

PLANNING AND BUILDING APPROVALS REVIEW: *Proposed Improvements*

Part A – The Strategic Approvals Process
A1 – Simplify planning schemes
<p>1. Extend the Smart Planning program to further improve planning schemes – plain English drafting, order of materials, digital delivery, user guide, clear upfront information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applying plain language drafting principles, including a contents page to enable users to find the sections relevant to their concerns; • revising the order of material in a planning scheme from ‘most used’ to ‘least used’ provisions to make it easier for users to navigate schemes and exit at the earliest point; • considering the way digital delivery may change how planning schemes are set out and how they can be searched; • providing clear information up front about who will decide the application’s outcome; and • continuing the translation of planning schemes into the integrated planning policy framework. <p>This review notes that simplifying planning schemes can involve substantial cost and effort, and the benefits of doing so would need to warrant wholesale change. It invites stakeholders to provide feedback on whether, in their view, changes such as those outlined above would yield substantial improvements in the planning process</p>
2. Consolidating (while allowing for local variation) planning scheme requirements, principles and rules that serve similar purposes.
3. Faster policy resolution for emerging planning issues to ensure a consistent state-wide approach with clear and appropriate frameworks for local council variation.
4. Councils working within their regions and across Victoria to harmonise their planning policies, where possible. Recent efforts through the Planning in the Economic Growth Zone (PEGZ) program in the Latrobe Valley have shown the benefits of this collaborative approach at a regional level.
A2 – Streamline planning scheme amendments
5. Councils could be provided with a final response within 30 days of DELWP initiating a further review of an authorisation request.
6. DELWP’s notice templates should be rewritten in plain English (supplemented by technical language where required under legislation) and include images to show examples of what sort of changes a community can expect to see under the amended scheme, modelled on the VPA’s approach.
7. In cases where it is clear that there will be unresolvable issues, the recommendation to proceed to a panel hearing should occur at the earliest opportunity (noting that Ministerial Direction No.15 requires councils to request a panel if necessary, within 40 business days of the close of submissions).
8. Panel reports should only be embargoed by councils for seven days (rather than 28).
9. The number of administrative and simple amendments could be reduced by having councils and DELWP group non-urgent matters into periodic omnibus amendments.
10. Councils should be required to make a formal decision with reasons when deciding to abandon or not exhibit a proponent’s amendment. This would ensure that both the proponent and the Minister for Planning are better informed if a proponent seeks the Minister’s intervention on an abandoned amendment.
A3 – Streamline the PSP process
11. The PSP 2.0 approach should be implemented by the VPA and, as soon as possible, applied to the PSPs in the current program to speed up the rezoning of land and maintain the government target of a 15-year land supply.
12. The PSP 2.0 approach should be adapted to speed up the planning for the preparation of plans and precinct plans for regional cities’ strategic sites prioritised by the Victorian Government (including those led by DJPR)
13. Differing views have been expressed by stakeholders regarding the most appropriate size of a PSP. The VPA should balance the need for strategic planning over larger areas with the desirability of approving manageable-sized precincts in a planned sequence that aligns with the delivery timeframes for new public transport and school infrastructure
14. Once PSP 2.0 has been used in the development of a few PSPs, the approach should be evaluated to ensure that the process improvements are delivering reductions in delays and costs while maintaining quality outcomes.

15. Guidelines should be developed to encourage the proper sequencing of development across a PSP, including the issue of permits for the first stage of development using section 96A and combining the assessment with the process for approval of the PSP
16. Wyndham City Council’s MOU approach with developers should be more widely utilised in growth corridor areas where the delays in bringing lots to market are a real constraint on competition and housing affordability
A4 – Escalate planning for sites of strategic importance
17. The VPA and DJPR could advise the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Priority Precincts of the pipeline of sites of strategic importance in Melbourne and regional cities after consulting with councils and other stakeholders. The selection criteria could include whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development is strategic and desirable to implement a direction in Plan Melbourne or helps leverage key government infrastructure such as the Suburban Rail Loop; • the site matches areas identified by government for future housing and/or job growth; • the precinct spans multiple local government boundaries; • the landowner has requested the amendment be given priority; and • the council concerned has failed to decide in a reasonable time or is not able to prepare a plan for its development.
18. The VPA, in consultation with DJPR, the Suburban Rail Loop Authority and relevant councils and stakeholders, should advise the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Priority Precincts about which of the sites could be prioritised and the best form of engagement with the council for planning to be undertaken jointly in each case.

