

Commerce Ballarat

Good Afternoon,

Commerce Ballarat is the largest independent business group in Ballarat with 500+ members across every industry sector. We have perused the document and asked relevant members for comment whilst we feel that it is moving the right direction there was some interesting feedback.

- Why are we still fighting a change of purpose regulation in this day and age anyway?
- No doubt there are a lot of buildings that need protection in regards to heritage and amenities and these should fall squarely with local council. Here lies a fair bit of the lengthy timeframe.
- Reduction in timeframes and regulatory requirements are a massive move forward if they can put a bit more structure around how that looks.
- The VIC Smart approval process has seen an decrease in waiting time for many businesses and developments so this is working.
- Self-help is a step backwards in our humble opinion. Thought the whole reason for this action was to help business?
- Really interesting to see on one of the timelines that items like liquor licencing have a smaller timeframe than others. These are done via one regulatory department(VCGLR) with input from council and Vic Pol so in my view shows how efficient working with one body is for business.

Commercial renting can be made easier during the application process removing many of the unknowns and distress for a tenant taking on a lease especially for a lengthy timeframe.

If it was part of the start-up process coming from one central point this would remove many of the stresses involved with the unknown at start up and the feeling that you are forking out more and more money every time you talk to a different department or organisation.

When focussing on the food safety reform and liquor licensing address, we congratulate the government for recognising this as an issue. For many small scale retail food venues, there is a low barrier to entry, meaning that a lease can be taken up and a new business trading starting with as little as \$10k (for example, a small café). It's not unusual for these venues to erode nearly all their start-up capital whilst waiting for approvals from local council regulators, with little to no assistance (unless seeking expert advice \$\$). This demographic will benefit greatly by these proposed reforms, particularly using a self-serve service tied into Streatrader. I think the overarching result for the small business in retail/food will be a better shot to make it in the critical first 12 months in business.

In regards to the medium to larger retail/food businesses, these reforms are not so much about cost saving, but more about time savings. The complexity in adhering to local regulations is absurd, with many local regulations antiquated at best.

Overall improvements as follows;

1. Fee transparency for food regulation – Big tick. Let's make sure fees are uniform across regions.
2. Reduce record-keeping requirements – Big tick. Unless you have failed food safety inspections.
3. Undertake a business case for an online portal for fixed-premises food businesses – Small tick. Self-serve doesn't help everyone, councils should be there to 'help'.

If you would like further clarification on any of the above please contact the office at any time.

Regards,

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