

Appendix B: Workshop approach

A wide range of stakeholders, both internal and external, are involved in the planning process in some way. The suggested workshop approach groups stakeholders into interest groups and allows an opportunity for stakeholders to be heard in a structured manner.

Who should we speak to?

Group 1 – Users of the system

- builders
- land surveyors
- submitters
- applicants
- planning consultants
- architects
- designers
- developers
- wider community members

Identify a number of suitable representatives from each group to invite.

If planners attend the users' session they need to ensure they only actively listen and do not seek to influence or react to the views of participants.

Group 2 – Council's senior executive management

The Chief Executive Officer, directors or group managers and planning managers/coordinators represent the senior executive management.

This session could involve a number of questions arising from, and further exploring, issues raised by the 'users' workshop.

Group 3 – Council's planning team

Council's planning team and other officers who work on planning applications including internal referrals (such as information technology advisers, records, human resources, arborists, heritage advisers and traffic and drainage engineers) represent council's planning team.

A similar approach to that taken with the 'users' could be applied with an emphasis on open, honest and constructive discussion and some reflection on the feedback from the users. It is an opportunity to tease out more intangible issues such as staff relations, job satisfaction and resources.

Group 4 – Councillors

The councillors are an important stakeholder group as they represent a link between the community and administration.

A general discussion on the perceived best and worst aspects of the planning scheme and planning process could be facilitated and results recorded. A facilitator could lead this discussion however it is recommended that either the planning manager or director and a couple of council planners also attend this session to ensure a shared understanding of issues.

Group 5 – Referral authorities

Interviews with a representative of each referral authority that council's planning department deals with could be undertaken. The consultation could be conducted by telephone or consider organising a focus group discussion with all referral authorities to help facilitate a broader discussion.

The purpose of the interview is to discuss situations where the responsible authority believes that there is opportunity to:

- Reduce the number of referrals by removing or refining scheme provisions
- Enter into an agreement that can replace the need for correspondence in relation to particular types of referrals.

How could the workshop sessions be run?

Required resources:

- One facilitator (could be the project manager or project consultant, if suitably experienced)
- White board or butcher paper and pens
- One senior planner
- Time allocations and participant numbers as follows:

Group type	Time allocation	Number of participants
1. Users of the system	2 X 2 hrs, after hours	15 to 25
2. Senior executives	1.5hrs, before hours	2 to 4
3. Planning team(s)	2 hrs	All members
4. Councillors	1.5hrs	50%
5. Referral authorities	1 hr	individual interviews or a group discussion

The project manager should develop a clear agenda for all groups.

At the beginning of the workshop session, Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4 are asked to complete Part A of the stakeholder group questionnaire attached. If necessary, a brief overview of the planning scheme and the planning process, using examples should assist participation in the workshops.

These workshops should be focussed on the perceived best and worst aspects of the planning scheme and council's planning processes and other issues such as staff relations.

The responses to the questions can then be used to form the basis of the discussion that follows. Key topics of discussion, as well as individual points raised should be recorded. After approximately 45 minutes, participants should be asked to repeat the above tasks, completing Part B of the questionnaire, followed by a facilitated discussion.

At the conclusion of the workshop the facilitator should collect the individual written responses. Individual responses should be kept confidential.

It is suggested that the project manager should report back to the workshop participants on the review outcomes and invite them to review progress and implementation one year after their participation.

A proposed template for the invitation letter and a stakeholder questionnaire are provided in the following attachments. Council should modify these as necessary to suit its requirements.

Summary consultation report

A summary report should be prepared which highlights the key issues that have arisen during the consultation process and the report should be presented to the review committee for consideration.

Invitation letter

Dear

PLANNING SCHEME & PROCESS REVIEW

Council wishes to improve the operation of its planning scheme and associated planning processes.

A review of the planning scheme and planning processes is an opportunity to test the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning scheme and the efficiency of the council planning processes and related administrative procedures.