Part B – The Permit Approval Process
B1 – More help with applications
19. It would be useful for DELWP to provide a (PPN) and model application forms to councils about how pre-application processes can be used to identify the key issues and the information requirements, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which elements of a proposal trigger the need for a permit and what planning policies apply; • the supporting information that will be required to be submitted with the application; • which referral authorities and which council officers will need to consider the application; • whether early engagement by the user with referral authorities would be useful; • any additional information that will be required for those referrals; and • any potential major issues with the proposal and ways to address them. <p>Ideally, councils should provide written advice after these meetings within a reasonable timeframe, addressing the matters discussed and noting any unresolved issues. Councils should outline the process for pre-application meetings on their websites and provide checklists of material that users should bring to the meetings or provide in advance.</p>
20. To ensure that pre-application meetings are effective, senior planners should be involved to bring their knowledge of recent decisions made by the council and by VCAT (to promote consistency of advice). For larger proposals, these meetings could also involve other staff and decision makers, such as referral authorities and internal referrals such as drainage engineers or heritage advisers.
21. Councils could be required to offer pre-application meetings and be able to charge a reasonable fee for more complex matters. These fees could be reimbursed when a complete application is lodged, and no further information is required. Referral authorities could also consider formalising and offering pre-application meetings.
22. Difficulties later in the process would be avoided by adopting a Better Approvals approach focused on council planning and building approvals processes. This would facilitate concurrent decision making, streamline referrals and embed the concierge model as a form of case management and give each applicant a consistent contact with whom to discuss their issues.
B2 – Ensure lodged applications are complete
23. Councils should only accept applications once they are complete. Guidelines, standard forms and checklists should be developed to help applicants prepare complete applications.
24. To support this, the VPP should be amended to increase clarity of application requirements by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing all VPP application requirement lists for clarity, consistency and relevance;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing standard application requirement lists and forms for common application types, including land use, building and works, subdivision, signs, and vegetation removal; and • testing the development of application requirements lists for certain applications types.
25. DELWP, through its Smart Planning program should work with councils to review the information requirements in local schedules to check whether they duplicate requirements under the VPPs and, if not, whether the additional requirements are actually necessary to enable consideration of local issues.
B3 – Move to online planning permit processing and tracking
26. An achievable timeframe should be set for all councils to have their planning permit applications fully trackable online and further efforts should be made to ensure greater compatibility between the different systems. An achievable state-wide goal would be for the DELWP website to offer a direct entry point to each of the 79 councils’ planning web pages.
27. Desirable features for council-based permit management systems should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development and introduction of common data standards which will help to drive greater standardisation of planning permit application requirements and allow for easier sharing of data across council systems; and • an end-to-end system for managing and tracking all aspects of council processes, with the capacity to coordinate engagement between parties, read and compare different versions of plans, pay planning fees, and so on. <p>Implementing these systems should be considered in the context of other related initiatives, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significant modernisation achieved by DELWP’s Smart Planning reforms in digitising planning schemes, Ministerial planning permits and the PSA process; and • The existing use of SPEAR (see Box B3.2) for managing subdivisions and the investment that authorities and private users have made in adapting their systems to SPEAR.
28. The Rural Council Transformation Program should be extended to support initiatives that deliver online tracking and processing of planning applications for rural councils.
B4 – Improve planning resources for councils
29. Provide additional resources for DELWP’s Regional Planning Services network to act as regional planning hubs, providing resources and facilitating training to support councils’ planning functions (see Box B4.2). This support is mainly needed in non-metropolitan areas, where councils often lack the resources to deal with complex or strategic planning issues and manage staff gaps. While the most critical role of these additional resources would be in permit approvals, these hubs could also provide additional resources and facilitate training to support councils’ strategic planning functions.
30. DELWP and PIA could develop online training packages for planners across Victoria. Peak industry bodies could also be funded to work in partnership with DELWP to deliver training packages based on the successful development and delivery of the DELWP/UDIA training module Property Economics: A short introduction for Urban Planners dealing with Affordable Housing.
31. DELWP could encourage harmonisation between councils’ local planning requirements and processes by holding regular regional meetings between councils, referral authorities, the VPA and other relevant bodies to facilitate communication and resolution of issues. The MAV annual regional conference is a good forum for sharing state-wide experiences and regular regional meetings could be built on this.
B5 – Modernise public advertising of proposals
32. Experience in Queensland has suggested a significant improvement in public understanding of proposals as a result of a requirement under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, which states that the notice of a permit application should include a picture of the proposal where a significant building is proposed. A similar requirement could be adopted in Victoria for applications involving a new building or larger developments. Pictures could be displayed on signs similar to real estate display boards. The cost to the applicant would be modest but there would be significant benefits, including a reduction in objections based on misunderstandings of the proposal
33. Formal notice should be provided on council websites, via email alerts and on social media. Formal notification by mail for affected landowners should remain a requirement. Councils could use their regular local newspaper columns and advertisements to give notice about major developments currently on display.

