

# Politicians get earful on proposed child-care cuts <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

There was no question Wednesday how parents, unions and the child-care lobby feel about the proposed closure of regional child-care centres – they don't like it.

"This recommendation would force families like mine to make impossible choices," said Andrea Siemens of Kitchener.

The 145 seats in Region of Waterloo council chambers were filled to capacity with citizens urging politicians to ignore a consultant's recommendation to close five regional child-care centres.

An overflow room was also full.

"The importance of these centres is woven into the very fabric of this region's history," said Angela Carter, whose son attends Edith MacIntosh Children's Centre in Kitchener.

She urged politicians to expand child care.

More than 20 people spoke at the public input night on the potential closures.

A decision on the recommendation will be made Oct. 21.

Heather Heartfield of Cambridge said she was amazed by the difference she saw between private child care and the regional system.

"I always felt guilty for leaving my children in less than ideal circumstances," she said.

Prior to the 7 p.m. meeting at least 60 people rallied outside regional headquarters.

Several children wearing 'I love my children's centre' shirts were present and the bricks in front of regional headquarters on Frederick Street were chalked with foot-high letters sharing the same slogan.

Consultant KPMG was hired by officials to review all regional services to find efficiencies and better ways to deliver services.

The report suggested the region use the savings from closing the centres to provide 200 more subsidized child-care spaces.

In 2015, the region is providing full or partial subsidy for about 3,100 child-care spaces and there is no waiting list.

About 250 kids attend regional centres while another 8,775 kids under the age of 12 receive care in 137 private and non-profit centres.

Right now, about 1,700 families are on a wait-list for immediate child care in the region.

Andrea Wiebe of Kitchener, whose two children attend regional centres, asked politicians to look critically at how the change might impact the wait-list.

"How is closing five centres a solution to this problem," she said.

Under provincial legislation, the region 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.

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.

It's estimated about 50 jobs would be lost in the five locations in Kitchener, Cambridge and Elmira.

Jan Richards, president of Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 1883, presented a petition with nearly 1,300 signatures to keep the

centres open.

Other consultant recommendations include:

- Discontinue delivery of Employment Ontario, a provincial program, to save about \$384,000
- That the region and local municipalities review the idea of shared information technology services
- Restructure the road maintenance agreement with local municipalities to include the same rate structure for all municipalities
- Focus on increasing revenue and cutting operating and capital costs at the Region of Waterloo International Airport.

-reprinted from The Record

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

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