



Streamlining Planning Processes

Presented by:

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Junior Minister for Home Affairs

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Madam President, I am today providing the Senate with information and updates on various initiatives which the Department of Planning are implementing in order to streamline processes, and also to provide an update on the current status of service delivery.

Madam President, initiatives to improve various Planning procedures were introduced last May with the aim to implement more efficient decision-making and generally unburden application processes.

Madam President, one of the initial steps that was taken was to engage with key stakeholders from the construction industry on a periodic basis to understand first-hand the range of concerns. Such meetings have provided much insight into the needs of the industry, and, by opening up the lines of communication, it has, in turn, begun to improve the perception of the Department in that industry by allowing stakeholders more input into the process.

Madam President, one of this Government's aims is to make public information more accessible to our residents. The Department's 'EnerGov' allows members of the public to access planning submissions online with just a few clicks of a mouse. The 'EnerGov' system underwent its first phase of implementation in the summer of 2019 and provides for electronic submissions, review of applications and submissions of objections, thus eliminating the need for paper submissions.

Madam President, the Department recently capitalized on the benefits of this system whereby service delivery was able to continue throughout the ‘shelter in place’ period. In this regard, the Department **never** ceased delivering services, such as resolving planning applications and issuing building permits.

Madam President, to further assist the public during these challenging times, the Department has made a wide variety of updates to their website in order to provide up-to-date information on procedures and processes.

These updates have included such items as:

- the posting on-line of Development Application Board (DAB) meeting agendas and minutes;
- advertising of applications electronically,
- updated guidance notes; and
- the ability of the public to subscribe with their email to automatically receive updates.

Madam President, the Department has embraced the use of technology to combat challenges posed by COVID-19. In this regard, DAB meetings

have been held virtually with much success and officers have worked remotely with ease thanks to online meeting platforms and the ‘EnerGov’ system.

Madam President, the Department is diligently working on a technological solution to resume the Draft Bermuda Plan 2018 Tribunal inquiries which are required to be open to the public. It is expected that such a solution will entail virtual meetings that can be live streamed.

Madam President, as publicly announced earlier this year, an initiative, known as the Scheme of Delegation, is now operational. The DAB has delegated its power to grant or refuse planning permission to the Director of Planning for those applications that are fully compliant and those only requiring minimal discretion. This has resulted in the reduction in processing times for straightforward applications,

Madam President, the benefits of this approval process were particularly realized since March 19th – the advent of Covid-19 on our shores – a total of 55 planning applications have been approved administratively to date.

Madam President, feedback from key stakeholders indicates that delays have become far too common with respect to required approvals from entities outside of the Department of Planning for building projects. As a result, the Department is actively exploring ways to improve processes and accelerate applications which involve inter-Departmental consultation.

Madam President, this past fiscal year, the Department held quarterly ‘planning clinics’ in different areas of the island. Many members of our community took advantage of these sessions to obtain planning-related advice and guidance on the submission of applications. The Department will now be evolving these sessions to include virtual presentations on various topics such as green infrastructure, alternative building methods, and answering questions submitted by the public.

Madam President, the Department of Planning is developing a new initiative known as the ‘Competent Persons Scheme’. This initiative will enable various tradespersons to qualify against a set criteria to become a

‘trusted and competent’ individual in their field which will enable them to carry out work without the requisite building inspection process.

Madam President, the build out of this initiative requires assessment of what criteria will be used to qualify persons and also for what specific types of projects. The intention is to apply the scheme to renewable energy projects and other small scale works such as minor residential additions and home renovation projects. The primary benefits of such a scheme will (1) allow for construction to proceed seamlessly without undue delay; and (2) provide increased opportunities for Bermudians and small businesses.

Madam President, in closing, I am encouraged by the progress made by the Department of Planning thus far and how service delivery continued through the period of ‘shelter in place’ due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am confident the Department of Planning is committed to making the necessary changes for the ultimate betterment of Bermuda.

Thank you, **Madam President.**