

## **CMDA to digitize building plan approvals: The Times of India**

Granting planning permission for buildings and taking action against violators will get easier for the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority as the planning body has decided to digitize the documents. What's more, an application under Right to Information (RTI) has forced the hands of the authority to embrace technology for transparency. Digitization will cover those buildings which have more than two floors (in addition to stilt). Once implemented, this would also mean quicker replies to RTI applications seeking details of buildings.

Now you are unlikely to get details of a building that is more than 10 years old since the papers are destroyed in the absence of a facility to store the growing pile at the CMDA offices "We normally destroy documents that are more than 10 years old," said a CMDA official. "Digitization of documents is the way out. This will enable us to not just refer old files if needed, but also reply to RTI questions on old buildings." Digitisation figured in the agenda of a recent meeting of CMDA. "We will start scanning and storing the approved planning permissions right away. It may be followed by other documents like completion certificates," said another officer. CMDA deals with all planning sanctions and completion certificates for constructions that are more than stilt-plus-two-floors falling in the limits of Chennai Metropolitan Area. In 2015, the authority provided more than 330 approvals for special buildings, an increase of 40 from the previous year.

Welcoming the initiative, RTI activists said it would speed up the response on RTI queries. Vinoth Ranganathan, one of the founders of onlinerti.com, said there is a "visible change" in delivery of replies by the Bangalore Planning Authority (BDA) after the body digitized all the documents." "BDA, which used to take more than a month to reply to RTI applications, now provide the answers within a week or at the most a week." According to him, the RTI Act does not make it mandatory for departments to give information about matters that are more than 20 years old. "The 20 years cap was created because it would be a tedious process for officials to search for details from old records. Digitization will pave way for elimination of the clause, where public information officers can have old data at the click of a button," the RTI activist said.