

HOUSE RENOVATION CONTROL IN KLANG VALLEY: A BASELINE DOCUMENTATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY PRACTICES AND ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS

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ABSTRACT

House renovation is an established and culturally recognized practice in Malaysian urban areas, yet unauthorized renovation activity remains widespread despite mandatory approval requirements under the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974 (Act 133) and Uniform Building By-Laws (Amendment) 2021. The implementation of building control at the local authority level has been identified as a primary compliance determinant, but systematic documentation of the current practices across local authorities remains limited. This paper documents house renovation regulatory practices across eight city and municipal councils in Klang Valley through semi-structured interviews with Building Control Department staff. Three operational dimensions were examined: clarity and accessibility of renovation guidelines and checklists; monitoring, complaint management, and enforcement mechanisms; and data collection for tracking illegal renovation activity. Findings reveal material variation across all three dimensions, including differences in checklist comprehensiveness, monitoring frequency, complaint management formalization, and illegal renovation tracking methodology. Two councils maintain no terrace house inventory records, and no uniform tracking methodology exists across the study authorities. These findings provide baseline documentation of the current institutional practices, informing evidence-based policy harmonization aligned with the regulatory reform priorities of the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (2026-2030).

Keywords: House Renovation, Building Control, Local Authority, Regulatory Compliance, Klang Valley

1. INTRODUCTION

House renovation represents a deeply embedded practice within Malaysian housing culture with homeowners frequently modifying properties to accommodate changing needs and preferences. Homeowners have expressed the need to expand existing homes due to insufficient bedrooms for growing households, coupled with financial constraints preventing relocation to larger properties (Kanesan and Che Mat, 2022, Sabri et al., 2017). This trend has been recognized formally, where the Ministry of Housing and Local Government has acknowledged house renovation as one of the local culture and became a norm (Sarkom et al., 2017). Under the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974 (Act 133) and Uniform Building By-Laws (Amendment) 2021, renovation works involving structural alterations, extensions and changes of building use require prior approval from the relevant local authority. Notwithstanding this legal requirement, unauthorized renovation works have been widely documented across Malaysian urban areas. Sarkom et al. (2018) has reported significant enforcement challenges in Klang Valley local authorities and Sabri et al. (2017, 2018) has characterized the cumulative outcome of illegal renovations as production of uncontrolled development.

Klang Valley, as Malaysia's most densely urbanized region, consisting of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor state, is particularly subject to this issue. Sustained media reporting documents recurring public grievances and local authority responses related to illegal house renovations in the region (Bavani, 2022, Bavani and Ravindran, 2022, Bernama, 2016, The Star Online, 2022a, The Star Online, 2022b, Yap and Bavani, 2022). The documented consequences extend beyond regulatory violation to physical and environmental impacts. Reports of structural damage including cracking and water seepage affecting neighbouring properties, are recurrent (Daily Express, 2024, Hasbi, 2022, Nair, 2016). Drainage failures due to unauthorized building extensions have been associated with localized flooding and stagnant water accumulation that lead to health implications risks including dengue (Bavani, 2022). In one instance, Malaysia's Energy and Natural Resources Minister identified illegal house renovations as a contributing factor to a landslide at Jalan Kemensah Heights, affecting multiple properties (The Sun, 2021). Existing study provides some indication of the scale of non-compliance in the Malaysian context. Sabri (2019) reported that 40–60% of homeowners who had obtained renovation approval subsequently deviated from approved plans, and that 90% of homeowners did not declare their renovation status upon completion. While these figures derive from a single study and may not be generalisable across all Klang Valley jurisdictions, they suggest that non-compliance is not an isolated phenomenon. Against this backdrop, systematic documentation of how local authorities currently operationalise house renovation control becomes a necessary precondition to identify where institutional gaps exist and what improvements may be warranted.

