

Now is a great time to plan

COVID-19 and working from home shouldn't stop the planning and development wheels from turning. Now is the time to continue planning your development or creating policy. At Mecone we're still open for business and ready to assist with the full range of planning services.

Get your sites shovel ready post COVID-19

With development and planning continuing largely as usual, now is a good time to get your approvals in place to be shovel ready when this health crisis is over. Most of us expect, and history has shown, that there is usually a quick uptake in development activity and property transactions post disruption. We are in an excellent position to assist clients in the meantime.

This can all be done remotely, so the reduced ability to engage face to face is somewhat limiting but does not preclude the building and development industry from getting the planning phase done. This will put those that do continue to actively pursue approval in an advantageous position to commence works at the earliest possibility - and get ahead of the curve.

We've overcome adversity in the past

The stock market crashes in 1930 and 1987 were both significant events in our history and both were followed by significant periods of growth and recovery.

Government stimulus measures came too late in the 1930s but were effectively applied in response to the '87 crash and the overall market returned to average in about 18 months.

It wasn't just a baby boom that followed World War II; pent-up consumer demand fuelled exceptionally strong economic growth in the post-war period. And the building boom created thousands of jobs and activity across the development industry.



Figure 1: S&P 500, after October 1929 and March 2020
(Source: Eureka Report)



Figure 2: S&P 500, October 1987 and March 2020
(Source: Eureka Report)

What we are doing at Mecone

At Mecone we have moved to a remote working arrangement and keep in touch via electronic means, including face to face meetings on Microsoft Teams, which is really quite effective. Our existing channels that have allowed us to work seamlessly between Victoria, Brisbane and NSW for the past several years, have put us in good stead to continue to meet our clients' need while being spread further afield at our home offices.

We all have remote access to our server so all our documents are accessible; our Mosaic mapping system provides a portal to all the relevant planning information needed to give advice and continue current projects; and we have direct lines of communication to the planning authorities.

So we can utilise this 'quiet' time to continue our range of services for you, such as:

- Continue to manage your current statutory planning application process.
- Continue to prepare for the lodgement of a new statutory planning application.
- Advice on development potential and feasibility for your property.
- Review any proposed developments affecting your property and advise whether an objection should be submitted.
- Prepare and lodge rezoning proposals
- Review any proposed planning policies and advise on implications on your property; advocate to the State government or local council.
- Continue to develop strategies and policies for government.



Figure 3: Typical urban growth pattern post WW2

(Source: Manningham City Council)

Lessons have been learned from all these events and clearly governments recognise the need for economic support and stimulus packages from the outset of a crisis. We are already seeing support being offered to those in most need and we should have great confidence that there will be a recovery and upturn in the market. So let's get ready!

Support for industry to proceeding despite COVID-19

State governments (NSW, VIC, QLD) have made it clear that development and construction should continue to the furthest extent possible, despite COVID-19, declaring them both essential businesses. Whilst normal business operations are slightly disrupted with most people working remotely, development applications, rezonings and other planning matters are continuing.

In NSW there has been legislative changes to allow for the electronic exhibition of rezonings and similarly Council meetings will soon be able to be done without holding a meeting in chambers. Other changes are rapidly being introduced by government across Australia, such as 24/7 supermarket and pharmacy operations, including deliveries and more generous changes to allow for expanded home businesses.

The Queensland Government has introduced changes to the Planning Act 2016 that facilitates the ability to grant temporary use licences, change operating hours for shops and warehouses and suspend or extend statutory timeframes.

Opportunities – it can't be all bad!

Being forced into a re-thinking phase can produce some remarkably innovation solutions. Within a matter of days or weeks we have all moved to a new way of operating; managing to continue our work, relationships and home life – differently.

Disruptions to various industries have occurred in the recent past – think Uber, and we've all had to adapt. The scale of the disruption that COVID-19 has caused is at another level completely but still it is something that we will get through.

Let's take the opportunity to innovate; grasp some good from this situation; rethink our planning processes; reduce our travel (and greenhouse footprint); work more flexibly.

We don't have to go back to doing things the way we did before, if this has given us the opportunity to think of a better way.

You've heard of Love in the Time of Cholera... Well it's time to Plan in the Midst of Corona! So get shovel ready now and get your approvals and development paperwork in order. Contact Mecone on-line for planning and development advice from an expert in your State (mecone.com.au).

Our experience so far is that local councils are undertaking their normal business activities, with planning applications lodged on-line or in the post, pre-lodgement meetings held over phone or video conference and panels proceeding too. In NSW our Director Adam Coburn attended one of the first planning panels remotely via phone conference, with a positive experience and more importantly a consent for an outdoor digital advertising sign for our client at Canada Bay Council.

Planning information available at your fingertips

With increasing numbers of people working from home and remotely, now is the perfect time to act on obtaining planning approvals, what else is there to do?



Figure 4: Mecone's Mosaic online mapping tool

With access to the internet who needs to go on site or to Council? With downloadable maps, Google street view, and the very impressive Mecone Mosaic (mecone.com.au/mosaic/) which is a fantastic planning tool for use in VIC and NSW, there's no need to leave your home office. Planning has no doubt become more accessible with all the necessary information available online - if you know where to search it's easy.

We have direct relationship with Council's and government and communicate electronically or over the phone. We have already held a number of meetings on-line or by teleconference, with this expected to continue for the short term.

You'd think we'd been planning for social distancing for years!



mecone

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