

Delta parents forced to choose 'undesirable childcare options'^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Delta council this week approved moving forward with a new Delta Childcare Strategy and Action Plan.

The strategy includes 24 recommendations which are grouped into three strategic directions including increasing accessibility, increased affordability as well as a focus on quality.

Among those recommendations is working toward a goal of adding 1,051 new childcare spaces over 10 years to reach the Canadian average ratio, convening a City of Delta Child Care Steering Committee and partnership with the Delta school district to explore the option of co-locating childcare programs in elementary schools.

Delta had received a grant through the Community Child Care Planning Program to undertake a childcare needs assessment, which found 80 per cent of survey respondents reported that there is an inadequate supply of childcare services in Delta.

In particular, there is a need for before and after school care, infant and toddler care, flexible hours for parents and space for operators to build new facilities, a report to council notes, adding the findings were consistent with many other communities across B.C. where childcare has been described as being in a "crisis state".

The consultant's findings concluded, "As a result of the limited childcare options, families are having to make difficult choices when it comes to childcare. Grandparents and extended family are being heavily relied upon for support, and if this support is not available, parents are choosing undesirable childcare options or choosing not to work because childcare is too expensive. From an operator's perspective, offering good wages is a challenge and recruitment and retention of employees is very difficult. There is not enough money to maintain staff and the work is not valued, which is creating a human resources shortage. Furthermore, licensing and regulations are constantly shifting and operators are struggling to keep up with the demands."

The report to council notes the province is helping municipalities to achieve childcare targets by providing capital funding to support the creation of 22,000 childcare spaces over the next three years.

Already this year, 85 new childcare spaces have opened up in Ladner and Tsawwassen with funding assistance.

The province is currently accepting applications for funding through the Childcare BC New Spaces Fund, and applicants must demonstrate that there are new spaces needed in the community.

Noting there had always assumed to be a need for more local childcare spaces but until now there was no data, city manager Sean McGill told council the report clearly highlights the needs throughout the city.

He said staff wanted to get the report to council and made public as soon as possible so that groups could apply for the provincial funding as soon as possible.

Staff will report back with recommended actions that Delta could take in partnership with other community stakeholders.

The plan will also be referred to the Delta Child and Youth Committee, Delta School District, the Climate Action and Community Livability Advisory Committee and other stakeholders for comment in terms of the action items, implementation measures and timelines.

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