I am pleased to invite you to participate in this project by being part of a councillors/users/referral authorities group workshop session. The workshop details are as follows:

- Date:**
- Time:**
- Venue:**
- RSVP:**

Details of the review will be provided at the workshop. The review is expected to take between two and four months to complete.

Expected benefits from the review include:

[a list of expectations and outcomes to convey to those invited, like, better and quicker planning decisions through the identification of scheme and operational improvements; reduced processing times resulting in reduced development costs; a focus on continuous improvement; and a set of objectives to drive and monitor improvements].

I hope that you can attend this session and assist the council continuously improve its planning scheme and planning processes. If you have any queries please contact me on or by email

Yours sincerely,

Stakeholder group questionnaire

Part A

What do you think are the five best aspects and the worst aspects of the planning scheme from your experience?

Best aspects

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Worst aspects

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What do you think are the five best aspects and the worst aspects that you experience with the planning unit, planning processes and procedures at council?

Best aspects

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Worst aspects

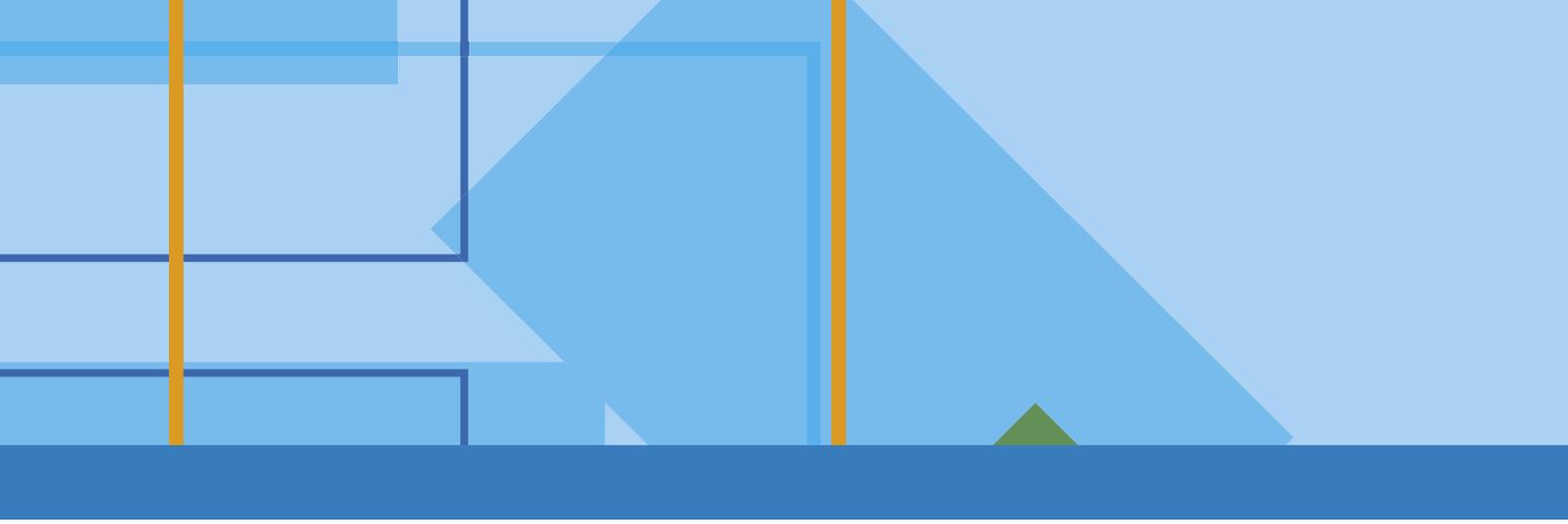
1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



Part B

Name five changes you would recommend to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning scheme:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Name five changes you would recommend to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning processes and procedures:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Appendix C: Examples of planning practices

The following examples of planning practices have been compiled based upon previous reviews. The examples are put forward as a cooperative approach for planners helping planners and not all examples will be appropriate in all circumstances. DSE and MAV will review the reports submitted to the Minister and periodically update the following examples to include new council initiatives and add them to the list published at www.dse.vic.gov.au/planning.

