

# Toward Metropolitan Parks: The Case Of The Ayalon Park



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**F**rom garbage mountain to flowering park: transforming vision into reality

A new term has been introduced into Israel's planning jargon - metropolitan parks. Throughout the country - in the Jerusalem, Haifa, Tel Aviv and central regions - metropolitan parks have begun to appear on planning maps. In the central region of the country alone, no less than eight metropolitan parks have been designated.

**What is a metropolitan park? How does it differ from an urban park, national park or nature reserve?** These are some of the questions addressed in an ongoing study initiated in 2002 by the Ministry of the Environment, the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

According to the interim conclusions, a metropolitan park is a large open area, characterized by a variety of natural and landscape features and/or by continuous open areas such as large expanses of agricultural land, which responds to social needs for recreation and leisure. Metropolitan parks are rooted in regional plans and are situated in close proximity to urban centers but not within city bounds, thus serving as buffers between built-up urban entities.

## The Ayalon Park: A Park in the Making

The Ayalon Park is a salient example of a metropolitan park in the making. The April 2005 government decision to establish the 800-hectare Ayalon Park was a major victory not only for the country's green organizations, which battled long and hard for the park, but for the 1.5 million residents of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area.

A major landmark in the planned Ayalon Park will be the rehabilitated Hiriya landfill which served the Tel Aviv metropolitan area for fifty years until it was closed down in 1998. This geometrically shaped landfill looks like a table mountain, with steep slopes descending into the banks of the two rivers surrounding it - the Ayalon River and



View from Hiriya. Photographer: Danny Sternberg



## Metropolitan Parks - Goals and Aims

- To address social needs for leisure and recreation in close proximity to major urban areas.
- To preserve continuous open spaces as buffers between built-up areas.
- To protect nature and landscape resources and biodiversity and to serve as ecological corridors.
- To contribute to quality of life and the environment and to the image of the city and the region.
- To stimulate plans for urban open spaces adjacent to the park.
- To create an area with high educational value for environmental and physical education.
- To create a place of refuge and rest.
- To contribute to the infiltration of runoff.

the Shapirim River. Its summit offers a panoramic view of the entire southern part of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. The plan calls for the transformation of this landfill, long an aesthetic blight in the center of the country, into a central element at the heart of the new park.

The rehabilitated Hiriya landfill will be integrated into the park as a dramatic hill adjacent to agricultural fields, an archaeological site and the historic Mikveh-Yisrael agricultural school. Some parts of the park will be designated for recreation and leisure, others for a waste recycling park, and yet others for floodwater collection.

#### **Toward Development of the Ayalon Park**

The April 2005 government decision on the Ayalon Park made it abundantly clear that public parks are not real estate. Based on the decision, an interministerial committee is drafting recommendations for the creation of an administrative body which will be responsible for establishing, planning, developing and maintaining the park.

Although there is still much to do – technically and financially – plans for the implementation of the park are definitely progressing. Last year, on the holiday of Tu B'Shvat (Arbor Day), children from about 100 schools took part in a major tree-planting ceremony at the park. Today, bicycle paths are in service and waste recycling and methane collection are already a reality in Hiriya. Hopes are ripe that plans for what promises to be one of the world's most unique parks – environmentally, economically and socially - will indeed be fulfilled.



## MARTIN WEYL ON THE AYALON PARK

**Director of the Beracha Foundation, Former Director of the Israel Museum.**  
*The Beracha Foundation is the motivating force behind the idea to transform the former Hiriya garbage mountain into the heart of a major metropolitan park. Israel Environment Bulletin talked to the Director of the Beracha Foundation, Dr. Martin Weyl, on June 6, 2005 to find out the "hows" and "whys" of the Foundation's involvement in the Ayalon Park project.*

### **Why did you choose to concentrate your efforts on the transformation of Hiriya from the most infamous garbage mountain in the country into the center of a major metropolitan park?**

I have always been bothered by Hiriya, how it looked, how it smelled and what it represented: lack of wise ecological management. The site resembled a wound in the heart of the country, something nearly immoral, a place that had no place in decent society. I wanted to change this.

### **What did you do to promote your vision?**

I tried to interest different environmental organizations in my ideas as far back as 1996-7, but no one was interested. Therefore, I took a lift with a garbage truck to the top of the garbage mountain to look for myself. I became convinced that something interesting could be done.

