

Daycare stalled in city [CA-BC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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[Natasha] Beim, a for-profit operator, points to the Vancouver's suburban-style zoning as a reason why Vancouver child-care waiting lists are so high. She plans to appeal the zoning restrictions at the board of variance. The accusation, however, describes just one of a multitude of new problems hampering a resolution to the city's child-care situation. That situation includes waiting lists of up to three years, according to Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the Coalition of Childcare Advocates of British Columbia, and costs reaching \$1,400 a month.

The finger-pointing cycle starts with a staff recommendation going before Vancouver city council today (October 5). Councillors may decide to ask the province for \$6 million to stabilize the Childcare Endowment Reserve. The 15-year-old fund subsidizes 144 infant and toddler spaces; the new money would allow the fund to continue indefinitely and subsidize up to 276 spaces, according to a staff report. Until now, it's been funded from developer contributions. (Technically, child care is under provincial jurisdiction. Vancouver waded into it in 1990, however, with the Civic Childcare Strategy.)

But the province's child-care coffers are in limbo until at least November. Currently, the provincial minister of state for child care, Linda Reid, has about \$127 million set aside by Ottawa, out of which the city's \$6 million would come. It represents the tail end of the federal Liberals' child-care plan, which was axed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives in favour of the \$1,200-per-year per child direct payment to families.

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Reid blamed Vancouver for its child-care issues, noting that there's nothing stopping city hall from enhancing its Childcare Endowment Reserve itself through more development fees. In addition, she said, Vancouver is killing increased private child-care supply through zoning—the kind that's holding back Beim's CEFA franchise.

"The reality is that child care is everyone's responsibility," Reid said. "There's no win in pointing to someone else."

Next year's provincial-level cuts could be deep, due to Harper's cancellation of the Liberal's child-care plan. In a letter dated September 12, Reid told the province's parents and child-care operators that "the province will endeavour to maintain all other child care services to the end of the school year."

Gregson said she is "sick and worried" that Reid may withdraw provincial child-care operating funds, which pay \$280 per month for every child-care spot for under-threes. Fees would have to rise by that amount, she said, passing the cost back to parents.

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When the Straight asked if Reid believes there's a child-care crisis in B.C., she said, "There's a lot of families that are in a glorious situation, some are looking, and some are on wait lists who haven't even delivered yet....There's the opportunity to be more creative and flexible than we have in the past, but the basket must contain choice. I'm energized by the early-childhood situation in B.C."

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According to an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report released last week, Canada ranks 20th out of the 20 member countries for public support of early-childhood services. Denmark, at the top of the list, spends about two percent of GDP for under-sixes; the United States spends about half of one percent; Canada spends 0.3 of one percent.

- reprinted from the Georgia Straight

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