Smarter Permitting

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COUNCILS

Smarter permitting practices help councils reduce costs, shorten approval times, and improve consistency – without compromising necessary risk controls and community protection.

Practices have been identified from engagement with councils, businesses and other better-practice guides. These reflect proven and actionable opportunities for councils to modernise their local law permitting practices, build better relationships with their businesses, and reduce processing demands on council staff.

Practices are categorised into four areas:

- **Customer service:** Improving businesses' permit application experience by providing targeted support.

- **Streamline processes**: Simplifying permit processes and requirements to reduce processing demands and confusion.

- **Improving digitisation**: Digitising and automating processes to streamline the permit application and approval process, freeing up time.

- **Building capability**: Developing skillsets and enhancing resources available to support the permit process.

Councils can use the table to:

- **Identify quick wins**: Choose practices you can implement without requiring local law amendments (e.g. clearer checklists or digital forms).

- **Adopt model local laws and permit conditions**: Integrate these practices with model permitting guides to ensure your local laws are fit-for-purpose, risk-based, and easier for businesses to navigate.

- **Prioritise longer-term reforms**: Build a roadmap for broader changes, such as risk-based pathways or tiered fee structures, which align with your council's strategic and resource needs.

- **Engage key stakeholders**: Share the table across teams involved in permitting (e.g. assets, traffic, planning, compliance) to align on opportunities and coordinate improvements.

Regulatory area	Recommended practices	Benefits	Examples	Possible next steps and considerations
Customer service – helping businesses get it right the first time				
Provide clear information, communication and guidance	• Information should be available in plain-English, and non-English languages (aligned to your council's major demographics). Explore using AI tools to translate information.[1] • Replace non-editable PDFs with an accessible, functional website, including checklists, flow-charts and interactive tools. • Share permit fact sheets and information packs, including guidance on when businesses may require multiple permits. • Adapt relevant journey maps to meet your council's context and make them publicly available on the website.	• Businesses self-screen in minutes. • Reduces follow-up calls to council. • Improves the end-to-end approvals process for businesses. • Helps businesses to more consistently meet council requirements. • Supports businesses to understand what they need to do before they get started.	• Interactive tool to determine whether a permit is needed: Do I need a Permit? Melton City Council • Greater Dandenong Council Asset Protection User Guide: Asset Protection Permits – Greater Dandenong Council • City of Yarra's Online Permit Application Guide (Asset Protection): Permits – User guide – Applying online • Editable journey maps and approvals guide for councils: Business Friendly Council Initiative – vic.gov.au	• Seek feedback on guidance and supporting information from businesses that have just completed a permit process. • Audit your existing PDFs and website. • Engage your digital or comms teams to develop consistent guidance. • Consider tailoring materials for different language groups. • Map your current customer journey and adapt templates. • Create or update fact sheets with multi-permit/permit family scenarios.

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[1] For guidance on the use of Generative AI tools in Victorian Government, and the use of publicly available and agency-approved Generative AI tools for official work purposes, refer to https://www.vic.gov.au/guidance-safe-responsible-use-gen-ai-vps.

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Concierge ('single front door')	• Identify a contact officer to assist first time applicants as a point of guidance. • Explore using AI to develop a digital concierge (please refer to footnote 1 on page 2).	• Reduces back-and-forth phone calls to your teams on common queries so you can focus on more complex issues. • Helps applicants navigate the front end of the application process and get necessary answers upfront. • Businesses receive earlier notice if application not successful, and can re-scope faster.	• Council and Regulator Toolkit Business Concierge Council User Guide: Business Concierge Information Pack • City of Devonport's AI chatbot 'Rose': Devonport City Council	• Review existing concierge models. • Nominate an officer for new business enquiries.
Case-management ('single point of contact')	• Allocate a permit officer/'priority lane'. • Offer pre-application triage meetings and site walk-throughs for more complex or higher-risk applications.	• Works with applicants to resolve pain points and supports approval processes. • Cuts rework and conflicting advice.	• City of Monash Council – pre-application meeting with statutory planning officer: Planning Applications – City of Monash	• Identify high pain permit areas. • Pilot case management for a small sample of permits.
Streamline processes – simplify and speed up permits				
Deemed to comply standards	• Publish clear triggers and deemed to comply standards. • Local law would provide power for council to take enforcement action against entities that fail to adhere to requirements.	• No costs for councils to assess applications. • Frees staff to focus on higher risk activities. • Encourages more lower risk business activities in your council areas.	• Council and Regulator Toolkit Local Law Assessment Guide:	• Review existing local laws and design standards. • Draft a plain-English summary of deemed to comply conditions. • Consult enforcement team.

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Notifications	• No permit is issued. Councils only need to maintain a register of notifications. • Councils can charge fees on an ongoing basis (e.g. renewals).	• No costs for councils to assess applications. • Businesses can commence activity immediately.	• Wyndham City Council's approach to notification for Asset Protection: Wyndham City Council *Community Amenity Local Law 2023*	• Determine which low-risk activities could move to notification only approach. • Update council website with a clear notification form. • Test register process.
Automatic approvals	• Permit is issued automatically after businesses complete an application and submit necessary documents. • Businesses commence low risk activities in compliance with mandatory requirements published by council. • Process suitable for activities with moderate risk of harms and a high degree of standardisation.	• Instant approval for routine works. • Enables businesses to start without delay.	• Automatic Approvals Process currently in use for Skip Bins and Footpath Trading Permits by Boroondara, Golden Plains and Melton Councils: Skip Bin Permit – Permits and Licences – Service Victoria • Footpath Trading Permit – Permits and Licences – Service Victoria	• List routine, low risk permits. • Work with IT team to prototype auto-issue feature.
Flexible/tiered fee models	• Simple, transparent, easy to understand fee structures. • Link charges to use (daily lane occupancy, m², duration). • Publish tiered schedule and review at least every three years.	• Transparent cost recovery. • Incentivises efficient use of council assets and areas. • Predictable budgeting for contractors.	• City of Boroondara scales fees for asset protection permits based on level of impact of proposed works: City of Boroondara – Asset Protection Permits	• Review current fees. • Draft simplified fee bands. • Pilot revised fee model for one permit.