The persistence of unauthorized renovation activity across Klang Valley reflects, in part, weaknesses in the implementation of building control at the local authority level. Abrabba et al. (2021) identify administrative system, legislative frameworks, and enforcement mechanisms as the primary determinants of building compliance and argue that deficiencies in these institutional factors generate conditions in which secondary factors including lack of awareness and cost perceptions to sustain non-compliance. The research corroborates the significance of monitoring capacity, staff resources and governance structure as compliance determinants (Abrabba et al., 2022). Challenges faced by local authorities documented constraints in these areas, including resources limitation affecting enforcement capacity (Alnsour and Meaton, 2009, Hassan, 2016, Sabri et al., 2017), inadequate monitoring system (Abrabba et al., 2021, Omollo, 2020), and procedural inconsistencies across agencies and jurisdictions (Marzukhi et al., 2021). These institutional conditions are consequential where monitoring is infrequent and enforcements are reactive, hence the practical deterrent effect of the regulatory framework is reduced.

Despite this, a systemic documentation of how local authorities in Klang Valley currently operationalize house renovation control is limited. Building control research has predominantly addressed new construction instead of controlling existing buildings (Doukari et al., 2024, Saloux et al.,

2023), and research specifically examining renovation process governance is sparse (Abrabba et al., 2021). Understanding the current practices allows more opportunity to identify institutional gaps, assess inter-authority variation and recommend reform interventions. This is in line to the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (2026-2030), which aims to identify regulatory instrument review, reduction of regulatory burden, and standardization of government delivery system at the local government level as strategic priorities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 House Renovation in the Malaysian Urban Context

Terrace houses constitute the dominant residential typology in Malaysian urban areas, particularly across the Klang Valley metropolitan region (Sabri et al., 2017). The prevalence of this housing form, combined with household growth and financial constraints limiting relocation to larger properties, has sustained renovation demand as a structural feature of urban residential behaviour (Kanesan and Che Mat, 2022, Sabri et al., 2017). The Ministry of Housing and Local Government has formally recognized house renovation as an embedded local culture (Sarkom et al., 2017), reflecting its normalization across socioeconomic groups and urban contexts.

The legal framework governing renovation is established through the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974 (Act 133) and the Uniform Building By-Laws (Amendment) 2021 (UBBL), which require prior local authority approval for works involving structural change, extension, or change of building use. Notwithstanding this requirement, unauthorized renovation activity has been widely documented. Sarkom et al. (2018) report significant enforcement challenges in Klang Valley local councils, while Sabri et al. (2017, 2018) characterize the cumulative outcome as producing conditions of uncontrolled development. Sabri (2019) reported that 40–60% of approved renovations deviated from approved plans; 90% of homeowners did not declare renovation status. These figures provide concrete scale to the compliance problem and strengthen this subsection considerably. The physical consequences of unauthorized renovation include damages to adjacent properties, drainage failures, and in isolated instances contributions to slope instability (Bavani, 2022; Daily Express, 2024; Hasbi, 2022; Nair, 2016b; The Sun, 2021), extending the governance implications of non-compliance beyond individual regulatory violation.

2.2 Regulatory Framework and Three-Tier Government Structure

Malaysia operates under a three-tier governmental structure comprising federal, state, and local governments, each carrying distinct responsibilities in the administration of building control (Hutchinson, 2014). The effectiveness of renovation control depends significantly on how these responsibilities are distributed, coordinated, and resourced across tiers.

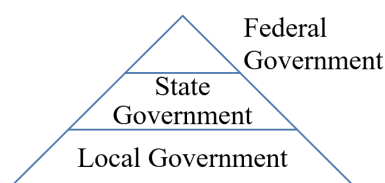


Figure 1: Three-tiers of the Malaysian Government
(Source: Ngu & Liaw, 2024)

At the federal level, the primary role is to establish legislative frameworks applicable nationwide. The Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974 (Act 133) and the UBBL establish minimum technical standards for building works across Peninsular Malaysia. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT), through its Local Government Department, issues operational guidelines for local

authorities and administers performance audit mechanisms including the Star Rating System for local councils. The Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172), however, does not specify requirements for building renovations explicitly, leaving local authorities to develop renovation guidelines within the parameters of Act 133 and the UBBL without detailed federal prescription (Sarkom et al., 2018). This legislative gap creates conditions for implementation variation across jurisdictions.

