

Improving how we plan

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Minister for Transport, Planning and Lands Rita Saffioti has released a green paper entitled *Modernising Western Australia's Planning System*.

This 81-page report stemmed from an independent review of our state's planning system by experienced planner Evan Jones.

The underlying objective of this review was to identify ways to make our planning regime more efficient, transparent and readily understandable by all parties.

Master Builders, other interested stakeholders and members of the public were invited to provide feedback on the green paper by July 20.

Evan Jones and his team have done a good job identifying the complexities and challenges within our current planning system. But that's the easy part. The more important part of this assignment is to come up with practical recommendations to improve the current system – the planning approvals process in particular, which has become an increasingly frustrating issue for most builders and their clients.

The green paper proposes five key reforms:

- To make strategic planning the cornerstone of the planning system.
- To make the planning system easy to access and understand.
- To open up the planning system and increase community engagement in planning.
- To make the planning system well-organised and more efficient.
- To refocus the planning system to deliver quality urban infill.

Master Builders supports all of the recommendations proposed by Evan Jones, with the priority being on speeding up the planning approvals process. This can be done through a variety of ways such as electronic lodgements, which have the potential to eliminate inconsistencies between local councils, provide greater transparency and more detailed guidelines for lodging building applications.

It will be important for this review to demystify and streamline the planning approvals process which, over the years, has become unnecessarily complex and complicated. The renewed focus on strategic planning with a clear view on expediting mixed used developments in the vicinity of Metronet projects is fine, but the main issue for most builders is the day-to-day building approvals process. This is where the Department of Planning needs to take a leadership role and provide clear direction to



local government and its clients.

Education and training will be critical to manage the expectations and minimise disputes between different stakeholders. The retention of development assessment panels (DAPs) is welcomed, along with additional accountability and transparency in their decision making.

Master Builders' submission in response to the green paper emphasised the importance of prescribing reasonable timelines for councils approving planning applications, especially for single detached homes which vary only slightly from the existing residential design codes. We believe 30 days turnaround time is more than adequate.

The proposed inclusion of a smart growth planning policy makes sense and should be applied across all areas and regions in conjunction with the long term plans of Infrastructure WA when it is established.

Providing effective mechanisms for monitoring performance is overdue. Local

governments having to report annually on their planning responsibilities is a sound recommendation.

With the irreversible transition to infill developments, group dwellings and apartment living, the recommendations contained in this green paper are timely and appropriate. We would recommend another review in three to five years to ascertain how the changes are progressing and to assess whether additional measures are required to facilitate the needs of builders, developers, homebuyers and the community.

With most delays to building approvals being caused by planning issues, this review has the potential to be a game changer. Master Builders has lodged a comprehensive submission in response to every recommendation made by Evan Jones.

We are now keen to consult with Planning Minister Saffioti in developing her white paper in a few months' time, which will contain the legislative changes the government is likely to take.