

\$1.24 million daycare opening March 2020 ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Officials broke ground on a new \$1.24 million daycare facility in Morden, Monday, helping put a dent in a waiting list that's grown to 156.

The Pembina Valley Childcare Centres' (PVCC) new location will add 90 spaces (16 infant and 74 pre-school) to the original Morden site's 112 spaces.

"It's taken a lot of sweat, stress, planning, and disappointment on the part of [PVCC Director] Shuana Richards... and many others throughout the community," PVCC Chair Candace Brunn says. "We are very thankful that they didn't give up and we persevered."

Originally, the PVCC had planned to open an expansion downtown by repurposing space in the Agassiz building. However, the plan was later scrapped.

Morden-Winkler MLA Cameron Friesen explains, "it didn't work out because trying to retrofit an existing space for a childcare [centre] comes with a lot of regulations and a lot of costs. And there was a determination made that it couldn't be done for an appropriate amount of money."

Friesen says the Provincial government is proud to be contributing \$792,000 to the construction, as well as \$491,000 in grants in perpetuity for operating the facility. "It's amazing to see how community members and community leaders will coalesce and demonstrate generosity around an idea."

Brunn notes the facility wouldn't be possible without partnerships with the government and local business. Along with the Manitoba government's \$792,000 under the Canada-Manitoba Learning and Child Care agreement, The City of Morden has contributed \$450,000 to the project, as well as agreeing to lease the land for 99 years for one dollar.

Mayor Brandon Burley says they're excited to make an investment into "safe and accessible and dependable childcare" adding it's an investment in families' wellbeing as well as the economy, ensuring that families within the community have the ability to expand their incomes.

PVCC Director Shuana Richards explains they were thrilled to see the local business community rally around the project; Decor Cabinets will donating materials to the project, Winkler Co-op will be donating appliances and Vern's Carpet will be donating area rugs for the centre. The Morden Elks will also be donating proceeds from this weekend's Lobster Fest event towards outdoor playground equipment.

However, Richards says they still have a list of items worth approximately \$130,000 that still need to be purchased including blinds and a security system.

"We've got a little bit of time to figure out how we're going to get those, but it's been wonderful that the community has come together like this."

She notes the pressure on daycare centres in the region will be further alleviated together with the new facility attached to the upcoming Pine Ridge Elementary in Winkler.

"That will really help this whole region, two new facilities will be huge for both communities."

Longtime daycare advocate Cheryl Digby was also honoured for her work presenting the need to numerous city councils over the years as well as other government departments.

"It's been Cheryl," Richards says. "That's why this project has happened... she has been working with me on this for ten years, looking at what we could do to create more spaces in this city."

Digby says the waitlist for childcare has been over 100 for the past decade in Morden. "So it was rather a desperate need. We've been dreaming and checking out sites for many years, filling out applications... and we are so excited to see this coming to fruition."

She explains what kept her going: "It's the need. It's also the need for the labour force to get women into the labour force... it enables people to get out and get working and getting some extra income for the family as well."

Construction is expected to be complete on the new Pembina Valley Child Care Centres Inc. 'Hive Site', by March 2020.

However, that's not the finish line for Digby. She's already thinking about the future and how to encourage more licensed home daycares in the city, "because this won't fill the whole gap."

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