State governments occupy an intermediary position, formally responsible for local government matters under the Federal Constitution but constrained in practice by fiscal dependence on federal transfers (Hutchinson, 2014). Within building control, state responsibilities center on developing state-specific planning frameworks and coordinating local authority implementation. However, intra-state variation in renovation guidelines across local authorities within the same state, documented by Sarkom et al. (2018) in the case of differing extension permissions between DBKL and MPAJ, indicates that state-level coordination of building control practice remains limited.

Local authorities constitute the operational tier of building control, responsible for receiving and assessing renovation applications, conducting inspections, issuing completion certificates, and enforcing compliance. The Klang Valley study area encompasses both Selangor state and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, operating under structurally different governance arrangements: Selangor local authorities operate within the full three-tier federal-state-local structure, while Kuala Lumpur City Hall reports directly to federal oversight without an intermediary state tier. This structural difference produces distinct regulatory environments within the same metropolitan region.

Table 1: Government Tiers Involved in Controlling House Renovations in Klang Valley, Malaysia

Government Tier	Selangor (State Context)	Kuala Lumpur (Federal Territory)
Federal government	Local Government Department, Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT – JKT)	Local Government Department, Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT – JKT) Federal Territories Department
State government	Selangor State Government. State Economic Planning Unit – Local Government Section (UPENs)	N/A - Federal Territory reports directly to Federal Government
Local government	Shah Alam City Council Petaling Jaya City Council Subang Jaya City Council Klang Royal City Council Ampang Jaya Municipal Council Selayang Municipal Council Kajang Municipal Council Hulu Selangor Municipal Council Kuala Langat Municipal Council Kuala Selangor Municipal Council Sabak Bernam District Council	Kuala Lumpur City Hall

Local authorities operate under documented resource constraints that directly affect building control capacity. Sabri et al. (2017) identify low staffing capacity in monitoring and inspection, difficulties in preparing investigation documentation, and problems executing demolition of illegal extensions as primary operational obstacles, based on interviews with enforcement officers across Selangor local authorities. Hassan (2016) associates inconsistent and predominantly reactive enforcement with reduced public confidence in the regulatory system. These constraints are not uniform across the council population: local authority efficiency in service delivery has been found to correlate positively with population size and fiscal independence, meaning smaller and less financially autonomous councils face capacity disadvantages in building control relative to larger urban councils

(Marzukhi et al., 2020). The consequence is that renovation compliance governance varies not only across tiers but across councils within the same tier, producing an uneven regulatory environment across the metropolitan region.

A further governance dimension is the documented tendency of some local authorities to prioritize fine revenue over compliance outcomes. Sabri et al. (2017) observed that certain councils emphasize revenue collection from penalty compounds, with performance metrics focused on revenue targets and not compliance rates. This organizational misalignment creates perverse incentives wherein enforcement generates income without eliminating violations, effectively converting penalty systems from deterrents into tolerated costs of non-compliance.

This pattern of fragmented renovation control is not unique to Malaysia, though comparator jurisdictions have addressed it through different structural choices. New Zealand and the United Kingdom specify, at the national legislative level, exact thresholds for which renovations are exempt from approval (for example, additions under 10m² in New Zealand's Building Act) leaving local authorities no discretion to set their own criteria (New Zealand Government, 2015; UK Government, 2015). This differs from Malaysia, where Act 171 permits each local authority to define its own renovation thresholds, producing the jurisdictional inconsistencies described above. Singapore addresses renovation-specific procedural fragmentation through HDB's APEX system, requiring registered contractors to submit renovation permit applications electronically before works commence (Government of Singapore, n.d.), in contrast to Malaysia's OSC 3.0 Plus Online platform. The comparison suggests that Malaysia's renovation control challenges stem less from an absence of mechanisms than from insufficiently codified standardization across local authorities.

Malaysia's renovation approval framework distinguishes three categories of work. Minimal works (e.g., painting, minor fixtures) require neither a permit nor professional involvement. Minor works require a permit but no Principal Submitting Person (PSP), a registered architect or engineer responsible for certifying compliance. Only major works, involving structural change, extensions over 6.5m², or storey additions, require both a permit and PSP certification (KPKT, 2012). This graduated structure means that a large proportion of renovation activity falls into categories with limited professional oversight, placing the compliance burden almost entirely on monitoring and inspection by local authorities.