1. Pre-application

Objectives

- To encourage applicants to participate in a pre-application process, where appropriate.
- To provide essential information to applicants about processes and documentation required for a planning permit application.
- To ensure open communication between the council, applicant and the community about the proposal.
- To encourage a well conceived planning application with complete supporting documentation.

Planning practices

- 1.1 Distribute pre-application promotion material including:
 - Advice on council's web site and/or
 - Information sheets in council offices
- 1.2 Provide checklists of document requirements at pre-application meetings or at counter discussions.
- 1.3 Ensure applicant checklists are completed and submitted with the planning permit application.
- 1.4 Provide a summary statement of MSS and local policies so that applicants can understand council's expectations.
- 1.5 Provide information on the planning process and timelines when the planning permit application is lodged.
- 1.6 Ensure a senior and/or experienced officer is available to handle pre-application negotiations.
- 1.7 Prepare file notes of any pre-application meeting and ensure that they are kept on the relevant file.
- 1.8 Provide continuity of staff member(s) between pre-application meetings and the planner responsible for assessment of the application.
- 1.9 Provide web site links and publicly accessible hard copies of key documents including:
 - The planning scheme.
 - Strategic studies referenced in the planning scheme.
 - Planning process / timeline information sheets.
 - Fees and cost schedules.
- 1.10 Encourage the provision of a site analysis and neighbourhood photographs as part of the pre-application process.
- 1.11 Undertake a preliminary analysis of pre-application concepts and provide feedback to the applicant.
- 1.12 Encourage prospective applicants to contact neighbours to understand their expectations / values / priorities at the outset of the planning and design process.
- 1.13 Document and publicise good examples and outcomes achieved from the pre-application process.
- 1.14 Consistently train staff to ensure their skills will enhance the quality of the pre-application process.

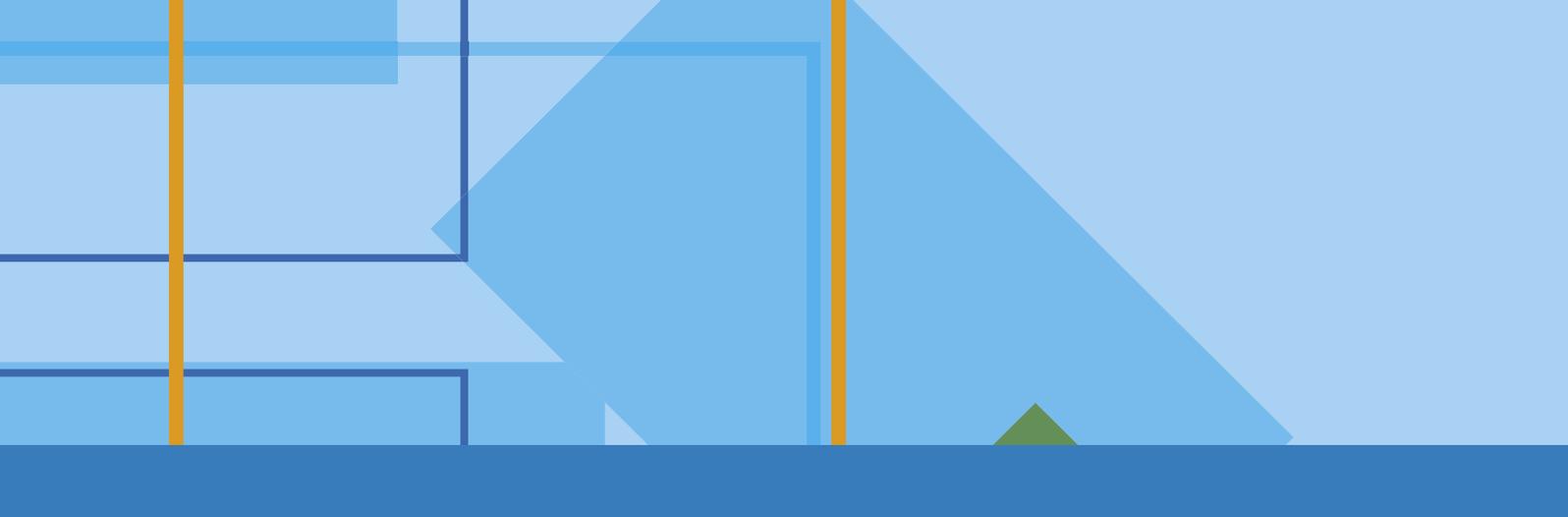
2. Registration, lodgement, referrals and assignment

