Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Commerce**

Building Commission

BUILDING SUMMIT

Background paper

August 2016

BUILDING SUMMIT

Introduction

In February 2016, Western Australia's inaugural Building Summit was convened and attended by more than 70 representatives from the building industry, local government and key State Government departments. To create a more efficient building process while strengthening industry relationships the group identified opportunities for simpler, more consistent and innovative building, planning and local government processes.

Attendees were asked for input on how best to:

1. capitalise on planning reforms and rationalise the residential design codes;
2. identify opportunities for greater consistency between local governments; and
3. make the new building laws work most effectively.

This process resulted in a number of ideas and progress has been made in several areas which will result in greater consistency more efficient processes and practices. Importantly it has also established greater collaboration between industry, State Government and local government to identify creative and effective solutions to challenges that arise.

Resulting from the Summit was a commitment from the Government to:

- map processes to better understand problem areas and opportunities for improvement;
- set priorities and timeframes
- look for best practice;
- allow opportunities for ongoing feedback and suggestions;
- promptly progress key reforms;
- report back regularly on progress;
- convene a second Building Summit; and importantly
- turn ideas into action.

A Building Summit Working Group asked stakeholders what they would most like to see covered at the August Summit. This time around it is important to focus on specific areas of concern where refinement or cross-industry discussion was most likely to achieve productive results.

The three areas identified where further discussion would be most beneficial are:

- electronic enablement (e-enablement) in the building industry;
- engineering standards; and
- implementation of bushfire reforms.

The August Summit is again being convened by the Western Australian Minister for Commerce, the Hon. Michael Mischin MLC, in conjunction with the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Tony Simpson MLA, and the Minister for Planning, the Hon. Donna Faragher MLC. Again, the ministers commit to taking the summit outcomes back into their portfolios to guide the development of policies and reforms.

The February Summit was a positive, collaborative and productive discussion which resulted in several new ideas and provided a forum for ongoing consultation and direction going forward. The August Summit is an important next step to ensuring the issues, initiatives and reforms discussed continue to progress in a manner that supports the industry and local government to operate efficiently while maintaining the high standards that we have come to expect in the Western Australian built environment.

E-enablement

Developments in technology, online communication and online commerce have opened up new opportunities for individuals and businesses. The internet and information technology have become accessible to a much wider demographic, and as the industry grows so does the expectation for services to be moved online.

We have seen in recent years how the use of online and mobile devices to access more and more linked information has turned traditional industries on their heads, and opened the way for new business opportunities. We have only to think of the impact of Amazon on bookshops and retailing, Airbnb on the hotel industry or Uber on the taxi industry to see how quickly and fundamentally the business model can change, and how customers respond to more choice and lower prices.

Industries worldwide are being faced with challenges brought about by the likes of globalisation, changing technologies and consumer demands for quality and diverse options at a value-for-money price. The industry in which we all operate is no less vulnerable to such challenges.

When considering what e-enablement might look like, it is important to not only focus on what we are trying to 'fix' but what opportunities it presents to reduce costs, increase productivity, improve the accuracy of data and sharing of information and overall standards and compliance through proactive monitoring.

In 2015 Minister Mischin announced a suite of reforms that included a strong e-enablement component. Projects include:

1. an online Building Permit database for permit authority reporting;
2. online occupational licensing applications and renewals;
3. electronic lodgement of plumbing notices and plumbing drainage diagrams; and
4. an electronic system for lodging and processing building permit applications.

Now that we have a secure source of funding for e-enablement, the Government wants to work with industry, local government and stakeholders to scope the projects and what each is proposing to deliver. The Building Permit Database and proposed online, single system for building and planning approvals, particularly for single residential development is one example.

When looking at online systems it's important to have a clear idea of their objectives and what they are proposing to deliver. That is, the focus needs to be on both the technology and the process that sits behind it?

Questions to consider:

What opportunities exist to use the building permit data that is being collected to improve the current process? (Who else can use it and what for?)

What are the main challenges going to be for implementation of an online lodgement system?

