

Closing daycares a difficult decision, but it's up to city council to decide: Smith ^[1]

City council agrees to spend \$300K to keep rates stable at eight daycares; more than 1,000 children remain on waiting lists for daycare spaces.

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EXCERPTS:

Council voted a final time Monday night to pay \$300,000 more annually, starting in 2020, to keep daycare fees stable at eight area daycares that would otherwise have had to charge more.

Several daycare workers and parents spoke to council prior to the vote to ask them to consider the funding, and council voted in favour without debate.

The daycares that won't have to increase their fees as a result of this new city funding include:

- Hucklebug Child Care (Havelock location)
- Centre Educatif Les Petits Curieux
- Compass Early Learning and Care
- City of Peterborough Child Care
- Pearson Child Care
- Strath-MacLean Childcare
- Trent Child Care
- YMCA Child Care

These daycares added new spots lately as part of a program of Ontario's previous Liberal government; the idea was to add 100,000 new daycare spots across Ontario over five years and the government planned to fund it entirely.

Ongoing funding was expected for those newly created daycare spots — and then Ontario's Progressive Conservative government announced it would offer 80 per cent of the funding for those spots instead of 100 per cent.

Meanwhile council is also considering closing both of its municipally run daycare centres — Pearson and Peterborough Day Care — to save about \$570,000 annually.

City staff has recommended saving that money every year and spending part of it on those expanded daycare spots at the eight above-mentioned daycares.

Council wasn't debating that on Monday, but there was still discussion about it from the public and from Peterborough-Kawartha MPP Dave Smith (who'd been invited to come speak about it to councillors).

Smith reminded council that it had been city staff's recommendation to close the daycares as well as the after-school programs at both Edmison Heights and Westmount public schools, which are also city-run.

Smith said it's a difficult decision, but it's up to council to make the call.

He blamed the previous Liberal government for its "mismanagement" of money and said each municipality is going to have to do its share toward fiscal responsibility.

"You're not necessarily going get what you want — but you'll get what you need, so no one will be left behind," he said.

Later in the meeting council heard from Pearson worker Patricia Bucholz, the union president for employees at city-run daycares.

She said her union — the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 126 — supports the extra \$300,000 annually for additional spots at

the eight daycares, but not the proposed closure of Pearson and Peterborough Day Care.

Bucholz said municipally run daycares offer the highest-quality of daycare and it would be a shame to close after 50 years of operating them.

Sheila Olan-MacLean, the CEO of Compass Learning Centres, said there are more than 1,000 children on a waiting list for daycare in the city.

Olan-MacLean said she receives daily phone calls from parents "desperate" to find daycare.

Laura Keresztesi, a mother of three young children, said she's had an "extreme hard time" finding full-time daycare for her one-year-old — and that many families in the city are in the same boat.

Jamie Sokary, a mother of two daughters aged three and five, said her younger daughter has developmental delays in every area and received exceptional care at Pearson.

Sokary's daughter is non-verbal and the staff at Pearson learned sign language to make sure the girl could communicate.

"Pearson is the kind of place the city should be proud of," she said.

Leif Einarson said he moved to Peterborough from Toronto with his family knowing his children would receive quality care here.

He urged council to "go back to the drawing board" instead of considering the drastic measure of closing daycares.

Karen Rodgers said her autistic son, now 22, thrived after receiving excellent care at Pearson — and now he's about to graduate from University of Toronto with an advanced degree.

"Look at this as an investment — these kids can do really well," she said.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: funding ^[4]

spaces ^[5]

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