Objectives

- To ensure statutory requirements are adhered to.
- To ensure the necessary information and fees have been provided prior to registration.
- To create electronic and hard copy files to enable the application to be processed more efficiently.
- To ensure the file/application is assigned to the appropriate officer as efficiently as possible.
- To acknowledge receipt, registration and assignment of the planning permit application as soon as possible.
- To expedite the necessary referrals and public notification of the planning permit application.

Planning practices

- 2.1 Delegate authority to all planning and administrative staff to perform all statutory administrative duties detailed in Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.
- 2.2 Issue an acknowledgment letter regarding receipt of an application including the following:
- Date received.
 - Application number.
 - Planner handling the application.
 - Information about the process and anticipated timelines.
- 2.3 Complete the following tasks prior to assigning an application:
- Identify the reason(s) for a permit.
 - Check the submitted documentation provided (use standard checklist).
 - Register the application.
 - Refer or attach relevant site history.
 - Attach or refer to current relevant planning scheme amendments.
- 2.4 Complete the following tasks shortly after assigning an application:
- Identify relevant planning scheme information and include in the file.
 - Add pre-application notes to the file.
 - Assign the application to the planner who conducted the pre-application meeting.
 - Identify internal and external referrals.
 - Distribute all referrals.
 - Undertake a senior officer briefing with the planning officer handling the application on relevant planning or management issues prior to any assessment.
 - Prepare a summary description of the application and circulate to councillors and senior management.
- 2.5 Provide a response date for all internal and external referrals and implement a timely reminder/collection procedure.

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- 2.6 Provide pro-forma advice on the following topics:
- Acknowledgment of application.
 - Timelines and stages in the process.
 - Service contract with customers.
 - Internal notifications.
 - Public notification.
 - Consultation/mediation practices.
 - Guidelines for persons with third party interests.
- 2.7 Document and monitor the time to complete various steps and actions during the registration and review stage.
- 2.8 Document and exchange e-mail addresses for both the officers and applicants during the registration and application stage of the process.

3. Preliminary Assessment

Objectives

- To ensure preliminary assessment of the proposal, in particular its compliance with the SPPF and LPPF.
- To ensure that the officer managing the application and (as appropriate) a senior planner share their views on the application and make decisions on its progress and strategic merit.
- To ensure that senior management and/or council are briefed where an application raises major policy issues or presents major social, economic or environmental implications with potential political consequences.
- To ensure that applicants receive feedback from the outputs of this stage.

Planning practices

- 3.1 Implement an approach to preliminary assessment that :
- Ensures planners and applicants form preliminary conclusions early in the process about the core merits and deficiencies of an application.
 - Identifies a fundamentally flawed application early in the process, and refuse if appropriate.
- 3.2 Obtain and circulate relevant pro-forma documents to assist with the assessment process including:
- DSE/MAV Model Officer report for report writing.
 - DSE/MAV checklists.
- 3.3 Prepare pro-forma documents to assist with the assessment process including:
- A standard letter for section 54 requests for further information.
 - A progress and assessment letter to be sent to applicants.
 - A referral form that provides for a relevant site history.

