Smoothing the Way for Developer Approvals

These days, most residential estates have design guidelines, and require the lot owners to obtain a 'developer approval' before they can build. The Design Review Group makes developer approvals easy for builders and lot owners. They do this through a simple but comprehensive portal that is accessible to their clients in real time, 24/7.

The concept was created by Nathan Alexander, founder of The Design Review Group which is Alexander Urbanism's developer approval arm. Alexander Urbanism is an award-winning design consultancy specialising since 2012 in design guidelines and development approvals.

Nathan is a designer by background, and has worked with local government, Lendlease and small developers. He was with the City of Melbourne for 10 years and during that time he designed the Bourke Street Mall. His work in Abu Dhabi involved designing a new capital city for the United Arab Emirates.

So how does the Design Review Group smooth the way for development approvals?

The Design Review Group's portal service makes the process simpler for all users. Applicants get a customised list of design standards that applies to their lot - only those standards that are relevant to that lot are shown. The process allows the builder, designer or lot owner to start the application. Previously with the old manual system, we would receive a call from an applicant to check on progress. We knew there was a better way. Now the lot owners look online themselves to ascertain the status of their application.

The whole developer approval process is managed on behalf of the estate developers so they can concentrate on more important work. There is a suite of services and options so clients can curate the service to their own needs, whether checking on the status of any lot, identifying which builders are making sales, the type and number of houses going on the lots, the fees paid, and other issues that might be of interest or concern. The information is used to help sales teams and to refine future stages.

A typical turnaround is less than two days, supported by knowledgeable phone assistance and in-principle approvals, assessing both buildings and landscapes.

Another valuable aspect is that the Design Review Group is able to identify patterns of issues that often prevent the smooth approval process for a development. "What we do is almost a case of 'machine learning' on our client's behalf and they benefit from that information. An important part of this is making sure the design standards are not ambiguous."

"In the first instance, we give developers what we call "white label design standards". These are our best value off-the-shelf design standards, suitable for the estate's intended market. We have tested the words with applicants so we

know they are understood easily. From that starting point, we customise the guidelines to suit our client and the estate.

"On the portal, we also include documents that will be useful for the applicant, for example engineering plans, and any approvals that have already been granted. When approvals are granted, they are listed on the portal immediately, and can be accessed by clients at any time."

All exemptions granted are recorded in the portal, so an estate developer can quickly determine the patterns of which design standards are working and which are not. At the end of the project, the estate developer can ask for all the uploaded plans and correspondence and have it all transferred within 15 minutes.

Sounds like a smooth way to do a Developer Approval. ■

STACKED STONE

RENDER   SMOOTH RENDER   SHEET CLADDING

DARD   HORIZONTAL TIMBER SLATS   VERTICAL TIMBER SLATS

MIN. 500 mm

PORCH ARTICULATES FRONTAGE

AIR CONDITIONING BELOW ROOF RIDGE
TV ANTENA AWAY FROM DIRECT VIEW
SOLAR PANELS FOLLOW ROOF
RETURE FENCE 1M SET BACK FROM THE FRONT FACADE
BINS STORED AWAY FROM DIRECT VIEW
HOT WATER SYSTEM AWAY FROM DIRECT VIEW
WASHING LINE NOT VISIBLE FROM STREET
SHED NOT VISIBLE FROM STREET

MAX. 25% OF FACADE AREA