2.3 Compliance Determinants in Building Control

Research on building control compliance has directed analytical attention toward institutional and governance factors as primary determinants. Abrabba et al. (2021) distinguish between main compliance factors; administrative systems, legislative frameworks, and enforcement mechanisms; and subsequent factors including awareness deficits, cost perceptions, and social norms. Their argument is that deficiencies in the main institutional factors create conditions in which subsequent factors sustain non-compliance; addressing institutional gaps therefore reduces the conditions from which behavioural non-compliance arises. Abrabba et al. (2022) provide empirical corroboration, identifying monitoring systems, staff capacity, and governance structures as significant compliance determinants.

Malaysian local authorities face documented constraints across several of these dimensions. Resource limitations affect workforce capacity, inspection frequency, and enforcement operations (Alnsour and Meaton, 2009, Hassan, 2016, Sabri et al., 2017). Monitoring systems have been characterized as inadequate relative to renovation activity volumes in urban jurisdictions (Abrabba et al., 2021; Omollo, 2020). Inter-agency coordination gaps create enforcement voids (Omollo et al., 2018). Procedural variation across local authorities in approval timelines, documentation requirements, and enforcement thresholds generates an inconsistent regulatory environment for applicants (Marzukhi et al., 2021), with conditions for inadvertent non-compliance established independently of homeowner intent where requirements differ materially between neighbouring councils.

The implication is that variations in local authority institutional capacity are likely to produce corresponding variations in compliance outcomes across jurisdictions, even under a shared legislative framework. Documenting the nature and extent of these institutional variations is therefore a prerequisite for targeting improvements effectively.

2.4 Research Gap

Building control research has concentrated predominantly on new construction, with regulation of existing building modifications receiving comparatively limited attention (Doukari et al., 2024, Saloux et al., 2023). Mahrouch et al. (2025) note that renovation process management remains an underdeveloped area of research. In the Malaysian context, this gap manifests as an absence of systematic, cross-authority documentation of how local authorities currently implement house renovation control across key operational dimensions. Studies have identified problems such as enforcement weaknesses, resource constraints, procedural inconsistencies, but without a documented baseline of current practices, the specific institutional conditions generating these problems across the Klang Valley council population remain incompletely characterized. Initiatives developed without this foundation risk misidentifying priority areas or lacking a reference point against which improvements can be assessed. The study addresses this gap through cross-authority documentation of the current practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using semi structured interviews as the primary data collection instrument. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they enable a systematic coverage of predetermined thematic areas and allows respondents to elaborate on procedures, and constraints relevant to the respective institutional setting. This design is appropriate to the study's objective, which requires the current operational practices embedded in institutional routines compared to formally recorded procedure in publicly accessible documentation.

The geographical scope was delimited to Klang Valley, comprising Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory and Selangor state, based on several considerations. Klang Valley represents Malaysia's most urbanized region, home to approximately 9 million people, nearly one-third of Malaysia's total population. The region demonstrates the highest concentration of building development activity in Malaysia, with Selangor and Kuala Lumpur collectively accounting for an average of 41% of all building plan applications submitted to One Stop Centres nationwide between 2019 and 2023, totaling 7,063 applications annually (Government, 2024). This selection of city and municipal council was intentional, as the research scope focuses on urban residential areas where renovation activities are more concentrated and regulatory enforcement is typically more structured. City and municipal councils are primarily responsible for governance in these urban zones, making them the most relevant authorities.

3.1 Participant Selection and Data Collection

The researcher approached the Building Control Department of all city and municipal councils within Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Of 12 councils approached, eight agreed to participate. The participating authorities are presented in Table 2. Semi-structured interviews averaged approximately one hour in duration and were conducted primarily in Malay, with occasional English usage during technical discussions.

