

MASTER BUILDERS

ROMINA DE SANTIS, technical adviser at Master Builders WA, answers your questions about home building



THE QUESTION

I currently live in a small three by two unit. Out the back we have a tiny patio, but it is exposed to the elements, causing our washing to often get wet from the rain while we are out at work. What would you recommend as a cost-effective weather protector for this small area? Would I need approval and how would I go about getting this?

THE ANSWER

I am not sure if you mean a paved area or a covered patio, as the term has a few definitions depending on who you ask. If your patio area is not roofed, then you will need to obtain an approval in some circumstances (i.e. area of the roofed area, height of the roofed area and where it does not meet the residential design codes).

You may also need to obtain approval from your strata body if there is one in place (depending on the number of units or year the strata title was created).

Where you meet residential design code requirements, a Building Permit is only required where the structure exceeds 10sqm and is higher than 2.4m.

These exemptions from obtaining approval for minor structures were adopted last October in the State Planning Policy 3.1 Residential Design

Codes and back in 2012 with the Building Act implementation in WA. Having said this, it is best to check with the council for any specific requirements in your local area.

In the case where you already have a small roofed area in place, you probably don't want to extend the patio too much, as it is nice to have a balanced courtyard with open space as well as covered area.

The best solution would be to install cafe blinds to the patio to prevent wind-driven rain from wetting the washing and other items that you might like to keep dry under the patio. Standard widths are available from hardware stores, or there are installers who can provide custom-fit outdoor blinds.

For more information about building, visit the Master Builders A-Z Building Information Directory at www.mbawa.com. If you have any questions about home building or purchase issues, email romina@mbawa.com

TECHNOLOGY CAN SPEED UP BUILDING APPROVALS

There is often debate about the pros and cons of modern technology. Master Builders director Michael McLean reports on how technology could help speed up the building approvals process.

INNOVATION and new technology have for many years helped the housing industry become more efficient, safer and more environmentally sustainable.

Examples include the mobile phone, numerous apps, personnel and material hoists, excavators, waste recycling plants and modular components.

A common complaint amongst builders is the inconsistency that exists across the 30 local government councils in the Perth metropolitan area.

The design requirements of new homes, colour schemes, use of building materials, fencing and landscape can vary from one council to the next.

This can be very frustrating for both homeowners and builders, especially if the actual requirements are not clearly identified and known at the outset of the building process.

Technology is something that could alleviate this problem rather quickly. Some years ago, several councils were funded by the State Government to pilot an online building approvals lodgement system to speed up the approvals process.

Although the trial was successful, it hasn't become a universal system across all local authorities. This is disappointing and has been a lost opportunity to take advantage of a breakthrough in technology.

What's needed urgently to make the building and planning approvals process more efficient is greater consistency across each local council.

This could be readily achieved if a standard online building approvals form were developed and applied to all local councils. This simple piece of technology would greatly assist builders because they would quickly become familiar with what was required of them and their client. Non-compliant building approval applications would not be able to be submitted and

therefore could be amended before being rejected.

Technology of this nature would effectively provide a standard checklist for builders and developers when submitting their housing plans for approval, either via a private certifier or through the council.

Inconsistencies across councils could then be overcome and councils would become more accountable and wouldn't have to spend as much time as they currently do in assessing individual applications in different formats.

The State Government's green paper entitled *Modernising WA's Planning System* contains a number of suggestions on how to improve our planning regime.

Introducing an electronic approvals process would be a good starting point because the inconsistencies and lack of transparency in planning requirements are becoming worse and causing unnecessary delays and frustrations.

These problems cause more grief during economic downturns like we currently have because builders and their workforce don't have numerous jobs to keep them busy to sustain their business.

Master Builders is currently drafting its response to the government's green paper, which is required by 20 July. A copy of this green paper can be accessed via www.planning.wa.gov.au/dop_pub_pdf/Green_Paper_May2018.pdf

Technology is something that can be put to good use in improving our building and planning approvals process. State Government funding, however, may be required to implement this much needed reform across all councils.

Compared to the previous costs of trying to amalgamate local authorities, this innovation would be much cheaper, quicker, less controversial and have immediate benefits.

