



NEW WESTMINSTER



**CHILD CARE STRATEGY
FOR NEW WESTMINSTER
FEBRUARY 16, 2009**

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Acknowledgements

The preparation of this Child Care Strategy would not have been possible without the commitment and dedication of the Child Care Strategy Task Group, whose members are listed below, and funding support from the City of New Westminister. The Task Group met on ten occasions to oversee the preparation of the Child Care Needs Assessment (October 27, 2008) and Strategy.

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The preparation of this Strategy would not have been possible without the involvement of parents who completed the child care questionnaire, participated in the focus groups and who took part in the forum. It would also not have been possible without the involvement of child care advocates and providers who agreed to be interviewed and who provided program information. To all who were involved or took an interest, your commitment and dedication to the children of New Westminister is truly commendable.



Child Care Strategy for New Westminster

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1 Introduction

The Child Care Strategy reflects City Council’s desire to be a municipal leader in the area of child care and provides an overall framework and long-term direction with regard to child care in New Westminster. It builds on past and present municipal child care initiatives and defines the City’s role, enabling powers and limitations. It also reflects a commitment in the belief that quality, accessible and affordable child care is necessary to creating a complete and healthy community and a prosperous economy.



2 Background

It has been over a decade since the completion of the City of New Westminster’s ‘Caring for Children’ Child Care Strategy (1995). During this time, the planning context in which the strategy was based has changed.

The Federal and Provincial governments are not as active in this area as in the past and there are increasing requests for municipal leadership and assistance. The demand for licensed child care is also far outstripping supply, which means that more and more children find themselves in unregulated child care arrangements. Given the importance of child care, both from a social and an economic perspective, this lack of licensed child care is threatening the City’s high quality of life and its future prosperity.

In this context, City Council decided that it was time to prepare a new Child Care Strategy; one which will define the City’s role and responsibilities in relation to the senior levels of government; recommend policies and tools to support existing and facilitate the provision of new child care spaces; identify potential funding and partnership arrangements; and establish child care targets by which the strategy can be regularly monitored and evaluated. 🏰



We have an opportunity to be a leader in the areas of child care and early childhood development. Both are vitally important to ensuring that our children have the foundation and skills to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.

Child Care Interviewee, 2008



3 Child Care Needs Assessment

As a first step of the work, a New Westminster Child Care Needs Assessment (October 27, 2008) was prepared. This document defines what is meant by child care and describes the different types; details its importance from both a social and an economic perspective; discusses how it is provided and funded and outlines the City's current role; examines the existing child care situation, including supply and demand factors; and identifies and analyzes a number of related issues.

The Child Care Needs Assessment was developed based on the input and feedback of over 600 people, including parents, child care operators and advocates, and community members. Efforts were made to reach out to groups and individuals who may face barriers in participating in such consultation processes, including low-income and single parent families, new immigrants and refugees, and parents of children requiring extra support needs.

The Child Care Needs Assessment provides the context for and informs the development of the Strategy. For example, the finding that about 35% of the existing child care spaces are located in facilities with uncertain lease arrangements or serious building deficiencies prompted the need for recommended actions, such as Child Care Program Stabilization Grants, that target such facilities. As such, both documents should be used together. 🏰





4 Importance of Child Care

Quality, accessible and affordable child care produces significant social and economic benefits for the recipient community.

Socially, quality child care provides opportunities for children to develop in all areas of child development. Children learn new skills in a safe and nurturing setting, while parents are afforded opportunities to learn about different developmental and parenting issues. Quality child care has also been shown to reduce social isolation, especially among single parents, and assist in the settlement and integration process for recent immigrants and refugees. Additionally, it has been found to reduce differences in developmental vulnerability across neighbourhoods, when taking into account parental education and style, family income, and neighbourhood socio-economic characteristics.

Economically, accessible and affordable child care enables parents to work and to contribute to the local economy; alleviates dependence on income assistance; and facilitates early childhood development and later school success which is vital to developing a skilled workforce for the future. It is also a major factor in the location and relocation decisions of both families and businesses and is a key determinant in recruiting and retaining parent employees. Regarding the former, many families now require two-incomes to afford to purchase or rent suitable housing in New Westminster. 🏰

A Canadian cost-benefit study considering universal, high-quality early childhood education and care showed that such a program would produce a \$2 social and economic return to our society for every dollar invested.

Cleveland and Krashinsky (1998)



5 Role of the Senior Levels of Government

The provision of child care is primarily a Provincial government responsibility.

Provincially, child care is governed by the Community Care and Assisted Living Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulations. Together, this legislation defines required staff/child ratios, group sizes, health and safety measures, and early childhood educator training requirements for various child care settings. The Province is also a major funder of child care, both to child care operators and to families. For more information regarding these programs, refer to the Child Care Needs Assessment. Despite claims of increasing Provincial funding, child care in most municipalities can best be described as being in crisis, with demand for spaces far outstripping supply.

