

Non-profit Beaches Child Care Centre closes its doors ^[1]

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Source: InsideToronto.com

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 Aug 2015

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

The end of an era has come as the Beaches Child Care Centre (BCCC), a non-profit, licensed child care facility at 646 Kingston Rd., just east of Main Street, readies to shut down for good this weekend.

A staple in the city's east end for 25 years, the double lot that houses the BCCC and playground will soon be redeveloped into a 'boutique' condominium. Construction is set to begin this fall.

More than seven years ago, Streetcar Developments purchased the prime ravine property with the intention of redeveloping it.

At the time of purchase, the lease expiration was March 2011, said Les Mallins, Streetcar Developments' founder and president in an email to The Mirror.

"To exercise full transparency with our fellow members of the community, we sat down with the property's tenants, Beaches Child Care Centre Inc., to share plans for redevelopment," he wrote.

Mallins said at that time, they offered to help BCCC with securing a new location and even gave the daycare the options of terminating its lease early, if the right spot was found.

Finding a new home for BCCC proved to be more difficult than anyone could have imagined, said Beach resident Shelley Zorzit, who for the past year and a half has served as the vice-president of the centre's board of directors.

"Finding a site was really hard. We had a 90-page document full of requirements," said Zorzit, whose three daughters – Bella, 11; Ava, 9; and Nico, 5 – all attended the local daycare.

"It was really more than a full-time job."

Zorzit, a local elementary school teacher, said even with \$250,000 in funds, the centre was unable to secure another suitable home in the community.

"We really tried. We applied for every grant, every bursary that was available, but even then it still wasn't enough," she said, pointing to at least two instances when they thought they'd found suitable sites in the area, but the deals fell through.

"We even hired a consultant to search on our behalf. We viewed dozens of properties."

In late 2009, BCCC approached Streetcar to request an extension on the lease from March 2011 to August 2011, as well as a shorter period for termination notice. Both requests were accommodated.

"We then accommodated a further extension for a minimum of three years, until July 2014, and delayed plans for redevelopment once again. At that time, we restated our commitment to helping BCCC secure a new location, and encouraged (the centre) to actively seek out a new location," Mallins said.

"At the end of the third year of the last extension (July 2014), we finalized our redevelopment timeline, which was communicated to the BCCC. This was shortly after Streetcar purchased the Dip n' Sip site directly across the street."

Mallins said they even sought the services of a local realtor to "help make securing a new facility a top priority and committed to provide financial assistance should it be needed."

"Unfortunately, this pursuit proved unsuccessful," he said, commending BCCC's current board for its efforts to try to secure new location, as well as Ward 32 Councillor Mary-Margaret McMahon and other city staff for their assistance.

In early June, Zorzit and her fellow board members were forced to share the news no one wanted to hear: the Beaches Child Care Centre would be shutting down at the end of the summer. Families, supporters and staff members officially bid Beaches Child Care Centre adieu during its annual general meeting and barbecue June 25.

"We held out hope right to the very end. We tried everything to not have to make this decision," she said, adding they made the announcement at this time so the centre's 40 or so east-end families had ample time to find alternate child care arrangements, as well as its 10 staff members, many of whom had worked there for several years, could look for new jobs.

"It's devastating to have to close. This Thursday (Aug. 27) is our final day with the kids."

Once the date of closure was confirmed, Mallins said Streetcar reached out to the board to see how they could assist with the process. He also said they've communicated to the board that they're willing to provide financial assistance to BCCC to help provide compensation to its long-term employees.

Zorzit, on the other hand, said more government support could have led to an entirely different fate for Beaches Child Care Centre, which started off as Tiny Tots Daycare before becoming the non-profit Beaches Child Care Centre Inc. in 1994.

"I feel this conversation needs to be top of mind at all levels of government," she said, adding all families have the right to affordable, responsible and reliable childcare.

"It's sad it didn't work out for us," Zorzit said, adding she said she hopes the same outcome doesn't occur for non-profit child care centres in Scarborough and Markham currently facing similar fates as the value of real estate skyrockets.

This weekend, the Beaches Child Care Centre will be holding a yard sale to help raise funds to cover the closure.

-reprinted from InsideToronto.com

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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