

City councillor raises concerns about child-care shortage in Burnaby ^[1]

'I'm wondering how we're going to close the gap,' said Coun. Alison Gu before more than \$2M approved for projects at North Burnaby schools

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The creation of 61 new child-care spaces in North Burnaby got one step closer this week with the approval of more than \$2 million in funding by city council, but one councillor raised concerns about a lack of spaces in the city's southeast.

At a meeting Tuesday, council released \$664,000 for the construction of 24 new infant/toddler spaces at the new Burnaby North Secondary School.

Those spots are in addition to 79 spaces currently run by the Puddle Splashers Childcare Society at the Burnaby school district's old Duthie-Union Elementary School property on Frances Street.

The Puddle Splashers program is scheduled to move into the new Burnaby North building after the Duthie-Union property is sold.

City council also earmarked \$1,429,864 to help pay for 37 new child-care spaces planned for Brentwood Park Elementary School as part of that school's seismic upgrade.

The total estimated cost of the Brentwood project is \$2,909,864, so a report by planning director Ed Kozak also recommended council authorize staff to apply for Provincial New Spaces funding to help pay for it.

Both projects in the report are part of an agreement the city signed with the school district in 2014 to increase child care in the city, according to the report.

Under the agreement, the school district was to supply the land and the city was to pay for the placement of modular buildings to house the daycares.

To date, 247 spaces at seven sites throughout the city have been built or are under construction because of the agreement, the report said.

But Coun. Alison Gu raised concerns about how the facilities are being prioritized, pointing to data in the report that indicates Burnaby's southeast quadrant has the lowest or second-lowest number of child-care spaces per 100 children in the city.

Gu noted neighbourhoods in the southeast, such as Edmonds, have a "significant socioeconomic status difference within the rest of Burnaby."

"I'm wondering how we're going to close the gap of the access for child care in the southeast quadrant of our city moving forward," she said.

Kozak said the city, as per its recently adopted Child Care Action Plan, looks for opportunities with partners, such as working with the school district on school-based projects and encouraging developers to make child care part of their applications.

He said the city is also looking to "remove barriers from our bylaw that enable for child care in a wider range of contexts," something he said would benefit places like Edmonds and Kingsway most.

"At the end of the day, we're going to have to work with our partners on new opportunities, so we'll continue to work with School District 41 and look for opportunities in areas where there are needs most, but we'll have to focus on the other strategies in the absence of those opportunities," Kozak said.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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