

Council opts for third-party service provider ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Municipal childcare workers sat quietly in Chatham-Kent council chambers as their fate was sealed by a unanimous vote on Monday night.

Some were visibly upset and in no mood to speak with media after council voted to have administration seek a third-party service operator to look after the 125 children they care for at two municipally-operated childcare facilities - Chatham's May Court Childcare Learning Centre and the Wallaceburg Childcare Learning Centre.

"It's difficult to make the motion, however, I will do it," said Wallaceburg Coun. Sheldon Parsons.

But, he made another motion that the two facilities remain operating with current staff until a third party provider can be found to maintain the current 125 childcare spaces between the two sites.

Parsons said he and fellow Wallaceburg Coun. Jeff Wesley have received a lot of calls over this issue over concerns about maintaining the much-needed childcare spaces in Wallaceburg as well as the fate of the staff.

Up to 18 full-time and five part-time workers, many who have 20-30 years service with the municipality, will lose their jobs as a result of this change.

The move to a new delivery model was made to cope with a \$1.4 million provincial funding cut for childcare services.

A report to council stated qualified early childhood educators employed by the municipality are paid \$24-\$27 per hour while licensed non-profit providers pay staff in the \$15 per hour range.

The funding cut left administration with two choices: cuts services such as subsidized childcare spaces and a pre-school early learning program, which used by approximately 500 kids, or change the way the municipality does business.

This move is seen as the best way to maintain the nearly 2,000 childcare spaces currently purchased by the municipality.

Parsons said it is never easy to make these kinds of changes, but noted with the current financial situation, council has no choice.

Wesley said the only way he could support the recommendations was with the addition of Parsons' motion.

He is confident staff will be treated fairly by the municipality.

"This is a tough decision," said Mayor Randy Hope.

He noted council had to look at maintaining the overall viability of the childcare system in Chatham-Kent.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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