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- 3.4 Undertake a preliminary assessment process that includes the following tasks:
- Undertake at least one site inspection.
 - Photograph the site.
 - Complete an assessment checklist.
 - Review and assess the proposal against State and local policy expectations.
 - Document the above assessment.
 - Confirm the scope of internal and external referrals and include others if necessary.
 - Assess the need for public notification, the method of notice of an application and the parties to be notified (including special interest groups such as resident associations and other specific committees such as heritage or foreshore committees).
 - Assess whether further information is required and send a section 54 letter promptly.
- 3.5 Encourage the submission of permit application documentation that has been prepared by, and or endorsed by a professional planning consultant that attests to the completeness of documentation and provides an assessment of the merits of the application.
- 3.6 Encourage applicants to submit electronic copies of material for use by officers for any referral and preparing their assessment and report.
- 3.7 Provide advice to applicants of poorly conceived proposals and provide a limited period to amend the proposal.
- 3.8 Avoid requesting detailed further information to be submitted for applications that are to be refused. Encourage the necessary change to the application.

4. Consultation and public notification

Objectives

- To undertake an accurate evaluation and selection of proposals that are to be subject to public notification based on section 52 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.
- To make an early decision on the requirement for public notification and the extent of notification.
- To ensure that all relevant stakeholders are notified of applications in accordance with the provisions of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.
- To undertake public notification as early as possible in the process.
- To ensure that consultation and public notification contains a clear reason a permit is required.
- To provide an effective process of conflict resolution with clear outputs that assist council in the decision-making process.

Planning practices

- 4.1 Provide an approach to public notification that:
- Seeks to assess the application against section 52 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and decide on the necessity of public notification.
 - Gives notice as early as possible upon receipt of all required information.
 - Uses administration staff (for a fee) to prepare and distribute public notification material and erect notices on behalf of the applicant.
 - Ensures advertised plans are on display for the public with A4 copies of plans also available to the public.
 - Provides a response system for the lodgment of submissions that is clear and simple.
 - Provides training for staff to ensure that they are aware of and follow the public notification policy and procedures.
- 4.2 Prepare a council public consultation policy or guideline.
- 4.3 Determine the need and value of holding a consultative meeting based upon the potential and prospect of a positive outcome being achieved.
- 4.4 Encourage applicants to consult with neighbours and key stakeholders prior to the lodgment of an application.
- 4.5 Conduct consultation meetings to inform parties about the proposal, or where the meeting has the potential to resolve an apparent conflict.
- 4.6 Conduct public information nights (when appropriate) on major proposals during the advertising period.
- 4.7 Use independent mediators/facilitators to conduct meetings, when appropriate.
- 4.8 Forward copies of objections to applicants and invite them to comment or amend the proposal, as applicable.

5. Delegation

Objectives

- To prepare a detailed planning policy which outlines the basis for delegated authority to officers.
- To delegate all administrative decisions to members of the planning team.

Planning practices

- 5.1 Develop a “buddy” or “mentor” program to train staff and ensure quality and consistency in decision-making.
- 5.2 Develop and use a delegation policy for use in exercising delegated authority.
- 5.3 Educate and train staff and councillors to enable greater confidence in exercising and giving delegation.
- 5.4 Regularly review ways to delegate tasks across the organisation having regard to skills, experience and competency levels.
- 5.5 Review career paths and structured programs to empower staff with responsibility and enhance job satisfaction.
- 5.6 Maintain a continuous program of policy and guideline development so that delegation is matched by accountability.
- 5.7 Put in place quality assurance processes, such as senior officers to sign off on a delegate’s report.
- 5.8 Limit matters referred to Council to proposals of genuine policy significance or potential major impact to the municipality.
- 5.9 Regularly provide Council with recommendations and reports on the operation and augmentation of policy, guidelines and delegation.

6. Assessment, reporting and decision-making

Objectives

- To ensure reports are clear and concise, focusing on the main policy and scheme considerations.
- To make decisions as efficiently and effectively as possible within the statutory timelines.

