



## **Streamlining Planning Processes**

**Presented by:**

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**Ministry of Home Affairs**

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**Mr. Speaker,** I rise today to inform this Honourable House about new initiatives the Department of Planning are expecting to introduce to streamline processes to support the construction and development industry over the course of this financial year.

**Mr. Speaker,** Honourable Members would likely be familiar with the required planning process one needs to navigate in order to obtain permission to build. It is a widely held belief that the process is slow and

cumbersome. There are some who would even suggest that Planning is impeding opportunities to encourage and attract investment. This Government does not desire any department to be perceived in this fashion. This Government recognizes the crucial role that the Department of Planning plays in facilitating and supporting new investment and as such is desirous to improve procedures that will result in more efficient decision making and overall unburden the process.

**Mr. Speaker**, there are a number of initial steps that will be taken in order to achieve improvements. First and foremost, as Minister responsible for the Department of Planning, I will be engaging with key stakeholders from the construction industry on a periodic basis to understand first-hand the range of concerns. Through this dialogue, it is expected that we will be able to discuss the proposed changes and obtain valuable feedback.

**Mr. Speaker**, I must inform you that the Department has invested heavily in a new EnerGov system which will allow for the electronic submission of applications and provide for an automated and electronic

workflow which will eliminate the generation of paper. It is being tested by staff and stakeholders and will be fully implemented in September.

**Mr. Speaker,** there are a number of areas in which changes are recommended. Firstly, starting with the planning application process, the team has commenced exploring those types of proposals that can be processed administratively and not required to be presented to the Development Applications Board for a decision. This procedure, known as the ‘Delegation to Director’, is a process that Section 5A of the Development and Planning Act 1974 enables. It is anticipated that this mechanism will greatly reduce processing times in respect of allowing internal approvals for those fully compliant applications and those only requiring minimal discretion.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Department will also be producing guidelines and procedures for (1) emergency applications, and (2) to fast-track applications for structures that are temporary in nature such as seasonal concession stands. The latter process will assist small business entrepreneurs to obtain permission quickly provided they meet certain

guidelines that will be made available to the public as soon as they are produced.

**Mr. Speaker**, it has also been acknowledged that there are a range of development types that under the Act require permission but are considered de-minimis, i.e. minor in scope. These types of applications, if eliminated, would free up additional resources to delegate to the processing of applications that are of a more complex nature. It is the intent to apply a more common sense of approach for minor development matters.

**Mr. Speaker**, it is acknowledged that during construction, it is commonplace to make on-site changes. For those minor types of changes, it is currently a laborious route in which to authorise these desired alterations through an ‘application for revision’ process. Often times, construction has to cease on site whilst approval is sought thereby adversely interrupting construction timeframes and impacting jobs on the ground. A criteria will be developed for the most common types of alterations to enable a ‘sign off’ in the field by building inspectors

thereby avoiding the time-consuming revision process. We hope this will assist developments that find themselves in this situation to avoid disruption and planning infractions. It will also facilitate a cooperative approach between the Department and the developer.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Department of Planning does have greater enforcement tools. These will be deployed where evidence shows that enforcement is necessary. The Department intends to provide as much support to agents, contractors and their clients as is needed to prevent potential infractions as circumstances arise.

**Mr. Speaker,** in the interests of public outreach, it is proposed that the Department of Planning will hold a series of ‘planning clinics’ in different areas of the island on a quarterly basis where members of the public can obtain planning related advice and guidance on the submission of applications. It is the aim through this initiative, to bring greater public awareness of planning requirements and also to raise the profile of the Department.

**Mr. Speaker**, whilst unfortunate to mention, it must be acknowledged that the Department has been often used as the classic scapegoat by agents which has resulted in unnecessary confusion and frustration for landowners in particular. To this end, the Department will be amending its communications structure so that all parties including the applicant, agent and contractor will simultaneously be in receipt of all correspondence. Concurrently, the Department will endeavour to improve its internal communication strategy.

**Mr. Speaker**, we will be introducing legislative changes to allow the Bermuda Plan to become a more fluid document whereby landowners will not be required to wait every 5+ years to request a change to the zoning of their land. At the same time, legislation will also be introduced to give protection in perpetuity to those areas of conservation value which are increasingly under threat from development, such as Woodland and Agricultural Reserves.

**Mr. Speaker**, this Government is pleased to report that following the culmination of the Draft Bermuda Plan 2018 process, technical officers

will dedicate resources to community planning initiatives for the island's nine parishes. It is this initiative that will focus on more of a 'grass-roots' approach to planning where residents will have a greater influence over the future of their community.

**Mr. Speaker**, since becoming Minister responsible for Planning, I have spent time listening to a cross section of people about their interaction with the Department. Generally, Planning does a good job but there are instances where it is clear that the Department needs to examine and change, where necessary, its policies and practices. This is acknowledged and is currently being worked on. We will engage regularly with stakeholders in the community to ensure that we are being responsive to their valid concerns. We have listened and are prepared to act.

**Mr. Speaker**, in closing, I am encouraged that the Department of Planning is committed to making the necessary changes for the ultimate betterment of Bermuda.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.