

Statutory Planning Newsletter

January 2021



Catch ups with Planning Consultants

Mandy Whelan (General Manager Development) and Andrew Millen (Manager Development Services) met online with a number of local planning consultants in August and September to hear about their experiences with the Statutory Planning Unit.

Six businesses took up the invitation, and we thank them for their time and feedback.

Let's start with the positives which, in general, included:

- Being able to lodge applications electronically
- Staff being accessible and good to work with
- Good to see the newsletter launched

There were also a number of areas that were highlighted for improvement and, in general, these included:

- Consistency in approach by the planning staff
- Communication
- Time taken to process applications
- Planning Referral Committee – understanding the role of committee, communication and time taken to follow up
- Understanding the challenges faced by developers

The team had already been working on some improvements prior to the recent consultations, with the meeting reinforcing the need to continue with these initiatives, and to also add a few more to the list.

This includes:

- Development of an enhanced pre-application meeting process
- Implementation of a quarterly newsletter (first edition published)
- Review and improvement of MRCC's internal referral process
- Review the process and format of weekly meetings with planning consultants
- Review the process through which application progress updates are provided to planning consultants
- Planning Referral Committee:
 - Tighten up process of following up on actions from Planning Referral Committee (PRC)
 - Improve communication in regard to role and purpose of PRC

Planning Referral Committee

The PRC was established to provide a more transparent process for decisions being made on Planning Permit applications by the General Manager Development, and to review recommendations being put to Council for decision.

The PRC is not a delegated body, and does not approve or refuse applications. It reviews the assessing officer's recommendation, and either supports or makes an alternative recommendation for the General Manager's consideration.



Mildura Rural City Council

The Committee consists of five Council officers from Strategic Planning, Engineering Services and Statutory Planning, and is chaired by the General Manager Development.

The meeting process is the same as the Council Planning Forum, with an opportunity for applicants, objectors or a nominated representative to make a brief presentation on applications prior to their consideration.

The format of the meeting is as follows:

- Introduction by Chairperson
- Summary of assessing officers recommendation
- Objector/s and applicant/s provided five minutes to address the panel on their views of the application
- Committee Members are provided the opportunity to ask questions of presenters
- Meeting closed and panel discussion undertaken prior to voting on a recommendation.
- Notification of the General Manager's decision the same week as the PRC meeting

New Processes

Following the Statutory Planning Unit's ongoing review of processes, a number of changes have been made, being trialled or are soon to be introduced.

Preliminary Internal Referral Process

Internal departments within Council now receive applications the same time they are registered, providing an opportunity to undertake a preliminary assessment of the application. This helps determine if the required information is available at the start of the process, enabling the assessing officer to request further information in a single combined request. This change in process aims to save time and expense for applicants, and also lower assessment times for Council Officers.

Application Updates

A new system will soon be introduced which has divided the application process into stages, with each stage provided with an indicative processing time. The timeframes will enable applicants to provide their clients with a clearer picture of timing for their applications to be determined.

New Pre-application Meeting Process

An enhanced pre-application process for consultants and applicants is currently being trialled, and will be documented, and outcomes shared with relevant parties. These meetings are not intended to predetermine an application, but to provide more detailed advice on what will be required for an application to be made, and what needs to be assessed during the formal process. The meetings include planning officers and staff from all relevant areas within Council.

Mildura Older Irrigated Area Incorporated Document May 2020

The MOIA Document has been amended and now allows for Planning Permit Applications for dwellings to be considered on all lots within the MOIA that are between 0.2 to 1.2 hectares, subject to a number of conditions.

One of these conditions is the concept of a Row of Dwellings. The MOIA document defines this as:

- Three dwellings within 300 metres along a single frontage, with each dwelling set back no
- more than 50 metres from the frontage.
- Council has sought clarification on this and confirms:
- the reference to single frontage refers to the same side of the street.
- the three dwellings must be within the 300 metre measurement, not three lots containing dwellings

If you have any questions regarding this new inclusion please speak to one of the Council Planning Officers.

COVID-19

With the recent relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, Council has reopened its customer service centres in a limited capacity. The Statutory Planning Team are still working from home. A roadmap for reopening is currently being developed and further information on this will be available in due course.

Staff Movements

We would like to welcome our newest staff member Karina Fonseca Ramirez to the team. Karina has moved from Brisbane to take on the role of Subdivision/Town Planner.

Tim Berger has recently accepted a position with another Council. While Tim's official last day is mid-December, he will continue to work in a limited capacity finalising his remaining files.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Tim for all his work with Council in his role as Senior Statutory Planner.