What are the core features that must be delivered by such a system?

Is there anything that your organisation (or others) does well in this space that we can learn from?

Engineering standards

In the lead up to the February Summit some stakeholders raised concerns with the process of applying for building and planning approvals across local government boundaries. Different regulations, policies, standards and processes were said to be confusing, contributing to delays in securing the necessary approvals and increased the overall cost of building.

The building approval process can link effectively with local laws, policies and standards and it would be of benefit to all stakeholders if we could achieve greater uniformity. Stakeholders broadly agreed that there should be a set of minimum building related policies consistently applied across all local governments in Western Australia, with the use of a local variation to be required to accommodate specific local conditions.

At the Summit it was suggested that the possibility of a reduced number of crossover standards across the existing local governments should be investigated. Work is being done to look into the current standards used by the 139 local governments in Western Australia and identify where there is potential and value in harmonising these.

The following key areas were raised previously:

- Civil engineering requirements such as road thickness, kerb heights, drainage, septic tanks, and other civil works technical requirements.
- Waste management requirements such as bin requirements and rubbish collection obligations.
- Crossover specifications.
- Verge bonds.
- Landscaping bonds.
- Traffic management.
- Soak wells and storm water management.
- Location of street trees.
- Demolition permits.
- Noise attenuation requirements.

While there may always be some minor variances necessary to take into account factors such as location, block size, soil type, and proximity to the coast or other infrastructure etc, we need to identify where the similarities are and what we can do in order to improve.

Questions to consider:

Which of the above (or other items not on the list) create the greatest challenges or if working well, could achieve the biggest improvement to the approval process?

Which is the low hanging fruit? For example, where are the best opportunities to get agreement on a consistent or uniform process across Local Government?

If a minimum set of engineering standards was to be considered (recognising there is a need for variances in some instances), how are variances applied for?

What could your industry/association/ agency do next to help this process?

Bushfire planning and building reforms

Reducing vulnerability to bushfire is the collective responsibility of State and local government, landowners, industry and the community. The appropriate location and design of development and increasing the bushfire resistance of buildings is a long term strategy to reduce the devastating effect of bushfires on our communities and the economy.

On 7 December 2015, the State Government announced a package of reforms to manage and reduce the threat of bushfires. The reforms introduced planning and building requirements for areas identified as bushfire prone to ensure risk is considered and addressed prior to development occurring in designated bushfire prone areas.

Bushfire risk management provisions have now been inserted in local planning schemes throughout the State. Bushfire prone sites also require assessment of a property's bushfire risk and the application of bushfire construction standards under the Building Code of Australia (BCA).

The application of bushfire requirements for planning and building has caused a number of implementation issues which include:

- Affordability – additional costs to satisfy BCA bushfire construction requirements.
- Notification/Disclosure – prospective/new purchasers unaware of planning and building requirements and costs associated with development in designated bushfire prone areas.
- Implementation/Discretion – local government has discretion to allow them to waive bushfire assessment where bushfire risk has been assessed/ addressed at prior planning/application stages (strategic planning or subdivision).
- Transitional – planning and building requirements apply to land notwithstanding future clearing and urbanisation.
- Whether/when a Hazard Separation Zone is required in addition to the Asset Protection Zone.

Responding to these challenges will involve innovation, cooperation and flexibility. Building designers and builders need innovative designs that are inherently bushfire resistant while holding building costs down or even reducing them. More effective education and awareness raising in the community will help home owners understand the role they play in managing down bushfire risk, and the options they have to contribute at minimum cost.

Questions to consider:

How can building designers minimise cost of bushfire resistant construction through design?

What construction techniques or materials can be used to reduce or eliminate the cost of bushfire resistant construction?

Is it appropriate to expose homes/people to what may only be a short-term risk for example while an adjoining development is cleared? What mechanisms could be used to reduce/remove this risk?

How can there be greater consistency between when a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) assessment is required for planning as against building?

Should both a Hazard Separation Zone and an Asset Protection Zone be required and, if not, how should an appropriate separation zone be calculated?