

Child care a must for city high-rises [AU] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Large commercial and residential buildings planned for central Sydney will have to provide child care facilities under a City of Sydney plan set to be adopted next week.

Developers would have to incorporate child care centres into all projects large enough to require a master plan, such as Meriton's World Square or the redevelopment of the Carlton United Brewery site on Broadway.

During the planning process, developers will have to analyse residents' and workers' needs for child care spaces and ensure those needs are met.

The policy means that a new apartment building expected to house 1000 residents would need a child care centre for at least 10 children. An office block the size of the MLC Centre in Martin Place would have to provide a centre for nearly 100 children.

The plan would also require any new child care centre in the city to set aside a third of its places to children under two years old, to address a chronic shortage of places for toddlers.

The plan, drafted for the former South Sydney Council, was considered at a committee meeting last night and will be voted on next week. If approved, it would become effective immediately as an interim measure during the public exhibition period.

The plan would then go back to the council for final approval.

The Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, said: "Increasingly young people are choosing to go on living in the city after they have children, whereas previously they tended to move to the suburbs.

"We see one of our key roles as increasing the number of child care places available and [the plan] will make inner Sydney more attractive for prospective child care providers."

Deborah Brennan, a University of Sydney academic with expertise in child care, said the proposal sounded "really sensible". She said there was a particular shortage of spaces for children under two, because caring for babies is more expensive to provide. "I think it's a good idea to get developers involved in contributing to the cost of the centres," she said.

But Ken Morrison, director of the Property Council, said it was inappropriate to require child care facilities through such a plan. If desired, it should be done through compulsory developer contributions.

"It's not going to get them desirable results either," he said. "What you're going to get is a lot more small spaces in smaller buildings that might not be viable [as child care centres]."

The plan also sets minimum requirements for outdoor areas, requires camera surveillance and allows centres to be established on the first floor if there are no ground-floor alternatives.

The plan adopts the State Government's guidelines for child care centres, which came into force last month. These require centres to have at least seven square metres of outdoor play space per child and limit the maximum number of children who can be accommodated at any one centre to 90. Centres are also required to have rainwater tanks for toilet flushing, laundry and watering of gardens.

- reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

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