

CONCEPT NOTE

Parallel Session: **Model Building Bye-Laws**

National Urban Conclave
24-25 October 2026

1. Background

Building regulations in India have evolved alongside the country's urbanisation process, originating from early municipal laws of the colonial period that focused primarily on public health, sanitation, street alignment, building heights and fire safety in rapidly growing towns. Post-independence, state Municipal Acts, development authority regulations and local Building Bye-Laws became the principal instruments for controlling land development and building activity. India's urban building regulations have long suffered from fragmented local standards and implementation gaps. Rapid urban transformation across Indian cities has outpaced the institutional and regulatory architecture designed to manage it. Modern urban demands require a structural shift toward continuous, agile and quality-driven service delivery that natively incorporates climate resilience, smart infrastructure and digital governance.

The Government of India, through the Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO), introduced Model Building Bye-Laws (MBBL) as a reference document for states and urban local bodies (ULBs). Over time, the MBBL have evolved from a narrow focus on development control and building safety to incorporate broader concerns of urban development. The transition from earlier bye-laws to MBBL 2004 strengthened provisions related to structural safety, disaster resilience, rainwater harvesting and barrier-free access, while MBBL 2016 further expanded the framework to include environmental sustainability, energy efficiency, accessibility, ease of doing business, digital approvals, heritage conservation and climate-responsive practices.

This evolution reflects a major shift: from regulating individual buildings towards enabling safer, more sustainable and efficient urban development. However, the effectiveness of Building Bye-Laws depends not only on the quality of regulations but also on their implementation through appropriate institutional arrangements, technical capacity, procurement systems and urban service-delivery mechanisms.

Across Indian cities, gaps often persist between municipal laws, planning regulations, and on-the-ground implementation. Multiple agencies, fragmented responsibilities, complex approval systems and limited technical capacity can affect the predictability, quality and efficiency of urban development. Simultaneously, infrastructure delivery increasingly requires coordinated arrangements for capital works, operations and maintenance (O&M), professional expertise and lifecycle management. Existing institutional systems and Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) can potentially serve as effective delivery mechanisms, but their roles, capacities and accountability frameworks require greater clarity.

Procurement and financial rules also influence the quality, cost and timeliness of urban projects. There is a need to explore reforms that encourage transparency, competition, innovation and wider participation by professional firms, startups and emerging

organisations. The session proposes to examine these interconnected dimensions and explore how the next generation of Model Building Bye-Laws can become more implementation-oriented, enabling and responsive to the evolving needs of Indian cities. In particular, the MBBL should incorporate climate change scenarios, which means revising building standards in line with projected future climatic conditions.

2. Objective

The session aims to initiate a policy dialogue on strengthening Model Building Bye-Laws by connecting regulation with institutional capacity, urban service delivery, procurement and innovation. The key objectives are to:

- Examine gaps between existing municipal laws, Building Bye-Laws and their implementation, and identify opportunities for simplification, harmonisation and improved compliance;
- Explore institutional arrangements for effective delivery of urban infrastructure, including capital works, O&M and coordination among ULBs, development authorities and other agencies;
- Examine the potential role of professional SPVs and existing institutional systems as delivery vehicles for urban infrastructure and services, including their mandates, accountability and lifecycle responsibilities;
- Discuss procurement and financial-rule reforms that can improve quality, costing, transparency and competition while reducing barriers to participation by professional and specialised firms;
- Develop mechanisms for onboarding new partners, including startups, technology providers, research institutions and organisations that have not traditionally participated in urban development, initially through small-scale pilots and demonstration projects;
- Examine how the MBBL can advance three cross-cutting perspectives: energy efficiency and sustainability, resilience and disaster risk reduction, and ease of doing business; and
- Identify practical reforms that can help transition from a predominantly permission- and compliance-oriented regulatory framework towards an outcome-oriented framework that enables better urban development and service delivery.

The session will seek to generate actionable recommendations that can inform future approaches to MBBL and urban institutional reforms.

3. Challenges

The effectiveness of MBBL is constrained when regulatory provisions are not adequately supported by institutional capacity, coordinated service delivery, appropriate procurement mechanisms and professional expertise. Fragmented institutional responsibilities, implementation gaps, complex approval processes and limited technical capacity can create inconsistencies between planning intent and development outcomes. At the project-delivery level, conventional approaches to capital works, O&M,

procurement and financial management may not always support the quality, innovation and flexibility required by rapidly evolving urban environments. At the same time, emerging startups, specialised firms, technology providers and new organisations often face barriers to entering public-sector urban projects.

The key challenge is therefore to develop an integrated framework in which regulation, institutions, delivery systems, procurement and innovation reinforce one another, enabling cities to translate regulatory intent into efficient, transparent, high-quality and sustainable urban development.

