

Report suggests closing all five regional child care centres ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Public child care centres in Waterloo Region could be shuttered in the next five years as part of a regional service review.

In a report released Friday, Consultant KPMG recommends that politicians close the five child centres the region runs and instead spend the savings of up to \$2.5 million on 200 new subsidized child care spaces.

"If we're able to let the community focus on delivering that direct service and we could repurpose the savings from getting out of that direct service to create more spots, that seems like a win-win to me," Coun. Sean Strickland said.

A public meeting on proposed changes is scheduled for Sept. 30 at 7 p.m., while politicians will review the report at a 10:30 a.m. meeting Tuesday.

Under provincial legislation, the Region of Waterloo is required to act as a service manager for child care services. Responsibilities include determination of subsidy eligibility, ensuring compliance with the Day Nurseries Act and providing funding to support children with special needs in child care.

The region is not required to operate child care centres.

Carolyn Ferns is public policy and government relations co-ordinator with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. She said the move would erode child care quality.

"Child care research has shown that public child care is often the highest quality child care centres we have," she said. "One of the key reasons for that is that they have the highest quality staff and the staff are well-paid and that means they can retain them for longer."

"It's not just a bottom line issue, there's another bottom line — there's a human cost there," she said.

Her group will be lobbying the region not to close the centres, which serve about 250 children.

Another 1,100 are in the region's home child care program, which would also be cancelled.

Jan Richards is president of Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 1883 which represents about 50 full-time workers at the region's five centres.

"It's a great loss of fair-paying jobs with pensions and our area has had enough layoffs," she said.

She said it will also be a loss for the children, some of whom have special needs and might be turned away from private centres.

In 2015 the region is providing full or partial subsidy for about 3,100 child care spaces. There is currently no waiting list for subsidized spaces, but nearly 1,700 families are on a wait-list for immediate child care in the region.

Coun. Geoff Lorentz said he wants to hear from the public before the region forges ahead with any of the five major recommendations from KPMG.

He chairs the committee which oversees child care.

"The long and short of it is if we closed our centres and put it out to the private sector we could probably provide over 200 new spaces — to me that's a big number," he said.

The consultant recommends the change be introduced over a five-year period.

Almost all of the \$2.5 million in estimated savings is provincial funding. Capital costs of at least \$4.4 million would also be realized. The region could also rent out the buildings that house its child care centres.

The service review has been ongoing for several months and reviewed regional operations to determine efficiencies and potential service

improvements.

Other recommendations from KPMG:

- Discontinue delivery of Employment Ontario, a provincial program, to save about \$384,000
- That the region and local municipalities review the possibility of a shared data centre, service desk and deskside support service
- Restructure the road maintenance agreement with local municipalities to include the same rate structure for all municipalities; and make the rate a combination of a fixed amount per kilometre and variable amount per kilometre
- Focus on increasing revenue and cutting operating and capital costs at the Region of Waterloo International Airport. Also establish a target for the draw on taxpayers to pay for the airport.

-reprinted from The Record

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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