

Victoria lacks more than 4,200 child care spaces within city: report ^[1]

Eastern neighbourhoods face the largest child care shortages

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

More than one Victoria council member called the numbers “shocking,” after hearing a shortage of more than 4,200 child care spaces exists in the city and the current child care access rate is just 37.3 per cent.

Child Care in Victoria, a report produced from investigations into the city’s child care inventory and the extent of problems experienced by both parents and child care providers, detailed the gaps in the system. In surveys, focus groups and interviews, parents – city residents and commuters who seek child care near their city workplace – spoke of life struggles related to the availability of child care.

“Some of the biggest pieces that came out for parents were around shift work, wait lists, specialized programming, affordability, [being] single parents, compromising quality,” Alison James, the city’s head of strategic operations, told council on Oct. 1. The desire for a wider array of options also came through, she added. “We heard from parents, ‘we don’t get a choice of what type of child care we want, it’s whatever is available.’”

Neighbourhoods with the highest unmet demand for licensed child care for children newborn to age 12 were a combined area that included Oaklands, Fernwood, North and South Jubilee (short 843 spaces), Hillside/Quadra (short 568 spaces) and an area combining Fairfield, Gonzales and Rockland (short 569 spaces).

Using child population projections, and the care space inventory, researchers calculated how many new spaces needed to be added annually over a 10-year period to achieve and maintain a modest goal of 50 per cent access to child care. Adding 28 spaces per year for children aged newborn to five, and 128 per year for those aged six to 12 would do so, the report stated, but is reliant upon consistent funding and support from government.

The project was guided by the Mayor’s Child Care Solutions Working Group, which received funding through a provincial Community Child Care Planning Program grant. Working group partners ranged from provincial ministries and Island Health to community associations, the Greater Victoria School District and the Chamber of Commerce.

While the report also outlined a series of broad recommendations including changing city planning and development policy to better incorporate the need for child care, and advocating for further targeted funding for both child care space creation and education and training for current and future child care facility staff.

“I think this report is very valuable. [It is] very useful in putting strong solid data to the stories and lived experiences that we’ve all heard from families in our community,” said Coun. Jeremy Loveday, who represented council in the working group. While the nature of child care may change in the face of COVID-19, he said, “the dire need for child care will not change, just how it’s delivered.”

While the research was done before COVID hit, noted James, the need for affordable and accessible child care – especially with schools being closed last spring – has become clear during the pandemic. “I think any parent would tell you it’s an absolute necessity in our community,” she said.

The full report is available online at <https://bit.ly/3IIN061> ^[3]

Region: British Columbia ^[4]

Tags: spaces ^[5]

accessibility ^[6]

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/victoria-lacks-more-than-4200-child-care-spaces-within-city-report/> [3] <https://bit.ly/3lIN061> [4]
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