

# It's a long, winding road to travel for city land-use approval

**T**HE CITY of Cape Town's Planning and Building Development Management (PBDM) department's core function is the performance of a complex balancing act between the competing needs of developers, conservationists, and ratepayers, while providing an important service to all Capetonians.

The city therefore appreciates input from the public, and appeals to all developers and residents to cooperate with the PBDM department to ensure an improved service.

This department faces a particularly challenging task, in that it must follow correct procedure, while trying to keep up with an ever-increasing demand. A decision to develop a piece of land or to refuse an application is slowed down

significantly when the developers do not submit applications correctly or submit incomplete applications – 66 percent of the Land Use Planning Ordinance applications received are non-compliant.

This causes unnecessary delays and is a waste of resources. Larger developments in particular need to engage with the city through pre-consultative meetings.

Planning applications are processed within an intricate bureaucratic system, involving compliance with a wealth of standardised procedures, regulations and ordinances, many of which are nationally or provincially imposed, and the department must comply with them.

Suitability of the land-use and the availability of – or ability to provide – infrastructure influence decisions.

The municipality covers a large area,

spanning 2 461km<sup>2</sup>, that services 3.2 million residents. Of the 24 365 building plans submitted over the last financial year, the PBDM approved 24 313 of them.

Cape Town's unique natural environment poses an additional challenge. There are few cities which have a national park at their heart and the city has a responsibility to protect its natural heritage. Many applications require careful weighing up of environmental, social and economic factors.

The act of processing applications is lengthy, requiring a number of mandatory waiting periods. Many of these are driven by legislation such as mandatory advertising and notification periods. The PBDM tries to run a number of processes in parallel to speed this up, but the prescribed minimum time-

frames cannot be avoided.

Approval of submissions often involves public participation, which allows for comment from any persons, neighbours, ratepayers' associations, or professional bodies affected by a development. Public participation ensures the application is heard at a different political level, and although it adds to the time delays, it is necessary.

Appeals against decisions are an important part of the process and can either be heard by the City Manager, the City Planning Appeals Committee, or the provincial government, depending on the applicable legislations.

The PBDM department is continually re-evaluating its business practices to improve service delivery. The city appeals to industry professionals and the

public to play their part by accepting a level of responsibility. Familiarise yourselves with the relevant legal framework, including applicable laws, zoning schemes and regulations, and national building regulations to make matters easier for all concerned.

The PBDM department has initiated discussion forums with professional institutions within Cape Town so that it can inform, and test and discuss concepts jointly. The city plans to extend these to community organisations.

With the cooperation of communities and developers, the PBDM can provide an effective and efficient service to all.

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