

Subject: Summary of Planning Case Studies for review by City of Kalamunda

Date: 11 August 2025

Objective of this Study

This document presents the findings of a series of case studies undertaken by the Kalamunda Chamber of Commerce (KCC) to examine planning-related issues experienced by local businesses. The purpose of the study is to provide the City of Kalamunda with a clear and evidence-based understanding of the challenges faced by applicants, with a view to identifying opportunities for improvement. These findings are intended to support collaborative discussions between KCC and the City as part of a broader review of the planning scheme. The detail of the review can be found in attachment APPENDIX A.

Background

In November 2024, CEO of the City of Kalamunda, Anthony Vuleta, suggested KCC prepare case studies of planning issues experienced by local businesses. Over the past five months, we have conducted face-to-face meetings with business owners and highlighted six detailed case studies, each representing hours of consultation and an end-to-end review of the application process from the applicant's perspective.

Without exception, the process experienced by applicants was more complex, time-consuming, and personally frustrating than can be fully conveyed in this document. The key issues have been distilled into the themes and recommendations presented below, representing what we believe are the most common and impactful concerns raised.

Scope of Cost Data

The cost impacts cited in this report relate only to expenses that can reasonably be considered avoidable. These include costs directly linked to process inefficiencies, delays, unnecessary duplication of work, inconsistent requirements, and avoidable use of external consultants. Costs that could reasonably be considered necessary, standard, or unavoidable components of the planning process have not been included, in order to ensure the figures reflect areas where process improvement could deliver tangible savings.

Key Themes

The overarching themes consistently reported across all six case studies were:

- Lack of clarity provided on requirements throughout the process
- Delays in response times and application turnaround (both real and perceived)
- Inconsistency in staff handling applications, resulting in repetition and conflicting advice
- Poor communication styles and reliance on technical "planning speak"
- Perception of planning acting as an unreasonable barrier to sustainable development, creating a reputation for being "anti-development" or "anti-tourism"
- Excessive processing times for home-based businesses moving location
- Decisions influenced by opinion or unwritten rules
- Lack of recognition of the financial impact of delays and consultant costs

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Cost & Time Impacts

The cumulative **avoidable** total cost impact and hours spent by the 6 case studies has been summarised below:

Case Study 1 - \$7,660 / 55 hours

Case Study 2 - \$5,500 / 40 hours

Case Study 3 - 80 hours

Case Study 4 - \$104,000 / 115 hours

Case Study 5 - \$150,000 / 160 hours

Case Study 6 - 40 hours

Not including loss of income figures, this equates to:

Cost Impact - **\$167,160 or \$27,860 per applicant on average**

Time Impact – **490 hours or 82 hours per applicant on average.**

Translated to an average wage of \$50.60 per hour, if CoK staff time matches the applicant time spent on these avoidable issues (approx. 490 hours), this represents an estimated additional **\$24,794 in potential annual staff cost savings.**

List of Recommendations for Review

On reviewing the specific issues raised, below is a consolidated list of recommendations for City of Kalamunda to improve the planning process.

1) Provide Early-Stage Guidance

Offer relevant guidance at the beginning of the process, particularly when CoK input will be required at the final review stage. This should be mandatory in instances where the development presents a significant economic or tourism development.

2) Enhance support for Tourism and Economic Development Applications

Introduce better support and oversight for Tourism and Economic Development applications and introduce concierge service, with view to reduce errors and avoid unnecessary costs for investors. This could also include blanket policies and exemptions for DA's within 'tourism zones'.

3) Improve Planning Communications

Limit the use of 'planning speak' where possible, as well as actively intercept, assess, and translate inter-departmental and inter-agency communications to help reduce the burden on applicants who often lack the planning expertise required to identify issues and errors or decipher planning policy.

4) Respect Resource Constraints of Small Business Owners

Establish a clear understanding that small business owners should not be expected to resolve issues that fall under the remit of the City of Kalamunda, or that have unreasonably come about as a direct result of the policies and practices of the City of Kalamunda and its staff.

5) Limit Unnecessary Consultant Reports

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Reduce the number of arbitrary or unnecessary consultant reports requested, especially where laws already govern operations or where clear precedents exist.

6) Improve Policy Transparency

Identify relevant policies for common planning issues and ensure they are used consistently. Provide transparency and guidance to applicants on where and how to access these policies.

7) Consider Extenuating Circumstances

Assess extenuating circumstances at the start of the process and apply discretion to response times and requests, particularly when community members' incomes may be impacted - common in home-based businesses. For home based businesses who are simply changing location, the City could issue a temporary or conditional approval at the outset, allowing the business to continue operating while providing a set timeframe to supply any required supporting documentation. This approach would protect livelihoods while still ensuring full compliance within an agreed period.

8) Standardise Patron Number Calculations

Set a standard for calculating patron numbers based on "any one time" capacity rather than "daily basis" capacity, aligning with practices commonly used in other areas across WA and Australia.

Planning Scheme Amendment

At the Ordinary Council Meeting of 18 December 2018, Council resolved to adopt a planning scheme amendment allowing for the discretionary request of a range of planning documents as part of the application process. The intent of this provision was to enable the City to request additional documentation in cases where it was reasonably necessary to inform decision-making.

It is proposed that the City undertake a review of how this discretionary power is currently being applied. Feedback from recent case studies indicates that, in practice, these document requests may be issued as a matter of course rather than on a discretionary basis, including in cases where the relevance or necessity of the documents is unclear. Examples include requests made of home-based businesses where the requirement does not appear proportionate to the scale or nature of the application.

The objective of this review would be to:

1. Assess whether the current application of this provision aligns with the original intent of the 2018 Council decision.
2. Establish clear guidelines to ensure discretionary requests are supported by reasonable and transparent justification.
3. Reduce unnecessary costs and administrative burdens for applicants without compromising the quality or integrity of planning assessments.

The original proposed wording of the 2018 amendment is included below for ease of reference:

Currently, the City and Council may be faced with a decision whether to support an amendment to Local Planning Scheme No. 3 (Scheme) without knowing what the anticipated built form or amenity outcome for the site may be, or the impact the amendment may have in terms of the surrounding community. To improve the decision-making process, it is proposed, through the Policy, that the City has the discretion to require an applicant to provide a Land Use Scoping report outlining the following key elements:

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- a) *Scale and Intensity of Use;*
 - b) *Streetscape;*
 - c) *Tree Preservation and Land Clearing;*
 - d) *Open Space;*
 - e) *Site Limitations and / or Constraints; and*
 - f) *Prevailing amenity, relating to noise attenuation, dust and odour, environmental impact, traffic management, safety and security.*
- The applicant will also be required to provide a Concept Master Plan upon lodgement when applying for additional uses or special use zones (or where the City deems appropriate) which requires the following to be provided at the City's discretion:*
- a) *an indicative location of proposed buildings;*
 - b) *incidental and additional uses;*
 - c) *concept drawings, including any development staging;*
 - d) *traffic assessment;*
 - e) *effluent disposal management statement;*
 - f) *stormwater disposal management plan;*
 - g) *car parking plan / strategy; and*
 - h) *noise impact assessment.*

Next Steps

We look forward to the City's consideration of these findings and recommendations. Once you have had a chance to review this document, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with your planning leaders, relevant executives, and our own planning sub-committee to discuss the next steps.

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