

# Victoria mayor planning for 300 new affordable childcare spaces

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The childcare spaces would be located on SD61 properties throughout Victoria

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**Source:** Victoria News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 1 Oct 2018

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## EXCERPTS

Victoria's incumbent Mayor Lisa Helps announced a plan to create 300 new affordable childcare spaces across the city.

Helps has worked with School District 61, Island Health and non-profit childcare providers to put forward an application to the Province to create new spaces in Greater Victoria beginning in 2019.

"We've worked hard together to put an initial plan to address the concern we've heard over and over from both parents and employers that access to affordable, high-quality childcare is a key priority for keeping life livable in Victoria," Helps said. "We've been working rather excitedly over a 10-month period to make this happen."

Helps said they are also working on developing a Childcare Solutions Action Plan to anticipate the future demands and develop a plan to meet them.

The 300 proposed childcare spaces would be housed in modular learning units on School District 61 properties, which Helps argues makes it easier for parents by creating a single drop-off spot rather than two, as well as offer an easier transition for young children from daycare to school.

For the entire SD61 region, the provincial budget would allocate \$11 million, while just over \$3 million would go to Victoria's spaces.

At this point, SD61 has submitted an application to the province and Helps has submitted a letter of support. No date has been set for a funding announcement, but Helps anticipates they will hear from the province soon.

However, affordable child care doesn't mean it will be inexpensive. Kristina Wilcox, co-executive director at the Fairfield Community Association and member of the city's childcare solutions working group, says what is deemed "affordable" comes from statistics within the Child Care Research and Referral Centre in Victoria, which compares fees from different providers.

"We try to keep it on the lower end of that scale, but it will be different for each age group," Wilcox said. "For us, that would be \$810 per month from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., that is what we believe to be affordable in our area."

Wilcox says this fee would cater to kids age 2.5 to 5 years old, when expenses would be higher due to a need for more staff.

She added this fee works for them because they are a non-profit organization, while private daycares would have higher fees.

Wilcox also noted fees could be higher on school district properties, because daycares will need to pay rent, versus on City land which might not charge rent.

The first area of priority for childcare spaces will be Vic West, which saw the sudden closure of one of its largest childcare facilities, Babies to Big Kids, in the spring. The first modular units for Vic West are slated to open at Vic West Elementary school in early 2019.

Other spaces opening over the next three years would include Sir James Douglas Elementary School, George Jay Elementary School, Oaklands Elementary School, South Park Elementary School and the James Bay Community School between 2019-2021.

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