Check it twice – lodge it once

ACTPLA chief Neil Savery urges industry to make sure they get their development applications right

ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) Chief Planning Executive Neil Savery has urged industry professionals to check their development applications carefully before lodging them with ACTPLA.

Mr Savery said ACTPLA was rejecting a lot of applications because applicants were often making several mistakes and not including crucial information, including things like correct site or floor plans.

“Over the last 12 months ACTPLA has actively been improving its internal administrative processes to ensure that development applications are processed well and truly within statutory timeframes.”

“But there’s a limit to what we can do and one of the things we can’t do is accept applications when applicants have left off vital information. For example there is an Australian standard for drawing plans and all applicants are required to meet the standard when they lodge these plans.

“Unfortunately a number of applicants are regularly submitting incomplete or incorrect floor or site plans that don’t meet the standard.”

Mr Savery said another big cause for concern was the number of people who were submitting incorrect statements against criteria, or leaving them out altogether.

“If you lodge an application in merit track you have to comply with the rules or criteria, unless the rule is mandatory. If you choose to meet the criteria rather than the rule then you have say how you meet the criteria. A lot of applicants are either not doing this or they are just saying they meet the criteria without saying how. Also statements are sometimes addressing the wrong code.”

Mr Savery said sometimes applicants were not doing homework properly and this was reflected in simple errors like not filling in all the boxes or mistakes like putting in the wrong zone.

“When there is a simple error, like the wrong zone or they’ve left off one minor detail ACTPLA staff will call applicants and fix the error. Unfortunately we can’t do this when there is significant information left off the application, things like a missing land custodian’s signature; an environment protection plan or landscape management plan not submitted.”

“Other errors have included filling out the wrong form; not stating the gross floor area; plans being provided which are not to scale; erosion and sediment control plans not being provided.”

“One of the ways that applicants can prevent leaving off necessary pieces of information is to use ACTPLA’s eDevelopment system, which won’t let applicants progress their application unless every necessary document has been loaded.”

“However, ACTPLA also provides a checklist at the bottom of every development application, which applicants should use to ensure they are providing all the necessary information.”

Mr Savery said ACTPLA had worked closely with industry groups such as the Master Builders Association, Housing Industry Association and Property Council to ensure everything possible was being done to streamline planning further and ensure the system was operating efficiently.
“We also encourage any industry applicants who are experiencing difficulty to come in for pre-application meetings, where they can receive professional advice from ACTPLA staff on their applications and help ensure their application is not rejected.”

“ACTPLA has to assess applications according to what’s in the Territory Plan and in accordance with planning legislation, so if people are not meeting those requirements, we are required to reject the application, which slows down the process and makes more work for everyone.”

“I encourage all industry members to check and double-check their applications before lodging them.”

More information about the development application process can be found at [www.actpla.act.gov.au](http://www.actpla.act.gov.au)