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34. DELWP could prepare an updated PPN on 'Best Practice' modern notification processes for different types of applications, in consultation with MAV and VLGA
B6 – Stream applications according to risk
35. The Smart Planning program should review the identified issues with current prohibited and restricted uses, to allow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> non-retail land uses that add vitality and patronage to shopping strips and centres; and planning concessions for child care centres, aged care facilities and social housing located in residential areas.
36. The proposed VicSmart Plus should enable 30-day streamlined issuing of permits for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> secondary dwellings on an existing lot; and dwelling applications on a small lot in an established area
37. Following the review of the small lot code for growth areas, consider the case for amending Rescode and then dealing with siting and other issues through building permits.
B7 – Reduce requests for further information
38. Where RFIs are necessary, responsiveness could be improved by having Councils 'pause the clock' on statutory timelines for decisions, rather than reset it. This recognises that, in many cases, assessment of other aspects of an application can continue even if all relevant information is not yet present. This would also have the effect of reducing the use of RFIs as a tool to manage workload or performance reporting. The applicant would still be responsible for any time they take to respond to the RFI.
39. Set a deadline to encourage prompt assessment of the need for further information and curb multiple requests – possibly based on the Queensland cut-off time of ten days.
40. VCAT could improve and promote the prominence, availability and turnaround times of its Short Cases List to enable an applicant to seek a prompt review of an RFI, which could, in many cases, be done on the day of the hearing.
41. DELWP could support councils to help them more accurately and efficiently assess the need for RFIs by issuing a PPN and facilitating training opportunities for councils that illustrate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how to distinguish between further information requirements and requests for amendments to an application; the type and level of information necessary to inform common decisions (see B2); the types of changes to applications that are better dealt with through permit conditions rather than asking for the change in an RFI; and best-practice for addressing requests for amendments to applications, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> using pre-application meetings to offer applicants a choice between having councils request and finalise changes to an application before issuing the permit or do so by using permit conditions; when requesting an amendment, being clear that the request is for a change to the application rather than information; advising the applicant as to whether a requested amendment is a minor matter or one which is likely to affect the applicant's chances of having the permit approved; and ensuring the applicant understands that where an amendment has been requested, the applicant has choices about how to respond (for example, the applicant may choose not to make changes and proceed with the application, and this will not necessarily jeopardise the chances of having the permit approved.
B8 – Reduce response times for referrals
42. Improving performance by having the relevant Ministers for referral authorities emphasise the importance of abiding by the expected 28-day turnaround and pausing – not resetting – the clock for RFIs, and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> giving appropriate focus and resources to the role; better managing referrals through such actions as standardising and removing simple referrals and focusing resources on more complex referrals; consulting on and providing up-front guidance on referral decision criteria and authority requirements; and considering delegation of simple approvals
43. Improving performance reporting, with the Planning Minister requiring referral authorities to regularly report under section 14A of the Planning and Environment Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> their published guidance for applicants and councils regarding application information requirements, their decision-making criteria and policies and how they apply to their referral decisions including evidence of the consultative processes undertaken to inform this material; their decisions including timeframes, outputs and post-permit timeframes; the resourcing of the role and anticipated resourcing needs; and

