General Planning Advice

INTRODUCTION

Vision 2020 is the shared vision of the Yarra Ranges community. It describes the kind of community and environment residents of Yarra Ranges wish for in the future. The Shire of Yarra Ranges is a rich mosaic of urban settlements, productive rural holdings, healthy waterways, native bushland and forest. The area offers a special experience for those who live here and the millions who visit each year.

The Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme aims to protect and enhance the Shire’s unique character. We have a complex system of planning controls in place because we not only have a wide diversity of urban and rural areas, landscapes and townships but we are also dealing with issues such as wildfire management, heritage protection and avoiding landslip. The community expects that these planning controls will mean that the Shire continues to offer a special experience to residents and visitors alike well into the future.

PLANNING FACTS

- Yarra Ranges receives on average 2000 planning permit applications per year.
- Application types range from urban development, dwellings in rural areas, vegetation removal and tourism uses.
- More than 75% of planning permit applications require further information to be provided after they have been lodged.
- Most applications are advertised by sending a notice to neighbouring properties and putting a sign on the site. If people object to the proposal often a consultation meeting is held to try and find ways to address their concerns.
- Many applications need to be sent to other external authorities (eg Yarra Valley Water, Country Fire Authority, VicRoads) so they can review the proposal.
- The majority of applications are approved, although many include permit conditions requiring changes to be made.
- On average, a planning permit application will take around 2 months to process if we don’t need any more information but around 4 months if we need to ask for further information before we can fully assess your application.
- More complex applications can take between 6 - 12 months before a decision is made.
- Some applications need to be considered by the Council at a formal meeting, particularly major projects and applications that have received lots of objections or have a significant environmental impact.
STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Step 1: Talk to the Planning Department

- Take advantage of free planning advice.
- Find out if you need a planning permit.
- Ask for copies of the planning controls for your land or visit www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au to find a link to Planning Schemes Online.
- Get information about the planning process.
- Look at an example application under Planning Advice Notes on our website.

Step 2: Talk to your neighbours and other authorities

By taking the time to have a chat to your neighbours about your proposal you can find out whether they have any concerns or ideas about how a compromise may be reached.

It is also good idea to talk to other authorities such as Melbourne Water or South East Water, the Country Fire Authority or VicRoads (if the land is on a main road) to see if they have specific requirements which may require changes to your proposal.

Step 3: Hire a professional to prepare and lodge your application

Employing a consultant to manage the application on your behalf could save time. Depending on what you are applying for you may need assistance from an architect, draftsperson, landscape designer, arborist (tree expert), heritage expert or geotechnical engineer (if you are in a landslip area). We can provide some guidance about what expertise you need but unfortunately we cannot recommend anyone to you.

Step 4: Ask for a pre-application meeting with one of our Planners

- Bring in sketch plans of your proposal, along with other relevant application documents (such as an arborist report or geotechnical report), so that we have as much information as possible about what you plan to do.

- The Planner can give advice about whether you have all the information you need to lodge your application. Please note that a Planner will undertake a more detailed assessment of the application when it is lodged and may ask for more information to be provided.

Step 5: Lodge the Application with all the information we need

To help you understand what information and documentation you need to give us, we have an example application for you to look at. Either call us on 1300 368 333 for a copy or visit our website to access a copy.
Step 6: The Process After Lodgment: A Basic Guide

All applicants will be given a copy of our guide to the planning process once the application is lodged. The process is as follows:

- **Preliminary Assessment** - The Planner will undertake a preliminary assessment to identify general issues and if we need more information, which will then be requested in writing. A site inspection will also be undertaken to verify the information provided is accurate, to check if we need to advertise the application and to ensure the Planner is familiar with the site;

- **Referrals & Advertising** – we may need to send a copy of the application to other Council departments or to external authorities (eg Yarra Valley Water, Country Fire Authority, VicRoads) for comment.

  If required, we will also notify people that have an interest in surrounding properties of the application as they may be affected by what is proposed and may wish to make a written submission. If there are a number of objections, and there is a chance to find common ground, we may hold a consultation meeting. For further information, please read our Planning Advice Note on ‘The Public Consultation Process for Permit Applications’.

- **Final Assessment & Decision** – the Planner will consider all written submissions and then write a report assessing the application against the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme. They will then make a recommendation about whether or not a permit should be issued. The report will be considered by Planning Services under delegation, or by Council at a full Council meeting.

  The decision to grant a Planning Permit, issue a Notice of Decision to Grant a Permit (if there are objections) or issue a Notice of Refusal will then be made either under delegation by a Senior Planner or by Council at a formal Council Meeting. This decision will then be put in writing and sent to the contact person on the Planning Permit Application Form.

AMENDING AN APPLICATION

It is possible to amend an application at any time during the assessment process. If you are thinking of changing your application in any way, please contact your Planner as soon as possible as the process for making amendments varies depending on what stage your application is at:

- **Amending an application before referrals and advertising**: if you change your application before we send it to other authorities or advertise to neighbouring properties you simply need to provide us with a letter listing the changes made and 3 copies of the new plans. In some instances additional fees and changes to the description of the proposal on the application form are required because the proposal has been significantly altered.

- **Amending an application after referrals and advertising**: if you change your application after it has been referred to other authorities and advertised to neighbouring properties it may mean that we have to refer and advertise the application again. This will lengthen the application process significantly. You will need to complete our ‘Request to Amend a Current Application Form’, pay the required fee and provide a letter listing the changes, along with 3 copies of the new plans.

Please also talk to your Planner about what information we need as you may have to get more information from your designer and other experts involved with the application. If you are not the owner of the land, you also need to prove that they are aware of the changes to the application.
PLANNING TIPS & HANDY HINTS

Generally speaking, your application will have the best chance of being approved if:

- **You have followed steps 1 – 4 outlined above.** This not only means you understand the issues your application raises, but also saves time because we get the information we need to assess your application when it is lodged.

- You use a planning consultant or expert to act as the Applicant on your behalf. This is important if you haven’t applied for a planning permit before. It also may help the process run more smoothly and save time.

- You have quality plans and documents, which are easy to read and give us all of the information we need. This includes providing 3 copies of all plans, at least one A3 size set of plans and if at all possible an electronic version of your entire application.

- Copies of plans and other documents submitted with your application are provided in PDF format on a disk to ensure your application can be lodged and registered as quickly as possible.

- The location of proposed buildings has been pegged out and any trees you are proposing to be removed are marked (you could use ribbon or something similar) to help our staff clearly understand what you are proposing.

- All communication is between the nominated contact person on the Planning Permit Application From and the Planner. It is the contact person’s responsibility to pass on information to others including the land owner, applicant or other consultants involved with the application. This is important as it means the Planner can concentrate on assessing and processing the application rather than relaying the same information to several people.

- Please also remember that you may need other approvals such as a building permit, road opening permit if you need a new crossover onto your property or approval for a septic system. More information is provided in our Other Approvals Planning Advice Note.

We ask you to please be patient. Our Planners are busy trying to process applications as quickly as possible but have between 30 - 50 applications to consider at any one time.

If you phone to talk to your Planner, or call in unexpectedly at the counter, sometimes we will need to take a message but we will get back to you within 24 hours. If you can’t contact them and it’s urgent their Team Leader will often be able to assist. Just call 9294 6222 and we will try to help you.