Federally, the Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, which outlined a publicly-funded early childhood development system, was eliminated effective March 31, 2007 and replaced by the Universal Child Care Benefit. Under the latter program, families can apply to receive \$100 per month per child under age six. Additional funding is available to some families through the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the Child Disability Benefit. As such, the Federal government has transferred much of the responsibility for child care to families (who may or may not use it for this purpose) and to the Provinces.

In recent years, municipalities have, by necessity, moved beyond their legislated responsibility to oversee land use and building safety related to child care to that of facilitator, negotiator and funder in creating new child care spaces. While this Strategy sees an expanded role for the City, especially as an active partner and, in some cases, funder, it recognizes that the senior levels of government must significantly increase their support of and funding for child care if true gains are to be made in addressing the child care crisis. To this end, one of the recommended actions is for the City, through municipal associations and other means, to advocate that the Provincial and Federal governments recommit themselves to child care, including developing a National Child Care Strategy. 🏰





6 Recommended Child Care Policy

In 1992, City Council adopted the following Child Care Policy:

The City is committed to being an active partner with the senior levels of government, the community, parents and non-profit and private child care operators, in the development and maintenance of a comprehensive child care system in the City of New Westminster. A comprehensive child care system would include the provision of quality programs that are accessible and affordable.

During the process of the 'Caring for Children' Child Care Strategy, it was recommended that child care planning be incorporated into the neighbourhood planning process and that the City continue to promote and encourage the creation of licensed child care spaces in appropriate development proposals.

As such, the following policy was incorporated into the City's Official Community Plan (1998):

The provision of child care is an essential community-based service which contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the City.

Based on the first policy, which was quite comprehensive and cited the need for the City to be an active partner, and incorporating key elements of the more recent policy, including references such as child care being an essential community-based service, the recommended child care policy for the City of New Westminster is as follows:

The City of New Westminster recognizes that child care is an essential community-based service and that it makes a valuable contribution to the social and economic development of the community. It is also an investment in the future; as high quality child care is associated with improved child outcomes, including school readiness and success.

The City of New Westminster is committed to being a leader and an active partner with the senior levels of government, the School District, businesses, child care providers, faith organizations, parents and the community in developing and maintaining a comprehensive child care system. A comprehensive child care system is one that includes the provision of quality programs that are accessible and affordable.



A comprehensive child care system reflects the needs of all families and children that require care and who can benefit from participation in quality early childhood development and family strengthening programs. At its core, it includes the following three central principles:

Quality

A quality child care system is one which supports the child's emotional, intellectual, physical and social development and assists and complements the family in its child-rearing role. Research and experience indicate that the predictors of quality programming include: the existence of and compliance with licensing standards; the provision of specific staff training in child development and early childhood education; the effective administration of programs; the involvement of parents in the care option of their choice; and the provision of sufficient operating funds and program resources to support care that is developmentally and individually appropriate.

Accessible

An accessible child care system is one in which there is appropriate and adequate capacity for all families and children requiring care. This means an integrated continuum of services for children from birth to 12 years of age in developmentally appropriate programs for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and elementary school-aged children; the planning, coordination and delivery of child care services at the neighbourhood level; the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate services; and the development of physically accessible facilities that promote the full inclusion of all children.

Affordable

An affordable child care system is one which provides access to quality care for all families regardless of income. It is adequately funded by the senior levels of government and offers subsidies to families to make up the difference between their ability to pay and the actual cost of child care. 🏰





7 Recommended Actions

The recommended actions are based on the results of the Child Care Needs Assessment; the case study research into best practices being used by other municipalities who are considered leaders in the field of child care; and the input of the Child Care Strategy Task Group.



The recommended actions are grouped according to the timing of their proposed implementation. This sequencing recognizes that some of the actions will require significant staff time and/or resources to implement, while others are dependent on an earlier action being implemented.

A Child Care Strategy Task Group was established to guide and inform strategy development. This task group had a broad membership, including child care operators and parents, the City, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the School District, the Simon Fraser Society for Community Living, and YMCA Child Care Resource and Referral. In total, there were over 20 members and the task group met on a monthly basis starting in November 2007. 🏰

The strategy must address implementation. There is a need for an assigned staff position, a clearly defined policy, realistic deliverables, adequate resources and measurable outcomes. Without them, the strategy will not have its desired effect.

Task Force Member, 2008



Year 1

Formalize the Responsibility for Child Care within the City:

1. That the responsibility for child care reside within the job description of the Social Planner position within the City and that this position receive adequate resources and support to perform the prescribed duties in this area. If this position is eliminated or left unfilled for any length of time, that the responsibility for child care reside within the job description of another position within Development Services and that child care be one of the primary duties of this position.

