

## Spatial Planning in the Republic of Armenia

According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Urban Development, the main issues of the Republic's spatial development and actions for their solution are stipulated by national, regional and local level fundamental urban planning documents.

### **National level:**

RA General Resettlement Project

RA Project on Spatial Planning



### **Regional level:**

Spatial planning projects



### **Local level:**

Master plans

Zoning plans

Armenian spatial system has been formed based on the factors typical for Soviet era administrative methods of planning management. As for the planning structure, it reflects distribution and resettlement of production capacities, which were developing in accordance with the role of Armenia allocated in the Soviet Union economic system.

The RA General Resettlement Project was developed and approved in 2003 based on national level documents. It is an analytical type of standing and regularly updated urban development project document supporting the priority areas of the national urban policy. Aimed at the gradual improvement of the resettlement system, it outlines the strategic directions of spatial development in the country based on its socio-economic development priorities and plans.

The main goal of the project is to identify the prerequisites for selecting strategic directions for the improvement of the resettlement system, overall urban development arising from the RA legislative acts, including socio-economic and spatial development programs,

correlated with the creation of a safe and healthy habitat, sustainable development of settlements and preservation of natural, historic and cultural heritage.

The project has been developed interrelated to issues of nature management and spatial organization of urban areas. In order to achieve its main objective - creation of favorable conditions for the overall urban development of the Republic, a multifunctional analysis and comprehensive spatial assessment has been conducted.

We propose to set a regime for limiting the improvement of active economic-urban development zones mainly based on the risk of environmental disruption.

The number of urban communities in the Republic of Armenia is 49.

89.6 % of cities are located in active economic-urban development zones, and the 10.4 % - in economically weak areas.

The most important key objective of the RA is the targeted regulation of the spatial expansion of urban areas by determining the maximum number of population and by limiting the expansion of urban territories.

National-level planning document is, in fact, the spatial reflection of the state development program. It is obvious that during the previous decade along with the change in the country's political and socio-economic conditions, nowadays, the factors affecting the urban development have been changed, too.

According to the legislation, the document shall be subject to regular monitoring and updated based on the monitoring results, although, the RA General Resettlement Project has not been reviewed since the day of its approval.

The spatial planning draft and project are developed for the RA regions, administrative districts and their separate parts in accordance with the provisions set out by the RA General Resettlement Project. Urban planning covers the main terms and conditions of territorial organization of other necessary factors aimed at their intended use and sustainable development, conservation of natural, historic and cultural heritage, as well as the formation of favorable spatial environment for living.

As for regional level documents, the spatial planning project of Lake Sevan's water catchment area (2004), Shirak's spatial planning sketch (2005) and Vayots Dzor marz's spatial planning project (2010) have been developed.

The micro-regions, for which the government has envisaged priority development (*e.g.* Dilijan region, “Tatev” tourism center), need urgent consideration.

Processing the aforementioned documents will significantly facilitate drafting the master plans taking into consideration that they define the areas of engineering infrastructures, water catchments, the opportunities of rational allocation of landfills and cemeteries, conservation zones, as well as areas of recreational, historic and cultural monuments, environmental and sanitary protection areas and other areas of overall community interest.

The concept of the development and reformation of the approval process of the RA communities’ (settlements) urban development program documents was approved by the RA Government’s Protocol Decision N36 on September 3, 2009. It aims at the complete formation of a base of urban development program documents in the RA communities, through simplifying and clarifying the elaboration and approval functions, as well as through stipulating mechanisms ensuring safe and natural development of settlements.

In case of availability of a number of important peculiarities typical to Armenia and their commensuration, the need to elaborate spatial planning documents becomes more than obvious.

They include the following:

1. 9 of the RA regions are borderline, thus, one of the important directions of spatial planning is the issue of creating necessary preconditions for ensuring the security, harmonious living and development of the borderline settlements,
2. 56 % of the RA territory is suitable for habitation. The rest of the territory is located 2200 meter higher than the absolute mark, which is an uninhabitable territory. High mountainous and mountainous communities comprising about 40% of the Republic's communities or about 16.5% of population are located in economically weak areas. They are mainly located on mountain slopes at 1700 – 2000 meter altitude and have enough reserve area and a high potential of resource and ecology, however, they are characterized by their imperfect

engineering and transport network, low density of population and weak settlement network.