4. Guiding Questions

A. Municipal Laws, Building Bye-Laws and Implementation

- What are the major gaps between existing municipal laws, Building Bye-Laws and their implementation at the city and project level?
- Where do overlaps, inconsistencies or ambiguities between Master Plans, zoning regulations, municipal laws and building bye-laws create implementation challenges?
- How can Building Bye-Laws become more implementable, predictable and responsive while maintaining public safety, environmental performance and development standards?
- Can greater use of digital approvals, standardised procedures, performance-based provisions and outcome-oriented regulation improve implementation?
- How can the MBBL structure participatory mechanisms to embed user perspectives into building standards without compromising regulatory efficiency or stalling approval timelines?
- With the rising use of AI, is there scope to embed it in the MBBL for real-time monitoring and redressal, and what safeguards would be needed for transparency and accountability?
- Should MBBL expand its boundary and look beyond individual plots to protect wider city ecology, water bodies, and green networks?
- How can MBBL streamline cross-references to external standards (like NBC for fire safety) so local rules automatically stay updated with national codes?
- Given that green building certifications and material efficiency do not, by themselves, prevent broader ecosystem fragmentation, should the MBBL expand its scope to regulate site-level ecological impact?

B. Institutional Arrangements and Urban Service Delivery

- What institutional arrangements are required to effectively manage capital works, O&M throughout the lifecycle of urban assets?
- How can responsibilities between ULBs, development authorities, central agencies and other institutions be better defined?
- What professional capacities do urban institutions need to implement increasingly

complex regulatory and infrastructure requirements?

- What measures are used to assess the performance of implementation? Are there post-implementation audits or real-time updates on implementation status?

C. Procurement and Financial Reforms

- How can municipal financial frameworks be adapted to support multidisciplinary, outcome-based planning projects?
- What mechanisms allow cities to transparently engage specialist firms, startups, and research bodies in planning processes?
- How can a 'pilot → evaluate → refine → scale' framework be institutionalised within urban governance and procurement systems?

D. Energy Efficiency and Sustainability

- How can the MBBL align with the Energy Conservation Sustainable Building Code (ECSBC), ECO Niwas Samhita, the National Building Construction Standards, and green building rating systems so cities apply one coherent set of requirements instead of overlapping ones?
- How can compliance be tracked beyond the design stage, through commissioning, occupancy certification and periodic post-occupancy audits, so that approved performance matches actual performance?
- Which incentives (e.g., additional FAR, fast-track approvals, property tax rebates) are most effective in driving adoption, and how can they be designed to avoid greenwashing?
- How should the MBBL address embodied energy and material efficiency, including local and low-carbon materials?
- How can on-site renewable energy, EV-charging readiness, water recycling and rainwater harvesting be made mandatory or default without placing disproportionate compliance burdens on small plot owners?

E. Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction

- Should the MBBL require hazard-specific, site-specific risk assessments, with requirements differentiated by risk zone and building occupancy, rather than uniform provisions?
- How can the MBBL be better aligned with the National Building Construction Standards, relevant BIS seismic, wind and flood codes and local hazard maps (seismic zones, flood plains, cyclone-prone coasts, landslide-prone areas and heat-risk areas)?
- What mechanisms are needed to address the large stock of existing, unauthorised and informal buildings, including structural audits, retrofitting and risk-based prioritisation?
- How can climate resilience measures such as flood-proofing, stormwater management, and heat-resilient design be integrated into the MBBL, particularly for low-lying and coastal areas?
- How can ULBs strengthen their technical capacity (structural engineers, fire officers, inspectors) to enforce resilience provisions, and what role can professional bodies and

SPVs play?

- How can digital tools, including remote sensing, drone surveys and sensors, support the detection of unsafe construction, structural distress and non-compliance, with timely redressal?
- What post-disaster and post-event audit mechanisms (e.g., damage assessments and learning loops) should be built into the MBBL so that lessons feed back into revised provisions?
- How can critical and lifeline infrastructure (hospitals, schools, shelters, utilities) be subject to stricter standards, regular audits and clear O&M responsibilities across the asset lifecycle?

F. Ease of Doing Business

- Where do the main delays and duplications arise in the building permission process (multiple departments, NOCs, overlapping inspections), and how can the MBBL streamline them into a single-window, time-bound process?
- How can digital platforms for online plan submission, automated scrutiny of development control rules, e-signatures and a unified application tracker be standardised across states and ULBs while allowing for local variation?
- How can the role of licensed professionals (architects, engineers, structural engineers) be strengthened through empanelment, accountability and penalties for misdeclaration, so that approval authorities can rely on professional certification?

G. Towards MBBL 2.0

- How can the MBBL evolve from a primarily regulatory instrument into an enabling framework for urban delivery?
- What regulatory, institutional, procurement and partnership reforms are required to make the MBBL more implementation-oriented, innovative and responsive to the changing needs of Indian cities?
- How can the three perspectives be balanced in MBBL 2.0, so that stronger sustainability and resilience requirements do not add avoidable delay and cost, and ease-of-doing-business reforms do not dilute safety and environmental standards?