

Concerns expressed over proposed child care centre ^[1]

A local daycare owner is defending her plans to open a new centre at the Days Inn hotel, pointing out there will be outdoor space where children can play.

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EXCERPTS

A local daycare owner is defending her plans to open a new centre at the Days Inn hotel, pointing out there will be outdoor space where children can play.

On-site outdoor play space is not a feature that all daycares in the city have, Joy Agus argues.

Agus owns the Grow With Joy child care centre along with another daycare in Riverdale.

She spoke of her plans during a public hearing at Monday's city council meeting on the proposed rezoning of the hotel, which would allow for the child care centre.

As she told council, Grow With Joy is the only child care centre in the city that provides 24/7 care.

The service has proved popular, with a number of calls coming from people living Outside who are moving to the city and looking for child care outside of the traditional Monday-to-Friday daytime hours.

There's a waiting list of about 30 families, Agus said when questioned by Coun. Jocelyn Curteanu.

Given the high demand, Agus had begun looking for a larger space, and found the space needed at the Days Inn, formerly the Westmark Klondike Inn.

As she pointed out, the city does not allow for larger daycare centres to be located in many residential neighbourhoods, thereby limiting the potential sites available.

Along with plans for a 32 m-by-2.2 m area for outdoor play, Agus highlighted the possibility (yet to be confirmed, she stressed) of another larger area within the property for outdoor space.

Agus has also outlined plans to take older children to local parks and outdoor spaces downtown with a van that would be used to transport them.

Agus noted there's a number of daycares in the city that don't have their own outdoor space, but make use of local parks and such to ensure youngsters have time to play outside.

As noted by Edwin Woloshyn, who sat with Agus through the presentation, there is "plenty of space" for the children.

Agus was later questioned by council members for more details on the plans.

She confirmed that the child care centre could have up to 63 children (provided the staff-to-child ratios required by the territorial government's regulations are met) under the one licence proposed.

Any outdoor space would feature fencing, sand or turf with playground-type toys, Agus said.

As she noted, there are regulations set out by the territorial government around how much space must be between any toys outside.

Agus' and Woloshyn's presentation came in response to concerns brought up about the lack of outdoor space.

Also speaking Monday evening was Katie Swales, a member of the Network for Health Early Human Development Yukon who has worked in child care for more than 20 years.

She pointed out a lot of research shows children's development is hinged as much on being in the outdoors as much as being inside.

Child care programs, Swales said, should provide outdoor space that's easily accessible right outside the door, ensuring that children get time outside every day. When weather permits, she added, they should have access to green space.

Swales argued that the territory's requirements for child care facilities are on the lower end of the spectrum when it comes to quality.

Under the territorial requirements, child care centres must provide access to outdoor space, allowing at least five square metres of play area per child, though that outdoor space does not have to be on the centre's premises.

There are also requirements to be met around fencing for on-site play areas, areas that must be provided, condition of play structures and so on.

"Children depend on the community," Swales said of making decisions in the best interest of youngsters.

She described the proposed space as "largely inadequate," noting her group is strongly opposed to the zoning application.

Coun. Steve Roddick asked Swales about outdoor areas at other child care centres in the city.

She noted it seems to be a "mixed bag, really," with some offering on-site outdoor play areas while others appear to have none.

Coun. Jan Stick, meanwhile, pointed to a potential review of regulations that would be done by the territory's Department of Health and Social Services.

She wondered if the network Swales is part of will be bringing forward its concerns to that process.

Swales confirmed it will.

"Without question, it's really important," she said.

Yolande Vachon, a local resident, also spoke at the hearing. She noted child care provided in busier areas can allow for opportunities for children to learn about safety as they cross streets and walk to outdoor play areas.

Along with the presentations that were made at the public hearing, the city received four written submissions.

Three expressed support for the proposal, with the other being in favour, though highlighting some concerns.

In an interview after the meeting, Mayor Dan Curtis said he believes issues around the amount of outside space provided by child care centres are under the territory's jurisdiction.

The city's role has more to do with building inspections, looking at matters around traffic and parking and the like, he pointed out.

Curtis also noted his own children attended child care centres that didn't have a lot of outdoor space on-site, but provided kids with a lot of outdoor opportunities in nearby parks and the like.

City staff will bring forward a report on the public hearing next week before council votes on the final two readings of the proposed rezoning at the Jan. 28 meeting.

Related link:

Region: Yukon Territory ^[3]

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