

Lack of child-care spaces could stall local economy, chamber tells city council ^[1]

Author: Jensen, Randy

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EXCERPTS

Without adequate child-care spaces the City of Lethbridge's economy will continue to sputter, says Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce CEO Cyndi Vos.

"What we are seeing and what we are hearing from a lot of businesses is that struggle of getting employees back to work, which in turn is the employees having a struggle finding proper and suitable daycare," stated Vos after her presentation to city council on the same subject during Monday's public meeting.

According to the Chamber of Commerce, there may be as many 971 additional spaces required to meet the city's child-care needs, and it is especially difficult for parents who have older children in that age seven to 10 range -children who are not old enough to be on their own but who do not need full-time care.

Vos said most parents who lost their child care in March because of provincially mandated public health orders related to COVID-19 and the mandated closure of daycares, in many cases, are unable to get their old spots back.

"Essential workers had access to daycare, but anybody that wasn't deemed essential didn't," Vos explained. "So we started our reopening of business, and those spaces were all taken. So when you had to get a space most times you weren't getting back into the space you had previously."

After outlining the problem for council on Monday, Vos said it would be helpful if the City, utilizing a similar system to the provincial government, could track child-care space availability in all 34 local daycares on its website and provide regular updates to parents in Lethbridge.

"What I would like to see is a collaborative effort of how we can work together as a city to help people get back to work, and to help get that economy going again," she said. "What we have asked today is that the City provide that (child-care spaces information) to the citizens, because right now it's 'where do I go?' You do a little a Google search and go; so this website really will help families navigate that system a little bit better."

Vos also explained many private daycares, who could potentially make up some of those gaps, are having difficulty covering the costs of the additional personal protective equipment required by public health order to reopen. She suggested city council consider providing local grants to cover these additional costs in the short term until anticipated federal and provincial funding streams for this purpose fully come online.

"We are finding that there is a lot of gaps," she said, "and a lot of private daycares can't access funds to help offset the cost of personal protective equipment right now, which is extremely high. Until the province has a little bit of the cashflow rolling a little bit quicker, and once we know what September is going to bring, if the City can help with some of those businesses. We do not want to see businesses close because those businesses take care of our children so that workers and employees can get back to work."

Vos thanked council for its consideration of both of the chamber's requests to help parents in need of child care in Lethbridge.

"I think we are going to be able to find some kind of common ground to make this work," she stated. "We want as people in Lethbridge to get business rolling. We want to see the province rolling, and we are also taking this forward federally. So we are talking to all levels of government; we are not just picking on one. We are heading to all of them, for sure."

City council referred both chamber requests to come back for decision no later than Oct. 6 to give City staff time to look more thoroughly into the issue.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: economics ^[4]

spaces ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 7 Jan 2021): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/08/lack-child-care-spaces-could-stall-local-economy-chamber-tells-city>

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