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> targets for a reduction in referrals required by developing standards for less complex matters.
44. Supporting improvements in referral authority performance, eligibility for funding through the Streamlining for Growth program which could be extended to all councils and referral authorities seeking to improve their responsiveness and decision quality and reducing unnecessary referrals.
45. Resourcing the VPA to enable it to provide continuous improvement assistance to referral authorities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> hosting information sharing and inter-authority, authority-council and authority-industry relationship building at the regional level (many councils reported improved referral authority performance when inter-agency relationships and communication channels were maintained); designing standard form publications about application guidance and decision-making guidance for referral authority use; and strategically reviewing workloads for opportunities to rationalise the type of referrals that require individual review, those that may be addressed through standard conditions, or may only require notification or other methods.
46. Referral authorities should be engaged early in the design process to ensure that their issues are properly addressed and do not arise late in the process. Subsequent referrals should check compliance with the agreed scheme in accordance with section 55(1) of Planning and Environment Act.
47. The triggers for referral should be reviewed to enable simpler matters to be dealt with directly by a council, based on design codes issued by the referral authority.
B9 – Make decisions in a reasonable time
48. Consider a longer statutory timeframe for complex applications. Guidance on the definition of the threshold for what is 'complex' should be set based on the complexity of the assessment rather than just the size of the project. Alternatively, a negotiated approach could be considered, enabling councils to enter an agreement with an applicant on the expected timeframe. This review notes that the effectiveness of these changes to timeframes would depend on the definition of 'complex', and that creating this definition would have other statutory implications. This review invites stakeholder feedback on whether creating a longer timeframe for more complex applications would improve the planning process on balance and, if so, what criteria would be best to use to define complex.
49. Councils should report on the time taken for applications at different stages of the assessment and decision process, so that key performance indicators can be determined for the median time and the proportion of cases exceeding a maximum limit.
50. As part of the proposal for user-focused concierge services that begin at the pre-application stage, councils should also provide users with updates throughout the assessment process, so that they are aware of any potential delays and have confidence about the expected timeframe for a decision even if that timeframe exceeds the statutory minimum.
B10 – Promote best practice delegation of decisions
51. The current status of delegation arrangements across councils could be reviewed to streamline council officer delegations and develop a model 'deed of delegation' which reflects best practice, helps councils to triage matters and reduces delays.
52. A model deed of delegation could be developed and supported by a general guideline that defines common criteria for which matters are suitable for determination by the council's CEO, the director of planning, other senior staff, council or council committees for determination.
53. The frequency of councils' planning subcommittee meetings came in for some criticism. 'Missing a meeting' can add a month to the final approval. Shorter, more frequent meetings (say fortnightly) may mean that the volume of approvals can be transacted without such long pauses.
54. There is also scope for the government to review the current training given to councillors about their roles and responsibilities when making decisions within the planning framework. The proposal in the Local Government Bill 2019 to require candidates and councillors to undertake training could support this improvement

