workshop's content and logistics. The mayors rated their overall satisfaction with the debut workshop as 5 on a scale of 1-5. They noted that the workshop benefited them personally, and was very relevant to their work. They felt that they received a significant professional benefit, and nearly all answered that they recommend integrating the following three elements into future workshops as well: expert lectures, presentation and discussion of a project by each participating mayor, and exposure to colleagues' projects. The mayors greatly esteemed the professional management of the workshop, as well as its administration and the quality of the lodging.

The mayors answered that they learned much from the discussions that took place on their own projects, as well as from the analysis of projects presented by their colleagues. They said that these discussions exposed them to a wide variety of new opinions and perspectives, broadened their horizons, allowed them to learn much from others' experiences, and also encouraged them to plan for the long term. Even more so, they noted that their participation in the workshop burst commonly believed falsehoods regarding urban planning, such as the conception in favor of separating housing and commerce, which was undermined during the workshop discussions.

Asked whether they would do different plans in their cities today, after the workshop, as opposed to in the past, four out of the six mayors who responded to the questionnaire answered positively. They noted that in future planning they would put an emphasis on planning of streets (balancing housing, commerce and employment), and on transportation planning and accessible, comfortable pedestrian traffic. The mayors noted in this context that they would carry out additional checks of plans, and present the recommendations that arose in the workshop to the planning professionals in their city.

The mayors also noted several points for improvement in their feedback:

1. The aims of the workshop should be more clearly defined, and more time should be dedicated to coordinating expectations ahead of the workshop and thereafter.

2. The workshop should be more spaced out: The mayors need time in between the parts of the workshop to handle local crises in their city, felt that the intensiveness of the lectures and surplus of information led to a decrease in concentration, and would also like to have time for informal sideline discussions with their colleagues and with the members of the professional team present.
3. It would be best to hold the workshop in the middle of the week (Monday-Wednesday) and not on Tuesday-Thursday, as the first workshop was.
4. It would be possible to examine each project more completely if fewer projects would be presented.
5. Significant projects for each city should be selected.
6. For future workshops we should consider including a mayor with experience participating in an earlier workshop.
7. A district planner should be included on the professional team.

Recommendations of the professional team

1. Reduce the size of the professional consulting team, and do broader, more in-depth preparation work ahead of the workshop, with an emphasis on case studies, examples and illustrative sketches.
2. Manage the discussions in the workshop such that the time dedicated to presenting the projects would be reduced and more time would be given to the discussion itself, with each professional giving primary emphasis to his/her own area of expertise.
3. Dedicate the first evening to presenting the cities participating and introducing the members of the professional team, such that discussions during the workshop itself could focus purely on the projects and professional lectures.
4. Focus the lectures integrated into the workshop discussions to ensure that they better support the material that needs to be conveyed to the mayors.

Follow-up work with the mayors

- Two weeks after the workshop, each mayor received a summary of the discussions and recommendations regarding the project that he presented in the workshop.
- On July 1, a meeting was held with the Minister for Protection of the Environment, in which the mayors who participated in the workshop presented their impressions.
- In July and August personal meetings have been scheduled with the mayors who participated in the workshop in order to examine how to continue working together.

Budget

The workshop did not exceed the budget planned – budgetary details are in Annex 2.

The next workshop

The second workshop of the same model is scheduled to be held on November 14-16, 2010. This session will also take place at the Villa Galilee Hotel in Tzefat.