



Kate Oosterhof

Role: In house counsel – City of Wanneroo

Age: 26

Qualifications: Bachelor of Arts (Politics); Bachelor of Law, UWA

Brief Biography: I am appalling at maths and cannot draw a straight line, so law seemed like the right choice for me, but I was always envious of people who were doing real and tangible things in the world – be it designing towns, building houses, working outside, being present within the community etc. A lot of the 'good' a lawyer can do is from the office, so I chose the development industry as a focus because it was the closest I could get to doing work which could (hopefully positively!) affect the way society around me changed and grew. I am studying a Masters of Urban and Regional Design and love the practical and technical knowledge it brings to my work. For me, it's about developing robust but reactive processes and policies which can produce great planning outcomes efficiently and effectively.

Q: What challenges do you see the property industry facing in the next 5 years?

A: I think various challenges ahead and the preparations that need to be in place to weather them will ultimately vary depending on what discipline you work within. From my point of view, I think the inherent conflict between liveability and affordability needs to be addressed across the industry, which will require state and local governments to work far more closely with the development industry to develop reasonable, consistent and achievable expectations and standards. The notion of 'liveability' which includes a desire for integrated, diverse and cohesive communities with a plethora of open space options and employment opportunities is inherently costly – it is a cost that government passes on to developers, which is in turn passed on to consumers. The passing on of costs inherently affects affordability, and this will exacerbate as demand for new lots decreases because the ability to fund 'liveability' will also decrease. Can you achieve both? Perhaps, but it will require much greater consistency and clarity to be provided from government.

Q: Within the urban development industry what is the most significant project that you have worked on/been part of within your career to date?

A: I am working on a project at the moment, which, if we pull it off, should have a significant impact on the way local government and developers interact at the coal face of approvals and processes. I am constantly hearing criticism about a r lack of consistency when dealing with local government, and it is not untrue to say that expectations change depending on what team and what district you're working with. We're developing a suite of template documents which will better facilitate the early clearance of development conditions and all the trappings that come with that. The idea is that from the very beginning, every party will know exactly what the other expects and when, and how those expectations can be met. It's in the early stages, and super boring for people who don't find planning law sexy, but it could make a huge difference.

Q: Within the urban development industry what influence does your role have on the future of our state (Building design, new estates, etc.)?

A: If someone asks why something has to happen a certain way, it's completely unacceptable for the answer to be 'we've always done it that way' or 'I don't know'. As a lawyer, I don't make a call on lot size, or density or the placement of street trees, I just question why, or how, or whether there's a better way, and hopefully this ultimately helps us get better planning outcomes. The question of discretion and reasonableness gets thrown around a lot and I hope we're getting closer to everyone being on the same page of what that actually means! How this all affects the future of Western Australia? It's hard not to feel like a small drop in a pretty vast ocean, but I like to think this helps get better results for our community and our clients.