Part C – The Post-Permit Approval Phase

C1 – Checking compliance with permit conditions

55. DELWP, in consultation with the VPA, VCAT and the MAV, should formalise post-permit processes and set appropriate timeframes for granting approvals by providing a PPN and updating the Writing Planning Permits guide to consolidate and enshrine best practice principles.
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56. These best practice principles should take into consideration the UK example, include model conditions, provide examples of unacceptable conditions and provide clear advice to planning staff so that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> only apply planning conditions that arise directly from the specific issues related to the permit; only use conditions that are necessary and reasonable where existing provisions under planning and other legislation cannot more effectively or appropriately manage compliance; and clearly communicate draft conditions to applicants before a permit is granted, to ensure that there is a common understanding.
57. DELWP together with PIA and VPELA could develop an education and guidance program aimed at promoting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> more effective and targeted use of conditions; and collaboration between councils to develop consistent conditions.
58. Encourage the development of a state-wide manual of standardised engineering infrastructure requirements and conditions. The manual should aim to facilitate greater consistency across councils and reduce the time taken to negotiate infrastructure contributions. An example is the Local Government Infrastructure Design Association's Infrastructure Design Manual or the VPA's Engineering Design and Construction Manual for Melbourne's Growth Areas.
59. In adopting the Better Approvals approach for planning and building approvals processes (see B1), councils should consult with applicants about draft conditions before the permit is finalised – to ensure that there is a common understanding of the problem and what the condition seeks to achieve. This would be a continuation of the case management approach that this review proposes should commence in pre-application meetings.
60. As part of the more comprehensive data collection and monitoring framework being proposed in this review (see Introduction), councils would collect performance data for the post-permit process (for example, the time taken by councils to review amended plans submitted to meet a permit condition)
C2 – Streamline variations to the terms of a permit
61. VCAT's Short Cases List could be used more often to hear secondary consent disputes quickly.
62. DELWP could develop a PPN to guide councils and permit holders about the process and assessment criteria for secondary consents. This should be based on the VCAT principles about what constitutes a reasonable secondary consent amendment. The aim would be to make the principles more accessible for less frequent users and reduce the time council staff take to examine individual cases. A PPN could be clear about which matters are appropriate for secondary consents and establish expected approval times, depending on the complexity of the changes. For example, it could specify a quick turnaround for changes to plans that relate to buildings and works that are otherwise exempt from the requirement for a permit. A PPN could also provide advice on when a secondary consent is not appropriate and when a planning permit amendment is required.
63. Fees should be prescribed for secondary consents (as well as other post-permit fees), thereby replacing the various local fees charged by councils and providing consistency across Victoria. Fees could be scaled in a number of ways, for example, according to the number of changes requested or the overall cost of development. This may require amending legislation and/or regulations.
64. As part of the broadening of performance monitoring for planning activities, councils should be required to report the number of conditions added to permits and the time taken for post-permit decisions.
65. A PPN should be developed to provide guidance for councils about how to set specific timeframes that reflect the nature and complexity of a proposal, and for councils and permit applicants about the process and assessment criteria for extensions of time requests
C3 – Reduce timelines for electricity connections
66. The ESC should amend the Electricity Distribution Code to include an appropriate performance framework for distributors in respect of the non-standard connection. The framework would encourage continuous improvement, maintain safety standards and include consequences for non-compliance. Specific targets could be set for each stage of the non-standard connection process which are not contestable for each distributor. For example, targets could be that 90 per cent of applications are completed within: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 business days for master planning design approval; 15 business days for practical completion; 5 business days for initial audit; and 20 business days for tie-in of new developments.

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67. The Civil Contractors' Federation and Energy Safe Victoria could lead work with all five distribution businesses to develop training and support for contractors and subcontractors with the aim of decreasing construction audit failure rates. This could involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhancing shared understanding and engagement between civil contractors and distribution businesses; the promotion of the role of a site coordinator; setting of minimum standards for professional accreditation and qualifications for design, engineering, civil construction and project management; and establishing clear and accessible technical and construction standards
C4 – Simplify payment of infrastructure contributions
68. The VPA, developer organisations and councils should continue working towards an agreement on how to move to a simpler arrangement that can deliver an ICP for developments in a parallel timeframe to approval of a PSP.
69. Efforts to streamline the staged payment system should continue with the goal of achieving the four-week target timeframes for processing staged payment requests and a simple method to roll over SPAs when the GAIC liability has not been triggered within the financial year.
70. The VPA should be funded adequately to enable it to process in a timely way the collection of GAIC – possibly by enabling it to be reimbursed in the same way as the SRO is for its costs.
71. SRO's current work with LUV to fully integrate GAIC notices will facilitate land transfers within the electronic PEXA system and the SPEAR system used to manage subdivision plans, and the availability of an online calculator for staged payments will further improve response times.
72. A regular meeting (at least annually) should be held with VPA, LUV and SRO senior staff and representatives of the land development industry to monitor the implementation of reforms and deal with other issues as they arise.
73. The GAIC Hardship Board should be abolished by repealing the relevant sections of the Planning and Environment Act.
74. DELWP, councils and MAV should develop model section 173 agreements and explore the opportunity to create benchmark prices for standard infrastructure that can be applied across Victoria
C5 – Approvals by other authorities
75. Proponents need to be aware of the full range of approvals that they need, including those from other authorities. Improved pre-application processes (see B1) should enable these approvals to be identified by council planners at an early stage.
76. The Minister for Planning and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change could seek direct talks with the Commonwealth to reduce the time taken for approvals under the EPBC Act by ensuring that assessments under the existing bilateral agreements are used as extensively as possible and that the potential for bilateral approvals by the Victorian Government have been pursued. This would give greater flexibility to negotiate offsets while securing viable reserves of endangered habitat.
77. Councils should ensure their heritage studies and Heritage Overlays in planning schemes are up to date and in line with current community expectations to protect buildings of local heritage significance.
78. DELWP, in consultation with relevant parties, should provide clearer advice and information for councils and proponents about State and local heritage responsibilities and processes, including the safety protections of the Building Act.
C6 – Coordinate planning and building permit assessments
79. Councils should use the concierge approach proposed in this review (see B1) to anticipate and address specific issues early in the approvals process and to underpin effective coordination of planning, building, engineering, heritage and other specialist staff at councils. This 'whole of project' customer focus would provide oversight and coordination of internal approvals, monitor timeframes to ensure responses are provided in a timely manner and assist to broker compromises or alternative solutions when necessary.
80. With respect to flooding, the relevant authorities (for example, drainage authorities and catchment management authorities) should collaborate to develop a single, consolidated set of flood mapping information, with this data then made available to all parties who use and administer the system. Smart Planning could then consider integrating this information into the online portal.
81. An additional measure that could be implemented in the short term is to require the 'building information statement' to be provided at the time information is provided about the planning permit application requirements. It could then be considered as part of the