Table 2: Participating Local Authorities

Local Government	Type of Council
Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL)	City
Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ)	City
Subang Jaya City Council (MBSJ)	City
Klang City Council (MBK)	City
Selayang Municipal Council (MPS)	Municipal
Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ)	Municipal
Sepang Municipal Council (MP Sepang)	Municipal
Kajang Municipal Council (MPKJ)	Municipal
TOTAL: 8 councils	

(Source: Author, 2026)

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Interview questions were structured around five thematic areas: existing building regulations and guidelines; procedural frameworks for obtaining renovation approvals; monitoring protocols for compliance assurance; methodologies for tracking and documenting unauthorized renovation activities; and the availability of data pertaining to terrace houses within each jurisdiction. With interviewee consent, sessions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed in full.

The transcription was followed by thematic analysis conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase methodology: familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts; generation of initial codes across the dataset; searching for themes by collating related codes; reviewing themes for internal coherence and distinctiveness; defining and naming themes; and producing the final analytical account. Coding combined deductive and inductive approaches: predetermined thematic areas derived from the interview protocol guided initial coding. The analysis remained open to patterns emerged directly from participant accounts. Three dimensions emerged from this process: guideline clarity and accessibility; enforcement and monitoring practices; and data collection and management for illegal renovation tracking.

A limitation of the interview-based approach is that data reflects reported and not a directly observed practice. Discrepancies between stated procedures and actual operational behaviour cannot be excluded. Findings should be interpreted as documentation of institutional accounts over independent verification of practice.

The interview questions were not formally pilot-tested with an independent sample prior to data collection. The thematic areas were instead derived directly from gaps and inconsistencies identified during the preceding of literature review. It was structured to align with the study's exploratory objective of establishing baseline institutional practice. We acknowledge that formal pilot testing would have further strengthened instrument validity and note this as a limitation of the current design.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

This section presents findings from preliminary interviews across the eight participating local authorities, organized around three dimensions: clarity and accessibility of renovation guidelines; monitoring, complaint management, and enforcement; and data collection and management for illegal renovation tracking. Table 3 provides a comparative summary of key findings across all eight councils.

Table 3: Summary of Findings

Dimension	DBKL	MPS	MPAJ	MBSJ	MP Sepang	MBK	MPKJ	MBPJ
Application Guideline / Checklist	Detailed online guideline & checklist	Checklist (no specification)	Checklist	Brief online guideline & checklist	Checklist (no specification)	Detailed guideline book, brochures & checklist	Checklist	Checklist
Building Monitoring Procedure	Based on complaints only	Twice per month	Based on severity of complaints only	Every week	Twice per month	Based on complaints only	Based on complaints only	Twice per month
Illegal Renovation Statistics Method	No. of complaints	No. of CCC issued	No. of claimed deposits	No. of CCC issued	No. of complaints	No. of deviation notices	No. of complaints	No. of CCC issued

4.1.1 Clarity and Accessibility of Renovation Guidelines

Building approval is required prior to commencing renovation works involving structural change, extension, or change of use under Act 133 and the UBBL 1984. All eight participating local authorities provide applicants with checklists or guidelines outlining application requirements. However, the comprehensiveness and accessibility of these documents vary across councils.

Three councils (Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), Subang Jaya City Council (MBSJ), and Kajang Municipal Council (MPKJ)) have produced guidelines in accessible, non-technical language. DBKL and MBSJ additionally make guidelines available online. MPKJ supplements its checklist with a printed guideline book and informational brochures. These approaches reflect deliberate effort to support public understanding of application requirements beyond the procedural minimum. The remaining councils provide checklists of varying adequacy. Checklists from Klang City Council (MBK) and Sepang Municipal Council (MP Sepang) were observed during interviews to contain broad generic requirements such as "submit building plans" or "provide structural calculations" without specifying required format, scale, level of detail, or applicable technical standards. In the absence of such specification, applicants are unable to determine from the checklist alone whether their submission will meet requirements. Officers from both councils confirmed during interviews that checklists were not exhaustive and that applicants commonly required direct consultation with officers to understand submission requirements fully. This reliance on officer-dependent communication for basic procedural clarity represents an accessibility gap with practical implications for both applicants and departmental workload.

