



## Position Paper

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# From “Blue Lines” to Red Lines: Failure of the Permanent Geographic Committee Model

## Introduction

In 2016, the administration and oversight of Israel’s municipal space underwent a far-reaching structural change with the establishment of *Permanent Geographic Committees*, initiated by then–Minister of the Interior Aryeh Deri. Although the reform was presented as an efficiency measure, its practical outcome has been the large-scale transfer of state lands—tens of thousands of dunams—between regional councils and local authorities, frequently without substantive planning justification and at the expense of national land reserves.

This paper finds that the new mechanism has weakened professional oversight, incentivized planning inefficiency, and undermined the State’s responsibility to safeguard its land resources. Regavim therefore calls for **reassessment of the current model, restoration of rigorous oversight, and adoption of clear, binding criteria of exhaustion of planning potential and population density as prerequisites for any municipal boundary expansion.**

## Background and Policy Analysis

Municipal jurisdiction in Israel is defined by *Blue Lines* — the statutory boundary of local authority jurisdiction. Any modification of this boundary is inherently a strategic planning decision with long-term national implications. Until 2016, boundary changes were examined by ad hoc committees appointed by the Minister of the Interior. Each case was assessed individually, based on demonstrated planning need, and the committees’ recommendations were presented to the Minister following in-depth professional analysis. While this process was slow, it served as a critical strategic safeguard, preventing arbitrary or unjustified land reallocations.

**In 2016, this framework was replaced by six permanent geographic committees.** The shift created an expedited mechanism for boundary changes that, in practice, has functioned as an industrial-scale pipeline for transferring state lands between authorities—while significantly diluting the depth, rigor, and quality of professional justification required for each decision.

In many cases, boundary expansions and transfer of jurisdiction over land resources was approved with absolutely no consideration of widespread illegal construction, effectively rewarding construction offenders and legitimizing the municipal authorities’ failure to oversee or enforce planning and construction regulations. Ministry of the Interior data indicate that **between 2016 and 2020, approximately 34,448 dunams were transferred to Arab and Bedouin authorities characterized by low-density development and poor land-use utilization. Nearly three-quarters of this total—24,912 dunams—were transferred in 2018 alone.** A substantial portion of the land was transferred as open space, without approved or detailed planning.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Land Transferred to Arab Authorities (Dunams)</b>
<b>2016</b>	1,814
<b>2017</b>	2,277
<b>2018</b>	24,912
<b>2020</b>	5,445
<b>2021</b>	3,035

In practice, this resulted in the allocation of strategic national land resources precisely to the municipal authorities that failed to utilize the potential for urban density and construction within their existing “blue lines,” due to land shortages caused by failure to prevent illegal construction. Instead of addressing illegal construction and advancing modern densification within existing municipal boundaries, the committees rewarded planning inefficiency and non-enforcement by enabling territorial “creep” outward—at the direct expense of law-abiding regional authorities and national land reserves.

Notably, many of the Arab and Bedouin authorities that benefited from boundary expansions—such as Rahat, which received approximately 14,000 dunams from the Bnei Shimon Regional Council, and Sakhnin, which received approximately 1,800 dunams from the Misgav Regional Council—suffer from severe governance deficiencies and weak enforcement. Within the original Blue Line of these authorities there are substantial “trapped” land reserves that have not been utilized due to clan disputes or dispersed illegal construction that prevents modern urban densification.

It appears that extensive areas are being transferred to authorities that do not properly enforce planning and building laws—in a manner that effectively “ensures” that appropriate enforcement will not be carried out in these newly-acquired areas as well. Moreover, in many cases, the desire to avoid initiating enforcement proceedings against existing illegal construction is what drives the allocation of additional land to these municipalities, in direct contradiction to the State’s obligation to safeguard land resources and its duty to uphold the rule of law.

## Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The current policy framework has caused serious and strategic damage to Israel’s long-term national planning capacity and the erosion of Israel’s land reserves, which will constrain development for generations to come.

**Regavim therefore recommends the following reforms:**

- **Restore oversight mechanisms:** Abolish the permanent geographic committees and reinstate the requirement to demonstrate proven planning necessity as a condition for appointing a dedicated, case-specific committee.
- **Limit the scope of expansion:** Define a maximum allowable expansion as a fixed percentage of the requesting authority’s existing jurisdiction.
- **Adopt a binding “land-use exhaustion” threshold:** Permit Blue Line expansion only after conclusive proof that the authority has fully exhausted its planning potential through high-density development within its existing boundaries.
- **Condition expansion on enforcement:** Require demonstrated enforcement of planning and building laws by the requesting authority, with formal approval from state enforcement bodies (including the Land Law Enforcement Authority), as a prerequisite for any new land allocation.
- **Ensure forward-looking planning:** Weigh projected population growth proportionally, enabling responsible, future-oriented planning.