

Briefing Note re Current Child Care Environment and Planning in Saanich

The current situation regarding childcare in Saanich is as follows:

- The lack of affordable childcare impacts many groups - parents of children aged zero to 12, grandparents, couples who feel they cannot afford children
- The child care system has been positively impacted by the 2017/2019 introduction of the federal provincial program - more trained and better paid workers, lowered costs for parents, some expansion of supply primarily through private and a school district provision
- Saanich municipality was funded by UBCM to study and plan for childcare in 2020. Few of the proposed actions were implemented
- The overall supply of spaces has only increased marginally. The cost of housing has continued to reduce the supply of licensed in-home care. This decline has been offset by private sector and school district funded centres.
- The recent proposals for altering the zoning bylaw are welcomed, are very similar to those proposed in 2020 plan, but will likely do little to increase supply
- The school district has worked diligently to increase supply (primarily of before and after school care) on school grounds, but does not have the land base to do much more
- Not-for-profit groups are keen to partner but the development of centres takes up-front funding which they do not have.
- The private sector cannot access federal provincial capital funding but do see childcare as a potential profit centre. They can access federal provincial operating funding but costs are generally higher in private settings. The spectre of private equity acquisition is a concern.

The bottom line is there is a role that can be played by municipalities within the childcare system.

The 2020 plan proposed actions for Saanich municipality in four areas:

- Zoning - the proposed changes are welcome but will not change the supply meaningfully
- System development - if Saanich municipality is to play a role in child care then policy needs to be backed by human and other municipal system supports
- Providing land and buildings for childcare - this can take a number of forms
- Advocacy - this aspect of the 2020 plan was implemented but changing circumstances will require further advocacy

If Saanich municipality decides it can provide land and buildings for child care centres this can take one of two forms:

- Owner operator - the municipality can develop the facility and operate it as a child care municipal service, staff municipal employees etc etc
- Owner of facility with operator contracted out

Whichever format is chosen the municipality should undertake an inventory search to find suitable sites. These might be in municipal owned buildings, municipal hall, firehall, etc or on municipally owned land including parks. This could occur in conjunction with other municipal projects, with provincial child care funding contributing to or offsetting municipal costs.

Additionally childcare should be a primary candidate for community amenity space in community hubs and other major developments along urban corridors. The municipality can play multiple roles in the development of such spaces.

Any capital costs for the development of childcare centres can be 100% funded through the federal provincial capital program.

In summary

It is time that the municipality recognized that it has a role to play in the child care system

Capital funding has been available for several years. It is time the municipality identified projects and applied for funding

As long as the municipality contract-out the operation of new centres, the costs to the municipality will be minimal

The municipality needs to work in collaboration with other agencies - school district, early years table, CCRC, Camosun College to develop a policy framework and five year plan.

Recommendation

The Arts, Culture and Community Well-Being Advisory Committee recommends to council

- That council recognize that it has a stronger role to play in supporting the child care system
- That the administration work in collaboration with other community partners to develop a three year plan that will increase the supply of childcare spaces in the municipality.