Planning practices

- 6.1 Undertake a preliminary application assessment early in the process.
- 6.2 Make assessments only after a site visit, unless the circumstances clearly don't warrant a site inspection.
- 6.3 Ensure all assessments and reports have regard to:
 - *Melbourne 2030*, within the metropolitan area.
 - State policy.
 - Local Policy.
 - Other relevant policies or provisions.
- 6.4 Ensure all planning assessments follow a prescribed framework/report structure, including:
 - Preliminary reports.
 - Council reports.
 - VCAT submissions.
- 6.5 Ensure assessment reports avoid reproducing policy and focus on the relevant policies and their interpretation and application.
- 6.6 Ensure reports are concise.
- 6.7 Ensure reports have an executive summary, where appropriate.
- 6.8 Develop a process of reviewing reports both internally and with applicants to minimise errors and resolve conflict.
- 6.9 Ensure reports are reviewed and signed off by a senior planner.

7. Applications for Review

Objectives

- To reduce the number of applications for review and the associated costs involved.
- To make decisions that are likely to be upheld at reviews.

Planning practices

- 7.1 Base decision-making on well-founded analysis and policy.
- 7.2 Ensure that the planning officer who dealt with the application attends the review, particularly where the decision is consistent with their recommendations.
- 7.3 Ensure refusals are explained clearly to the applicant and the grounds of refusal are clearly stated.
- 7.4 Ensure a budget is approved when assistance is required by legal counsel or expert evidence.
- 7.5 Ensure planning reports can be efficiently used to provide the factual basis for review submissions.

- 7.6 Ensure the outcomes of review decisions (both within and external to council) are reviewed to inform policy preparation, recommendation and decisions.
- 7.7 Ensure that a range of staff is given the opportunity to contribute to the preparation and delivery of submissions to VCAT.

8. Enforcement

Objectives

- To assemble a dedicated enforcement team.
- To be proactive in enforcing decisions.
- To prevent the situation where permits are applied for after the fact.

Planning practices

- 8.1 Establish a dedicated enforcement team or service to:
- Consistently follow up applicants' adherence to planning permits and their conditions.
 - Conduct routine checks to ensure that there is no unauthorised use or development activity.
- 8.2 Ensure that the enforcement team or service is:
- Sufficiently trained in planning law so they are able to distinguish between permitted and non-permitted activity.
 - Resourced to follow through with penalties or enforcement actions.
 - Made up of a combination of resources comprising solicitors and/or planning officers and/or local law officers.
- 8.3 Ensure council has a budget committed to the enforcement service.

9. Training and support

Objectives

- To identify the basic competency skills required of staff and ensure staff awareness of these requisite skills.
- To provide the opportunity for staff to attend workshops or courses that equip staff with the basic competency skills.

Planning practices

- 9.1 Ensure a skill competency list is in place for each planning position.
- 9.2 Ensure workshops or courses are regularly attended to acquire or develop skills.
- 9.3 Ensure training programs are coordinated for staff.



10. Information systems

Objectives

- To develop information systems to:
 - complement and support work flow
 - increase efficiency in management of information and
 - ease workload in data entry and recording.
- To customise information systems to council requirements and where possible integrate them with other systems.
- To ensure systems are reliable and user friendly.
- To ensure back up systems or processes are in place in the event of system failure.

Planning practices

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| 10.1 | Develop information systems to assist in the operation of the planning department and the workload of staff. |
| 10.2 | Customise systems to meet the requirements of the relevant planning processes being served. |
| 10.3 | Integrate planning systems with other systems to ensure that data retrieval, recording and management is seamless within council. |
| 10.4 | Ensure systems are user friendly for both council and other stakeholders. |
| 10.5 | Ensure training programs are regularly conducted so that staff know how to operate and use the information and manage the systems appropriately. |
| 10.6 | Review and update the systems regularly to ensure proper functioning and relevance with changes in operational procedures. |