Meanwhile, the territory of Armenia, entirely being in the seismic hazard zone, is also characterized by exogenous geological processes, in particular, abundant landslides, which are constantly evolving and growing sources of hazard. 2504 landslide areas have been revealed in the result of researches conducted, covering around 1220 square kilometer surface, which makes around 4.0% of the country's territory. Approximately 25.0% of the country's communities are located in landslide areas, significant parts of roads and railway are damaged by landslides.

In the context of creating prerequisites for safe and natural development of settlements, significant importance is attached to the need for preparation of local level spatial planning documents, i.e. the need for drafting general and zoning plans of the Republic's communities.

According to the requirements of Article 14.3 of the RA Law on Urban Development, the general plan of a community (settlement) shall be developed through including all the land plots within the administrative boundaries of the community.

As a strategic urban development (spatial planning) program document, the general plan defines:

1. the main directions of the community's spatial development,
2. regulations, mandatory requirements and restrictions for using lands considered as urban development objects,
3. primary (up to 5 years), medium-term (5-10 years) and long-term (10-15 years) land development stages,
4. intended purpose of land plots included within the administrative boundaries of the communities and (or) changes in them through fulfilling legal requirements.

The procedure of putting forward special regulation objects of urban development activities, the separation of their areas and carrying out urban development activities in those areas are set by the RA Government Decision N 792 of June 26, 2009.

Up to the end of 2011, the general planning projects of the RA communities were approved by the RA Government. Later, the RA Law on Urban Development and the RA

Law on Local Government set provisions, according to which the most important document for communities (General Plan) is approved by the boards of community councils.

Developing, expertise, justification, approval and amendment procedure of the general plans of communities was approved by the RA Government Decision N 1920 of December 29, 2011, which also provides a relevant provision on the approval of general plans.

According to the legislation in force, urban development program documents, as well as tasks regarding their design are subject to justification with a number of state government authorities. In order to optimize the process of justification, an interagency committee has been established by the RA Prime Minister Decree N 1064 of December 22, 2009, which participates in all the phases of discussions on the mentioned documents and by this the justification timeline was cut significantly.

The availability of community general plans will greatly contribute to the establishment of the local government institute, as under conditions of decentralization of government, almost all the licensing functions regarding construction are reserved for community leaders.

At present, 42 out of 49 RA urban communities (except for Byureghavan community in the RA Kotayk marz, Kajaran and Dastakert communities in the RA Syunik marz, Ayrum, Spitak and Shamlugh communities in the RA Tavush marz; As for the general plan of Vanadzor city in the RA Lori marz, it is currently in the process of approval) have approved general plans. 33 out of 866 rural communities have got general plans, 5 more are in the process of approval.

In order to make the development of communities' general plans more accessible, seminars have been held with the participation of community leaders and other responsible persons.

It is prescribed by RA Law on Urban Development that territorial administration and local self-government bodies are obliged to inform natural and legal persons on envisaged changes in the living environment, area zoning or on in any other urban development changes through mass media, public discussions or project and program presentation activities.

The procedure of public awareness on planned changes in living environment, discussions on published urban development plans and projects, as well as public

participation in decision – making has been approved by the RA Government Decision N 660 of October 28, 1998.

Meanwhile, drafting general and zoning plans in conditions of local self – government’s still imperfect institute and, often, lack of financial resources, has become a difficult issue to solve, while uncontrolled development is going on in a lot of communities.

According to the Law on Urban Development and the Law on Local Self-Government, allocation of land plots for build-up purposes and provision of building licenses after January 1, 2016 shall be prohibited.

The dimensional habitat, where human beings are born and live, and the future generations will follow them, too, are planned and created, in particular, through spatial planning, construction and architecture. Therefore, creation of a humane and harmonious habitat, which is able to positively influence on human intelligence and feelings by promoting and enhancing their world perception, is worth to be considered as a primary issue.

Thank you for your attention.