Establish a Child Care Strategy Implementation Group:

2. That a Child Care Strategy Implementation Group be established to assist in the implementation of the new Child Care Strategy. This body, with the assistance of the City's Social Planner, would:

- annually review and update the needs assessment information;
- prepare an annual report on progress made in addressing gaps, needs and issues;
- examine the implications arising from the possible introduction of full-day Kindergarten and optional pre-Kindergarten for four and three year olds;
- examine other unforeseen child care related issues or situations as they arise; and
- work to raise public awareness about the importance of and need for child care.

Membership could include representation from the City, Community Care Licensing, the Early Childhood Development Committee, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the New Westminster Supported Child Development Program, the School District, YMCA Child Care Resource and Referral, child care providers, parents and others.

Continue to Participate on the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Public Partners' Committee:

3. That the City continue to participate on the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Public Partners' Committee which is working to develop four ECD Hubs serving six neighbourhoods in New Westminster. This body includes the City (through Parks and Recreation and Social Planning), Fraser Health, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the School District, and the United Way of the Lower Mainland.



Currently, planning for the Queensborough and Uptown/Downtown ECD Hubs is well underway. Regarding the former, consultation has been completed, a plan developed, an action team established and a preliminary concept plan prepared. On October 6, 2008, City Council unanimously endorsed the preliminary concept plan for the Queensborough ECD Hub. Regarding the Uptown/Downtown ECD Hub, consultation has been completed, a plan developed and an action team established.

Develop Child Care Agreements between the City, School District and Other Stakeholders:

4. That a Child Care Protocol be developed whereby the City and School District jointly work to stabilize and increase the viability of existing child care programs so that there is no loss in spaces within their collective control and that they plan for and develop new child care spaces on City/ School District lands and promote joint use of space.

5. That discussions be initiated with the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Public Partners' Committee to determine if this body would consider expanding its mandate to include child care. Recently, this body signed a Memorandum of Understanding to develop four ECD Hubs serving six neighbourhoods in New Westminster.

Integrate Child Care Needs into the Municipal Planning Process:

6. That child care be designated as a 'standard' community need similar to parkland and that child care planning be integrated into the municipal planning process. Additionally, that child care be considered in all appropriate development projects, including through the negotiation of developer contributions, and that neighbourhoods be planned as 'child-friendly' places.

7. That a review of municipal policies, regulations and procedures be conducted to ensure that no undue procedural obstacles exist in the development of child care. This review could include discussions with Community Care Licensing and YMCA Child Care Resource and Referral; an examination of other jurisdictions; and interviews with recent child care applicants.

8. That a review of City-owned lands and buildings be conducted to identify and inventory sites/spaces that could reasonably accommodate child care facilities/ programs. Additionally, that the School District, other levels of government and major landowners be encouraged to conduct similar reviews.

9. That consideration be given to building or incorporating space for child care facilities as part of the development of new municipal facilities or major renovations to existing ones. For example, consider child care in the planning for the new Downtown Civic Multi-Use Facility and the expansion of the Queensborough Community Centre.

10. That Parks and Recreation examine the feasibility of providing licensed, play-based pre-school programs (that complement and not replace its tiny tot programs). Additionally, that Parks and Recreation examine the feasibility of providing accessible, recreation-based, after-school care and drop-in program options.

11. That targets be established for the number, type and location of child care spaces which are required to meet current and future needs by neighbourhood in New Westminster. These targets would be based on the amount and type of projected new development, the anticipated rate of population growth and the needs assessment information.



Prepare and Disseminate Information related to Child Care:

12. That a step-by-step guide to establishing a new child care operation in the City be prepared. This guide would provide information on the different types of child care; the Zoning and Building Code requirements; the municipal approval process; and relevant contact information. This guide would be regularly updated to reflect any changes and would be available in hard copy and on-line.

13. That a child care page be created under the resident section of the City's official website. This site would provide direct access to the Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy; the Step-by-Step Guide to Establishing a New Child Care Operation; and other municipal documentation and initiatives related to child care or early childhood development. This site would also contain links to relevant websites, including the Early Childhood Development Committee, Fraser Health and YMCA Child Care Resource and Referral.

14. That child care information targeting developers and realtors be prepared. This information, which could be in the form of brochures or pamphlets, would raise awareness about investment opportunities. For example, developing new child care facilities in residential, commercial and institutional settings. This could be coordinated by the City's Economic Development and Social Planning positions and would provide a role for the Chamber of Commerce and other local business associations.