Fortunately, the time was right. Hiriya was in the process of being shut down. I came up with the idea of calling on artists to come up with proposals for changing the dump into an interesting new site open to the public. I managed to convince the chairman of the Dan Association of Towns for Sanitation of the possibilities. I also convinced the Board of Directors of the Beracha Foundation to organize a major exhibition which would show what could be done. The idea was conceptual – to focus attention on this garbage mountain and see if it was possible to change it from a negative symbol to a positive icon.

I used the exhibition in a political way and invited all of the relevant people - representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, other government ministries, Jewish National Fund, planning authorities, the Speaker of the Knesset, mayors of the surrounding municipalities. It was then that the district planner of Tel Aviv came up to me and asked whether the Beracha Foundation could become involved not only in Hiriya but also in its surroundings in order to transform the entire 800-hectare area into a major metropolitan park.

### **What was the next step?**

I strongly believe that if you do something you should do it right - at the highest level and at the highest quality. Since Israel did not have the experience to plan such a site, we sought the help of top international specialists with expertise in the rehabilitation and development of contaminated areas.

Most importantly, we were able to form a unique coalition of public and private bodies which allowed us to do things that government bodies could not do. We brought in top specialists, held seminars, workshops and an architectural charrette, published papers and developed a master plan with the aid of landscape architects from all over the world and Israel. This allowed us to "oil" the machinery, establish facts, raise awareness, promote educational activities and continue with a more detailed plan of the park at the highest possible level.

Just last summer, we organized an anonymous international competition for landscape





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### The Ayalon Park: Historical Landmarks

- **1998** Hiriya landfill shut down following nearly 50 years of service.
- **1998** Tel Aviv District Planner initiates a statutory outline plan (Plan 5/3) for the area of the Ayalon Park aimed at changing its designation from agricultural land to "reserve for park uses."
- **1999** International exhibition of proposals by artists and architects for the restoration of Hiriya in the Tel Aviv Museum.
- **2001** International planning workshop to formulate pragmatic recommendations for advancing the Hiriya rehabilitation plan.
- **2002** Outline Plan 5/3 is deposited for objections. Twenty objections are filed between September 2003 and February 2004.
- **2003** International planning workshop (Charrette), attended by 30 experts, lays the groundwork for the Ayalon Park master plan.
- **2004** Subcommittee of the National Planning and Building Board gives a go-ahead to the Ayalon Park and rejects demands for residential building on some of the land designated for the park.
- **2005** Israel government approves a decision to establish the Ayalon Park in an area spanning 800 hectares.

### Hiriya: ID Card

- Operated as the main landfill of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area for nearly 50 years (1952-1998)
- Quantity of accumulated waste: about 16 million m<sup>3</sup>
- Height above the surrounding area – about 60 m
- Height above sea level – about 80 m
- Average slope gradient: 1:1.4
- Area: about 50 hectares

planning of the garbage mountain, with the aim of turning it into a park, and have subsequently opened an exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum.

#### Are you pleased with the progress made?

A park like this cannot be built overnight. We are proceeding in sections according to the funding opportunities. While more detailed planning is still required, we can already start to implement the Hiriya part of the plan where the land is available. Other parts will take longer. Without doubt a major milestone in the process was the unanimous decision of the National Planning and Building Board to approve the park plan. This may be attributed to effective though quiet lobbying and to the fact that the Prime Minister was behind the plan. It has been said that "success has many fathers but failure is an orphan." The fact that we were able to build up a coalition of so many interested groups is a symbolic event in Israel's environmental history. The ripples grew larger and larger and more and more people became involved.

#### What are your wishes for the future?

I hope that this international effort based on stakeholder participation will become a model of how to rally socio-political, cultural, and economic resources around the cause of the urban environment and to create ecological and community consciousness in the process.

In the case of Hiriya, it seems to me that the big battles have already been won and the time has now come to put the technical aspects into place. Although there is still much to do, it is important for me to transmit the message that it is still possible to transform even the most environmentally degraded area into something positive, interesting and even beautiful. It is my hope that Hiriya and its environs will indeed be transformed into a high quality park whose special design will attract visitors from Israel and abroad.