planning approval process and provide access to any flooding information held by a council under the building regulations. This would enable building designers to incorporate this information in their planning permit application, avoiding unnecessary rework causing increased costs and delays if the information is discovered later.

Part D – The Building Approvals Phase

D1 – Expand the workforce of building surveyors, building inspectors and fire safety engineers

82. Establish a new class of building surveyor for low-risk building work.
Depending on the scope of the Victorian Government's recently announced review of the Building Act, it is proposed that a new class of building surveyor be created that has a narrower scope of work. This scope of work would be limited to low-rise domestic building works (Class 1 and 10 buildings) not exceeding 500 square metres floor area.

Increasing the supply of building surveyors to perform functions for low-rise domestic building work would free up more qualified surveyors to do more complex work, thereby reducing delays associated with appointing building surveyors for that work and improving quality assurance.

83. Increasing interest in the building and engineering professions.
To interest school leavers in the building surveying and inspection professions, the following improvements could be considered:

- the VBA, supported by the Victorian Government, the peak industry associations and training providers, continues to deliver its long-term strategy to market the profession as a desirable career option for school leavers and people wanting to change occupations, with a particular focus on encouraging women to consider careers as building surveyors and inspectors;
- the VBA, together with the peak industry associations and training providers, should:
 - identify opportunities to increase the availability of training, particularly in regional Victoria, and provide flexible modes of study to support students to access and complete courses;
 - identify and recommend, as appropriate, any additional courses that could be prescribed for the registration of building surveyors and inspectors; and
 - strengthen the coverage in the prescribed courses of the technical requirements and standards under the Building Act and the NCC by recommending the preparation of a separate unit of study on this topic and developing local content and materials for use by training providers.
- the Victorian Government should:
 - in partnership with the VBA and peak industry associations, consider promoting and providing scholarships for approved university and TAFE courses;
 - consider subsidising HECS fees and providing other funding support for university students studying the Bachelor of Building Surveying to complement the extension of the Free TAFE Program announced in August 2019;
 - consider funding training providers to support the development of trainers with industry experience, robust training materials and assessment tools to enhance training standards; and
 - consider providing support for cadetships.
- To address the predicted engineering skills shortage and the impact this may have on the availability of appropriately skilled fire safety engineers, Engineering Australia's 'pipeline strategy' is supported, which calls on the Commonwealth Government to try to reverse the decline in secondary school students, in particular women, taking up science, technology, engineering and maths subjects.

84. Set-up new bridging pathways for practitioners from related professions.
A new entry pathway for building surveyors and inspectors should be introduced for practitioners from related professions such as builders, architects, engineers and project managers. This would comprise a series of targeted bridging courses that recognise the knowledge and experience of these practitioners while providing top-up competencies in building surveying, law and practice.

D2 – Improve access to building records

85. A central database for Victoria that is managed by the VBA is the intention of the Victorian Government. In the longer term, the Building Activity Management System (BAMS) platform, recently introduced by the VBA to manage building permit numbers, is intended to provide a

central building records database.
Once the needed software and infrastructure are in place through BAMS, councils could be assisted to migrate existing digitised records to BAMS and digitise and lodge remaining hard copy building information.

