

Brainstorming ways to help residents access childcare in the County ^[1]

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 10 Jan 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

During the final Woodlands County Economic Development Committee meeting of 2021, members touched on the province's ten-dollar-a-day childcare initiative. The federal/provincial agreement will lower the cost of childcare in licensed facilities. The group discussed what effect the legislation would have in Woodlands County. Access to childcare helps with community development and unlocks a labour force by allowing parents to work.

The conversation was encouraged following an agenda item on a Women's Economic Recovery Challenge Grant that Community Futures Yellowhead East is applying for. The grant, if successfully obtained, would help fund initiatives to support women and girls in their economic recovery from COVID-19. Starting up a licensed childcare facility could be two birds with one stone.

Committee member Patricia MacNeil said she wondered how many families in Woodlands County would benefit from daycare in smaller areas. "I know the comment kind of was that centralized daycare isn't a County issue per se, but it could be. One really great initiative could be how to set up very small daycares in these rural areas which benefit women because then they have childcare and can get out into the workplace." She said that there would also be an entrepreneurial part to it as people would need to run the daycare businesses.

Councillor Alan Deane said that he wondered the same. "I went through the link and walked through the shoes of a couple that had a child that fit all the categories (on the Alberta.ca website), and unless I'm doing something wrong, it led me to one spot, and that is the playschool across from the curling rink (in Whitecourt). It wasn't like there were thirty of these operators on the list. I know there's going to be some of them that are going through the process to comply because they have to be licensed, and there are specific criteria, but that tells me that there is definitely an opportunity."

MacNeil said that helping deal with the lack of day homes in the County could be something worth investigating. "I think that the way we as Woodlands County could look at supporting that initiative is each of our regions have halls, whether that's Westward Hall, Anselmo Hall and so on. Even having the conversation open of using these halls as a rental to private operators to run these locations because I suspect in some areas we are looking to find a way to make five or six children viable for one person to look after. In other places, maybe there's going to be twenty children, but (it's) to make this accessible for all children throughout the County."

Economic Development Officer Bert Roach said a minimal number of providers in the area would qualify as being provincially licensed and able to participate in the ten-dollar-a-day program. He said that helping encourage the development of more licensed day homes could be impactful. "I think it can be a very good attraction opportunity if it's something that we have within our region that other folks don't have access to. It certainly becomes a selling point and a point of differentiation for our communities. I think the committee is on the right track," he said.

Councillor Deane said that it was clear the committee saw the benefit in the topic of day homes in Woodlands County beyond the grant that initially opened up the conversation. "We need to find out whether halls can be used. It makes sense to me, but we know those halls have regular users as well, so there's some information to be investigated. There could be other places. I'm thinking an existing dayhome could take steps in their own space and provide that service," he said. "We've come up with some ideas because this grant got us thinking about it. Regardless of how you feel philosophically, politically, if that's the right thing for Canada (the daycare subsidy), it's happening, so let's help people take advantage," concluded Deane.

Roach said that it was apparent there are needs within communities and that there might be a chance to leverage existing infrastructure to get licensed plans and programs available in Woodlands County. "There might be an opportunity for us to say, maybe this is an area where the County needs to do some investment or something like that," he said. The Economic Development Committee plans to speak more on the issue in early 2022.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: accessibility ^[4]

municipal role ^[5]

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[2] <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/01/10/brainstorming-ways-to-help-residents-access-childcare-in-the-county.html>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7859>

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