Checklists from Selayang Municipal Council (MPS), Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ), and Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) provided intermediate levels of detail, more specific than MBK and MP Sepang but without the simplified language or supplementary materials characterizing the highest-performing councils. None of the checklists reviewed across any council provided examples of acceptable submissions or common grounds for rejection, leaving applicants to interpret requirements without illustrative reference points.

This absence is practically significant. In the context of renovation applications, where submitted plans must meet technical specifications for scale, format, and level of detail, applicants without professional experience are poorly positioned to determine whether their submissions are adequate from a checklist alone. Officers from MBK and MP Sepang confirmed that applicants commonly require direct consultation with officers to understand submission requirements fully, suggesting that inadequate checklist guidance displaces compliance burden onto face-to-face officer interaction rather than eliminating it. This has implications for both applicant experience and departmental workload, as officer time absorbed by procedural clarification represents a resource cost that more accessible

documentation could reduce. The absence of illustrative submission guidance across all eight councils suggests that checklist design has not been systematically reviewed against applicant needs, pointing to an area where accessibility improvements may be achievable without significant institutional investment.

4.1.2 Monitoring, Complaint Management, and Enforcement

Monitoring practices across the eight councils divide into two broad approaches. Four councils (MPS, MBSJ, MP Sepang, and MBPJ) conduct scheduled building monitoring activities organized by geographic zone. MPS and MP Sepang conduct monitoring twice monthly; MBSJ monitors weekly. The remaining four councils (DBKL, MBK, MPAJ, and MPKJ) do not conduct scheduled monitoring of landed residential properties and rely on public complaints as the primary mechanism for identifying unauthorized works. MPAJ officers further noted that complaint-triggered investigations are selective: only complaints assessed as sufficiently serious receive follow-up action.

Complaint management systems vary in their formality and accessibility. DBKL operates a dedicated online platform, the Integrated “*Sistem Pemantauan Aduan Agensi Awam*” DBKL (iSPAAA DBKL), through which complaints can be lodged and tracked. Upon receipt, the Building Control Department opens a case file and completes investigation within 14 days, with status updates communicated through the platform. Complaints submitted by walk-in or telephone are processed through written correspondence. MPAJ, by contrast, accepts complaints only by telephone or email and specifies no investigation timeline. Other councils accept complaints through walk-in and telephone channels, without online access or defined response timelines.

Regarding enforcement action for confirmed violations, all eight councils reported that legal prosecution and demolition orders are measures of last resort. Standard practice across councils involves the sequential use of warning letters, compliance notices, and monetary fines, with the objective of bringing unauthorized works into compliance or securing rectification. Officers from DBKL, MPS, and MPAJ noted that legal proceedings are administratively resource-intensive, making fines the more operationally practical enforcement pathway in most cases. Officers from MPKJ, MBK, and MPAJ additionally identified fine revenue as a consideration in enforcement decisions. No council reported systematic post-enforcement follow-up procedures to verify sustained compliance after notices or fines are issued.

The preference for fines over demolition orders reflects both practical and organizational factors. Officers from DBKL, MPS, and MPAJ noted that legal proceedings for demolition are administratively resource-intensive, requiring documented investigation papers and court applications that absorb enforcement capacity disproportionate to individual cases. Furthermore, monetary compounds carry an inherent limitation: property owners often calculate that paying a fine is financially preferable to rectifying an unauthorized extension, particularly where the value of the improvement exceeds the compound amount. This compound-as-compliance-alternative dynamic, observed across multiple councils, reduces the practical deterrent effect of the enforcement framework even where councils exercise enforcement authority consistently.

4.1.3 Data Collection and Management for Illegal Renovation Tracking

Findings regarding data availability and management practices reveal significant variation across councils and, in some cases, the absence of basic housing stock information. Two councils (MPAJ and MBK) do not maintain records on the number of terrace houses within their jurisdictions. The absence of this foundational inventory data limits the capacity of these authorities to plan monitoring coverage, assess renovation activity relative to housing stock, or allocate enforcement resources systematically.