D3 – Streamline building permit requirements for low-risk work

86. Decks
The construction of a low-rise deck could be exempted from the requirement to obtain a building permit provided its maximum height does not exceed 800 millimetres.

87. Mobility access ramps
To ensure that all mobility access ramps are exempt from the requirement to obtain a building permit, including those that provide higher level access, exemptions could be introduced for:

- mobility access ramps that do not exceed 800 millimetres in height provided they comply with the NCC; and
- mobility ramps that exceed 800 millimetres in height provided they comply with the NCC and are certified on completion by a building surveyor or inspector.

Under both these sets of conditions, mobility access ramps would be exempted from the front, side and rear setback requirements

88. Sheds
The existing exemption for sheds could be expanded by increasing the current 10-square-metre floor area trigger to 16 square metres. Stakeholders have advised that increasing the size to 16 square metres would ensure that enough space is available in exempt sheds to store tools and equipment for land and bushfire management.

D4 – Standardise construction management plans

89. As many of the elements included in a construction management plan draw on local laws, DELWP could also prepare a model local law in consultation with councils and MAV to further facilitate standardisation across Victoria. The model local law would encourage a standard form and application of standard requirements, which could be varied by councils in certain circumstances to suit local conditions. Councils would need to replace their existing local laws with the model laws in line with the procedure for doing so set out in the Local Government Act

90. To accompany the model local law, a model construction management plan and guidelines for the model plan could be developed.

91. Consideration could also be given to including construction management plans in the concierge model of case management in councils. The City of Greater Dandenong has been cited by stakeholders as an example of using this practice efficiently.

D5 – Improve consistency of Council asset protection requirements

92. Stakeholders have recommended that a standard practice guide should be set for building-related work that could be adopted by all councils to create uniformity across Victoria.

93. To support such a practice guide and standardise the requirements for council permits and asset protection, a model local law could be developed in consultation with councils and MAV. As proposed for construction management plans, the model local law could adopt a standard form and consistent requirements, which could be varied by councils to suit local conditions.

94. Consideration could also be given to including asset protection requirements in the concierge model within councils (see B1).

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D6 – Distinguish building ‘consultants’ from building surveyors
95. It is proposed that in the short term, Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) runs a communications campaign to raise consumer awareness of the role of building consultants compared to building surveyors, the importance of engaging a qualified person, what to look for when engaging a building consultant, the risks, the relevant laws, where to get help and how to make a complaint.
96. In the longer term, DELWP and CAV could undertake a joint review into the: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• issues raised by stakeholders, such as the HIA, and the risks for building owners and consumers more generally arising from the operation of building consultants; and• measures, both regulatory and non-regulatory, to address the issues including, but not limited to, the costs and benefits of a consumer awareness campaign and a registration scheme for building consultants. A registration scheme could consider standards of practice including permitted and prohibited conduct, which may be in the form of a mandatory code of conduct.
D7 – Clarify processes for enforcement
97. Depending on the scope of the Victorian Government's review of the Building Act, that alternative models for the administration and enforcement of the building permit process be considered, including those proposed by stakeholders. Addressing the fragmentation of the enforcement processes would assist in building consumer confidence in the operation and integrity of the building permit process and the regulatory system
98. That Recommendation 6 of the 2019 Victorian Cladding Taskforce be implemented – ‘that consideration be given to the development and implementation of a protocol between the VBA and councils, which sets out accountabilities, mechanisms for cooperation and communication, strategic interventions and agreed procedures for referring enforcement actions.
99. The State Building Surveyor should include monitoring and regular reporting on the operation and performance of the building permit process, including making recommendations to improve the process, where needed.
100. To remove the inherent conflict, the review of the Building Act could also consider the respective roles of municipal and private building surveyors.
101. That a practice guide for building surveyors and inspectors be developed, which benchmarks the processes and the matters they must consider when inspecting each class of building. By clarifying processes and accountabilities for building inspections, a practice guide would assist with quality of work issues arising from conflicts of interest.
102. The code of conduct being developed by the VBA would support the proposed practice guide and strengthen the conflict of interest obligations of private building surveyors and inspectors.