

Bowen Island's childcare action plan released ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Some things in life are more precious than gold: a good book, a happy family and on Bowen, a childcare spot.

Mayor and council got a stark picture of the current childcare landscape at the regular council meeting Monday evening.

BIM consultant Suvi Teigen presented the grant-funded **Bowen Island Community Childcare Plan** ^[3] to council. The report looks at the island's current childcare options and needs and provides action recommendations.

Teigen told councillors that while the population of Bowen has grown over the past 20 years, the number of children has stayed consistent. Yet, in the same period, the number of families requiring childcare has grown. Some of the reasons for this trend given in the report include an increase in single-parent families and the Lower Mainland cost of living requiring two incomes.

According to the **report** ^[3], Bowen Children's Centre has a waiting list of 26 infants. The centre is licensed for nine full-time infants (seven of those spaces are reserved for part-time attendees, so a single space can serve multiple infants). The dayhome Kinderhaus has a waiting list of 30 children under five. Bowen Children's Centre's After School Club has doubled in the last two years and now serves 55 families in temporary, multiuse spaces at BICS. The report notes that Montessori school and Community Recreation's drop-in playcare face limitations too.

Stay-at-home parenting, shiftwork, grandparents, and help through au pair programs numbered among the creative solutions listed in the report that Bowen parents find for childcare.

In the online survey, 87.2 per cent of respondents said that Bowen residents don't have adequate childcare supply. Also of note, 87.5 per cent of respondents said that they are "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their own childcare arrangements.

Short-term recommendations in the report include: creating a before school program, identifying funding for more childcare spaces at BCC, more occasional childcare hours, creating a centralized childcare waitlist for Bowen Island families, having the Early Childhood Development Table report to council quarterly and building local awareness of childcare facility needs.

In the mid-term: creating a designated space for before-school and after-school care, building a new infant-toddler wing at BCC and reassessing on-island childcare needs when the next census comes out.

In the long-term the report suggests that BIM consider childcare space creation in future community planning and development.

Manager of Recreation and Community Services Shauna Jennings clarified that the drivers behind completing the recommendations will frequently be organizations themselves.

Jennings and BCC's executive director Ann Silberman both noted how their organizations' respective childcare initiatives have outgrown their spaces (notably After School Club and playcare), particularly when held in widely used multipurpose rooms.

Councillors unanimously voted to endorse the action plan and consider its recommendations in future planning.

Related link: Bowen Island Community Childcare Plan ^[4]

Region: British Columbia ^[5]

Tags: availability ^[6]

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