

Daycare at Markham civic centre urged to accept temporary extension ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

After 25 years, the Town's Little Children (TLC) Daycare may need to close its doors in the coming weeks unless a new conditional offer from the city that buys the daycare time is accepted.

The daycare had pleaded with Markham council for more time to find a new location or for parents to make new daycare arrangements. The city responded by offering a one-year lease extension to the daycare, which operates out of space inside the Markham Civic Centre. However that offer has been rejected, council heard during this week's general committee meeting.

"I'm not here to ask anything," said an emotional TLC director, Anna Iacono, during her deputation to general committee.

After reaching out to parents affiliated with TLC, the daycare is not able to secure enough enrolment for the next 11 months to keep their doors open, she said through tears, as some parents have opted for other childcare arrangements in the face of the impending closure.

The daycare employs close to 20 full- and part-time staff and offers close to 60 daycare spots.

Along with not being able to secure enough enrolment for the coming year, there also is no other city property available for the daycare.

Meanwhile, meetings with the Catholic school board regarding space revealed the best case scenario was space being available in two years.

"No one around this table wanted to see this happen," Councilor Colin Campbell said.

"It's a sad day you have to close, but that's business."

As Markham continues to grow, there is an increasing demand for space to house city staff.

City officials said they are reluctant to lease outside office space for city workers before making use of the space available at the civic centre.

However the daycare may still have a lease on life for the coming year, with conditions.

Mayor Frank Scarpitti urged the daycare to accept a new offer from the city of one-year lease extension with modifications, allowing parents at least a year to find new accommodations.

The new one-year lease extension allows TLC to terminate the lease with the city without penalty with 30 days' notice.

The new offer also calls on the daycare to provide proof of a new lease and location by January 2016.

"This sends a strong statement to parents," Scarpitti said. "This says parents can rely on you (TLC) to find a location. This lets parents know you are doing your work or not doing your work."

The mayor also took the opportunity to clear up some misconceptions.

"There is a perception that the city is heartless and all of a sudden it kicked this organization out on the street," he said. "There was an awareness among parents the lease was coming up."

The city did all it could do, he added, even connecting the daycare with local realtors to find a new location.

"It is not our obligation as a landlord to find the tenant another location," he said. "Change is not a comfortable thing."

The initial lease did not include a renewal clause and expired 25 years after the first day of operation.

TLC has until the end of the week to accept the city's newest offer. If it does not accept, the daycare must vacate the property by the end of the month.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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