

Major planning reforms to drive economic recovery

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Major reforms to simplify Western Australia's planning system and boost the State's economic recovery from COVID-19 will be introduced to Parliament today.

The McGowan Government's planning reforms are the culmination of three years of extensive consultation, which are now being urgently brought forward to support the wider economic response to the pandemic, protect WA jobs and create new job opportunities.

A series of amendments to planning legislation and regulations will simplify the planning system, cut red tape and increase support for small business.

The first initiative, made effective upon the passing of the legislation, would introduce a new development application process for significant, job-creating projects for the next 18 months to provide immediate support for the State's economic recovery.

In the short-term, the Western Australian Planning Commission will be the decision-maker for such projects, with plans to create a new Special Matters Development Assessment Panel after the 18-month period based on a similar model.

A significant development would be defined as:

- development proposals with an estimated cost of \$30 million or more; or
- residential dwelling proposals with 100 or more dwellings; or
- commercial developments with a minimum 20,000sqm of commercial floor space; or
- regional or tourism projects that may not meet the criteria but are considered important to assist in the COVID-19 recovery.

This model will ensure that large and complex developments receive a State co-ordinated approach with referral agencies and streamlined assessment processes to ensure job creating projects can start as soon as possible.

The legislative reforms will be supported by changes to planning regulations and State planning policies, and add to the launch of Design WA policies last year which prioritise the importance of good design in planning and development.

Further proposed changes in the reforms will provide flexibility for small businesses, improve community engagement requirements and increase the number of exemptions for approval.

The planning reforms will include initiatives that respond to community and stakeholder feedback, such as:

- abolish change of use approvals for a number of different types of small business, which is often required by local government to start up or adapt a business;

- exempt a wider range of small residential projects such as patios, decks and extensions from planning approval;
- abolish onerous requirements on small businesses to pay cash-in-lieu for parking shortfalls up to 10 bays; and
- improve community consultation by mandating consistent consultation processes across the State.

Most of the proposed amendments are part of the State Government's Action Plan on Planning Reform and follow three years of consultation to remove barriers in the planning system, provide greater clarity and consistency for users of the system and reduce the administrative burden on the State's 134 local governments.

Further consultation will be undertaken with all stakeholders on proposed regulatory changes which will be introduced as soon as drafting has been completed.