Lobby the Senior Levels of Governments for Increased Funding and Support:

15. That the City lobby the senior levels of government for increased funding and support to child care operators, caregivers and families. More specifically, that the City:

- lobby the senior levels of governments for a funding mechanism that adequately supports the development

and operation of an accessible, affordable and comprehensive child care system' and that provides caregivers with wages and working conditions that reflect the value of their work;

- lobby the Ministry of Education to permit, fund and support the co-location of child care facilities and early childhood development hubs in school facilities and on school grounds.

To maximize the effectiveness of lobbying efforts, the City should work with other municipalities on joint motions and working through existing bodies such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Lower Mainland Municipal Association and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. Implement 'Permissive' Zoning in Support of New Child Care Spaces:²

16. That child care operations of up to 16 spaces (principal use) or up to 12 spaces (accessory use) be permitted as an outright use in all residential zones. No rezoning would be required and approval would be the responsibility of City staff and would be subject to Provincial licensing requirements. In conjunction, review and establish parking requirements for such uses and require operators to document potential neighbourhood impacts (e.g., noise, parking and traffic).

17. That larger child care operations of up to 25 spaces (principal use) be permitted in all residential zones, subject to Council and public review of applications. Approval would be the responsibility of City Council. In conjunction, review and establish parking requirements for such uses; develop guidelines with regard to building siting and design; and require operators to document potential neighbourhood impacts (e.g., noise, parking and traffic).

¹ This would include lobbying for increased funding for parents of children requiring extra support needs, including extended hours for support staff and transitional programming after age 12.



Use Density Bonusing to Create New Child Care Spaces:

18. That child care be designated as a preferred community amenity and that density bonusing be used to create new child care spaces. In exchange for extra density, a developer would provide either a purpose-built child care facility or cash contribution-in-lieu to a Child Care Development Reserve Fund. If the former, then the City would assume ownership of the child care facility and would lease to a non-profit child care operator on a rent-free or subsidized basis.³ The City would assume responsibility for maintaining the physical structure and the non-profit operator would assume responsibility for replacing furnishings and equipment.

Enhance the City’s Status as a Progressive Employer:

19. That a joint Employer-Employee Committee be established to review the City’s personnel policies and practices and, where possible, recommend adjustments to assist City employees to better balance their responsibilities to both work and family. This committee would also determine the child care needs of City employees and explore options in meeting these needs, including the possible development of child care spaces for use by City employees. Based on the results of the review, consider encouraging other major employers in New Westminster to establish family-friendly workplace polices and on-or-off site child care facilities. 👑



² The City currently permits a range of child care facilities within its residential zones. Family child care homes (up to eight children) are permitted in all residential zones. Group child care facilities (up to 16 children) are permitted in the Neighbourhood Residential Dwelling Districts (NR-2) zone in the Connaught, Kelvin and West End neighbourhoods. More specifically, this zone permits group child care facilities provided that a minimum of 50% of the floor space of the principal building is in use exclusively as a single detached dwelling; the child care use is located primarily in the principal building; the number of children does not exceed 16; and the group child care conforms to the requirements of the Provincial Community Care and Assisted Living Act. Group child care (up to 25 children) is also permitted in Multiple Dwelling Districts, which includes everything from low rise to high rise apartments. More specifically, the group child care will have to meet the following conditions: shall provide a witnessed letter of authorization from the owner of the rental building or the council of a condominium or cooperative; shall not exceed a gross floor area of greater than 1,000 square feet per building or 0.05 of the site area, whichever is less; shall not exceed 25 children; and shall not be located in an amenity space provided for the residents of the building; or portion of the building, nor cause the loss of any such space.

³ Ensure that the tendering process is open and transparent and ensure that the facility meets minimum standards for physical accessibility for both adults and children.



Year 3



Establish a Child Care Development Reserve Fund and Grant Program:

20. That a Child Care Development Reserve Fund be created to assist with the capital costs of developing new child care facilities and to fund a Child Care Grant Program. Where possible, this fund would be used to leverage senior government funding thus maximizing the dollars available for child care in New Westminster. It would be funded by cash contributions from developers who are building projects that capitalize on the density bonusing system, as well as other potential sources of funding.

In order to grow the fund quicker, that the City lobby the Provincial government to amend the Local Government Act to extend the application of Development Cost Charges to child care facilities. Development Cost Charges are monies that the City collects from land developers to offset that portion of the costs related to services (e.g., parkland, transportation, utilities, etc.) that are incurred as a direct result of the new development.

21. That a Child Care Grant Program be established that would include both Capital Improvement and Program Stabilization Grants. The former would assist existing child care operators to expand, renovate or repair their facility; enhance physical accessibility; or purchase new equipment. The latter would assist child care operators to stabilize their financial situation, restructure their financial systems and conduct long-term financial planning. In conjunction, develop a grant process, including eligibility criteria. This program would be funded through the establishment of the Child Care Development Reserve Fund. 🏰



Notes

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