For tracking illegal renovation activity, councils employ six distinct methodologies, none of which is shared uniformly across the study group. DBKL, MP Sepang, and MPKJ measure illegal renovation prevalence through the volume of public complaints received. MPS, MBSJ, and MBPJ use the number of Certificates of Completion and Compliance (CCC) issued as an indicator. MPAJ tracks unclaimed renovation deposits, on the basis that unclaimed deposits may indicate works completed without formal closure. MBK uses the number of deviation notices issued as its primary measure.

Each of these methodologies captures a different aspect of renovation activity and is subject to different limitations. Complaint-based measures are dependent on public reporting behaviour and will undercount violations in areas where residents are unlikely to lodge complaints. CCC-based measures capture authorised completion activity but do not directly measure non-compliance. Deposit-based and deviation notice-based measures are indirect proxies whose relationship to actual illegal renovation prevalence is not empirically established. The methodological diversity across councils means that data generated by individual authorities are not directly comparable, and aggregate regional statistics on illegal renovation activity cannot be reliably compiled from existing council records.

The absence of terrace house inventory data has operational consequences. Without knowing the size of the housing stock subject to renovation regulation within their jurisdictions, these councils cannot calculate monitoring coverage ratios, set inspection targets, or systematically allocate enforcement personnel to areas with higher renovation activity. Sabri et al. (2017) noted that local authority monitoring targets, typically twice-monthly visits to residential areas, are difficult to achieve even where housing inventories exist; for councils without baseline inventory records, systematic planning of monitoring coverage is structurally impossible.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Variation in Institutional Practice

Findings across the three dimensions document material variation in how participating councils implement house renovation control, consistent with the procedural inconsistencies identified in prior literature (Marzukhi et al., 2021, Sabri et al., 2017). This variation is evident not only in resource-dependent functions such as monitoring frequency but also in lower-cost operational decisions such as checklist design and complaint management formalization. The latter is notable: producing accessible, detailed guidelines does not require significant financial investment, yet practice differs substantially across councils in this area. This suggests that variation reflects differences in institutional priority and organizational approach, not solely resource availability.

The distinction between proactive and reactive monitoring approaches across councils has governance implications that extend beyond operational efficiency. Councils relying exclusively on complaints for violation identification are structurally dependent on public reporting behaviour, which is subject to social, cultural, and practical constraints that operate independently of actual violation prevalence. Under a purely complaint-dependent model, enforcement activity reflects the willingness of residents to report rather than the distribution of unauthorized works, producing a systematic gap between the regulatory record and actual compliance conditions. Councils with scheduled zone-based monitoring generate enforcement data that is less contingent on these factors, though their coverage remains partial relative to the scale of urban residential activity.

Abrabba et al. (2021, 2022) argue that deficiencies in administrative systems and enforcement mechanisms create the institutional conditions in which non-compliance is sustained. The variation documented here provides illustration of that argument at the local authority level: councils with limited monitoring, inaccessible guidelines, and informal complaint systems present a lower institutional deterrent to unauthorized renovation than those with more developed practices, within the same legislative framework.

4.2.2 Data Fragmentation

The absence of a common methodology for tracking illegal renovation activity across Klang Valley councils represents a structural limitation on governance at the regional level. Where councils use different proxy indicators such as complaint volumes, CCC issuance, deposit claims, deviation notices, the resulting data is not aggregable and does not support inter-authority comparison. This fragmentation has several practical consequences.

First, it prevents systematic regional assessment of renovation compliance patterns. Without comparable data, state and federal bodies cannot identify where unauthorized activity is most concentrated or where enforcement investment would be most productive. Second, it limits institutional learning across councils. Where one council's approach produces better compliance outcomes than another's, the absence of common measurement makes this difficult to detect or verify. Third, the two councils that do not maintain terrace house inventory records (MPAJ and MBK) lack the foundational data required for systematic monitoring planning, independent of whichever tracking methodology is employed.

The Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (2026-2030) Strategy C3.2 emphasizes standardization of legislation and regulations to improve government delivery systems at all levels. Standardization of renovation tracking methodology across local authorities would address the data fragmentation documented here, enabling the regional evidence base that current governance arrangements do not produce.