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Shared 'gold-standard' templates	• Harmonised drawings, fee tables, standard conditions. • Provide downloadable, standardised templates for Construction Management Plans (CMP) and Traffic Management Plans (TMP) that businesses can use as a starting point when preparing their permit applications.	• Faster internal drafting. • Confidence for multi-site operators.	• Melbourne City Council's standardised templates for Traffic Management Plans: Traffic Management Plans – City of Melbourne • Greater Dandenong Council provides a standardised fee table for footpath trading permits: Trading in Greater Dandenong – Greater Dandenong Council • FoodSmart templates available as part of the Victorian Food Safety Program: FoodSmart – Department of Health	• Gather commonly used templates from other councils. • Consult internal teams to standardise fee tables and CMP/TMP forms.
Review compliance and enforcement approaches	• Manage risk attached to more streamlined processes with robust compliance and enforcement mechanisms, e.g. mandating photographs prior to commencement of work (for evidentiary purposes); proportionate fines. • Identify criteria for transitioning between promoting compliance, assessing compliance, detecting breaches and taking enforcement action.	• Fewer contested fines and prosecutions. • Supports proportionate response. • Reduces exposure to risk – including liability and debt – while making it easier for businesses. • Proportionate fines incentivise better compliance behaviour.	• Moorabool Shire Council - Enforcement Policy • Macedon Ranges Shire Council – Compliance and Enforcement Policy	• Review compliance and enforcement policies published by councils. • Update existing or publish a new compliance and enforcement policy

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Improving digitisation – digitising and automating application processes				
Digital status tracking through an online portal	• Online portal to support end-to-end lodgement and status tracking (mobile + desktop). • Live dashboard for applicants and officers.	• Reduced council staff time spent responding to 'where is my permit' enquiries.	• City of Darebin's eServices allow applicants to track the status of their planning and building permits: eServices – City of Darebin	• List all permit categories without tracking. • Meet with IT to scope a live portal dashboard.
Enhanced digital capabilities	• Simple online forms that auto-populate known data (e.g. ABN, name, and address for previous applicants). • Mandatory application form fields; use AI tools to identify and block incomplete lodgement (please refer to footnote 1 on page 2).	• Reduces manual effort for both councils and businesses. • Rejects incorrect or incomplete applications, meaning applicants are required to lodge correct documents the first time.	• Service Victoria permitting: Skip Bin Permit – Permits and Licences – Service Victoria • Service Victoria permitting: Footpath Trading Permit – Permits and Licences – Service Victoria • Business Services (a one stop-shop for businesses to register business details and keep track of applications): Service Victoria Business Services • Greater Dandenong Council permit application online form: Application for Local Law Permit Footpath Activity – Greater Dandenong	• Identify common form errors. • Implement mandatory fields. • Engage IT to integrate ABN data to auto-populate fields.

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End-to-end process enhancements	• Use AI tools (e.g. chatbots) to answer queries, assist applicants and provide quick online extensions (please refer to footnote 1 on page 2). • One online form per permit family. • Officer checklist mirrors risk controls and auto-approves in 24 hours when met. • Introduce 48-hour automated acknowledgment (email/SMS).	• Reduced council staff time spent responding to enquiries. • Inspectors redeployed to high-risk sites. • Enhanced transparency around processing.	• The City of Melbourne lists types of structures covered, when a permit is needed, and provides direct links to application forms and checklists: Install hoardings, gantries or scaffolds on public land – City of Melbourne • Yarra Ranges Shire Council has developed an AI tool to help improve user experience for planning permit applications: Yarra Ranges Shire Council Yarra Ranges Shire Council case study – Department of Transport and Planning • Find out if you need a planning permit Yarra Ranges Council	• Document permit families. • Align internal checklists. • Trial 24-hour auto-approval for one permit with strong risk controls. • Standardise acknowledgment times for low-risk permits. • Engage IT team to set up automated acknowledgment email/SMS.
Building capability – uplifting skills, processes and systems				
Resource management	• Work with neighbouring councils to pool specialist staff across councils where volumes are low, and rotate staff internally where possible. • Regularly review processes by referencing better-practice guides and benchmarking requirements against other councils.	• Improves processes and service delivery through increased cross-council collaboration. • Addresses turnover and silo issues. • Results in more consistent, defensible decisions.	• Local Government Victoria's Collaborating Councils case studies: LGV project summary	• Identify cross-council partners. • Identify better practice processes.

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Skill development	• Develop and implement targeted upskilling programs for council staff.	• Enhanced skills development for employees. • Promotes more effective service delivery.	• Frankston City Council's employee development opportunities: What we can offer you – Frankston City Council • City of Casey employee personal development opportunities: Benefits – City of Casey	• Survey team skills and gaps. • Work with internal HR teams and other councils to identify skills development opportunities (e.g. professional development)
Improving internal referral processes	• A centralised list of council department's business permit and registration prompts to tell staff which permits may be required, no matter which council department receives a business enquiry.	• Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of council departments in the permit application process. • Provides guidance for directing customer enquiries to the right place.	• Council and Regulator Toolkit: Enhance Council Interdepartmental Collaboration suite	• Map internal referral pathways. • Develop shared prompt lists. • Test one unified intake checklist with customer service team.