

Windsor council votes to get out of the daycare business ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

After a long and highly charged debate, city council voted Monday night to get out of the municipally operated daycare business.

It means the elimination of nine city-operated daycare and early learning operations by Sept. 1 and the elimination of 118 city worker positions.

"There is no question, this impacts lives...in terms of healing, it will take time," said Coun. Dave Brister.

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Windsor community development and health commissioner Ronna Warsh said the decision means an annual savings of more than \$1 million to city and county ratepayers.

"Our enrolment numbers are unfortunately not going the way we would have wanted them to go," Warsh said. As co-author of a report that recommended closure of the centres, Warsh said the city's daycare service had been hit by a "perfect storm," including a municipal budget crunch and upcoming full-day JK and SK being funded by the province that would further erode enrolment.

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I just don't understand what the rush is, what the panic is," said Marion Overholt of Legal Assistance of Windsor and an anti-poverty advocate.

Warsh said the more than 1,400 vacancies in the local non-profit and private daycare sector is more than adequate to accommodate the 425 children enrolled in city-operated facilities. She said the city purchases services from 31 non-profit and 30 private facilities, all of which offer spaces for half the cost of city operations.

While a "very, very difficult" issue to tackle, Coun. Fulvio Valentini pointed to the private and non-profit sectors filling 91 per cent of local daycare need. "You cannot ignore the numbers," he said.

Warsh made an "absolute commitment" that city staff would work with every family affected by the closure of any city-operated facility.

At one point, Mayor Eddie Francis came to the defence of administration. "This has been one of the most agonizing, difficult decisions for them to be involved in," he said, adding some staff had been "in tears writing this report."

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But council heard that the federal government is about to cut \$2 million in daycare funding to Windsor and that the city's social services department, like every other city department, was under pressure to hold the line on spending at a time when Windsor's economy is shrinking.

County council had unanimously voted to request the city delay any decision to eliminate the city-operated daycare system, which includes two facilities in Tecumseh and Amherstburg. But council ignored the deferral request, and city staff told council there was nothing preventing the county from continuing its own program.

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- reprinted from the Windsor Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/02/windsor-council-votes-get-out-daycare-business> [2]

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