4.2.3 Policy Alignment and Reform Implications

The findings are directly relevant to three strategies in the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan. Strategy C1.1 (regulatory instrument review) is applicable to the checklist and guideline deficiencies documented across several councils. Checklists that require direct officer consultation to interpret represent instruments that have not been reviewed against accessibility standards or user needs. Strategy C1.2 (reduction of regulatory burden) is relevant to the procedural inconsistencies across councils that generate compliance uncertainty for applicants, particularly those operating across jurisdictions. Strategy C3.2 (standardization of legislation and regulation) applies to both procedural variation in approval processes and the methodological fragmentation in illegal renovation data collection documented in Section 4.1.3.

The findings also carry implications for how building control performance is currently audited at the national level. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government administers the Star Rating System for Local Authorities (SSR-PBT), which includes building control as a core services assessment criterion (KPKT, 2019). However, the methodological variation in illegal renovation tracking documented across the eight participating councils means that building control performance data generated by individual councils are not comparable under any uniform measurement framework, including SSR-PBT. If performance audits rely on self-reported council data without standardising what is being measured, the resulting assessments may reflect differences in tracking methodology and not differences in actual enforcement effectiveness. The baseline documented in this study identifies a precondition for meaningful national performance benchmarking of building control, namely that councils must first converge on comparable measurement approaches before inter-authority performance comparisons can be considered valid.

The baseline documentation this study provides is a prerequisite for implementing these strategies effectively. Standardization efforts require knowledge of current practice distribution across authorities in order to establish what is being standardized from, identify where the performance gap is largest, and avoid anchoring to practices that are themselves inadequate. The present findings provide that knowledge for the Klang Valley council population.

4.2.4 Limitations

This study documents practices as reported by council officers in 2024-2025. Reported practices may not fully reflect actual operational behaviour, and conditions may have changed in the intervening period. The study does not measure compliance outcomes, as it documents institutional practices without establishing their relationship to actual renovation compliance rates across jurisdictions. Causal inferences about the relationship between documented practices and compliance levels are therefore not supported by this study's data and are not advanced. Future research combining institutional practice documentation with field-based compliance measurement would enable such inferences.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has documented house renovation regulatory practices across eight Klang Valley local authorities through semi-structured interviews with Building Control Department staff, examining three operational dimensions: guideline clarity and accessibility, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, and data collection for illegal renovation tracking. Findings indicate material variation across all three dimensions, from checklist comprehensiveness and monitoring frequency to the methodologies used to track unauthorized renovation activity.

The study's contribution is empirical and documentary. It establishes a baseline record of current institutional practices across the Klang Valley council population, filling a knowledge gap identified in the building control literature and providing the empirical foundation that policy harmonization and reform evaluation require. The findings are relevant to the regulatory reform priorities of the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan, particularly regarding regulatory instrument review, burden reduction, and government delivery system standardization at the local authority level.

Two observations from the findings warrant attention in policy development. First, variation in practice is not entirely explained by resource differences between councils, some of the most consequential differences, such as checklist accessibility and complaint system formalization, involve organizational decisions that are not primarily resource-dependent. This suggests that performance improvement does not require uniform resource increases across the council population. Second, the absence of standardized illegal renovation tracking methodology across councils represents a structural barrier to regional evidence-based governance that cannot be resolved at the individual council level and requires coordinated action at the state or federal level.

This study is limited to reported practices in 2024-2025 and does not measure compliance outcomes. Additionally, interview questions were not formally pilot-tested with an independent sample prior to data collection. The thematic areas were instead derived directly from gaps identified during the literature review and structured to align with the study's exploratory objective of establishing baseline institutional practice. Both limitations should be considered when interpreting the consistency of cross-council comparisons. Future research directions include longitudinal reassessment of practices following the implementation of Thirteenth Malaysia Plan strategies, field-based compliance measurement to assess the relationship between institutional practices and actual renovation compliance rates, and extension of the study scope to include district councils and non-Klang Valley urban authorities for comparative analysis.

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