

Region to keep child-care centres ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Regional politicians ignored a consultant's recommendation Wednesday and voted to save 250 child-care spaces in five regional centres.

With a 14-1 vote, councillors showed a commitment to providing the service.

"We are dealing with the children of the community and their opportunities for the future," Wilmot Mayor Les Armstrong said.

Consultant KPMG recommended in September that the five regional child-care centres close and that the estimated \$2.5 million in savings be used to fund 200 new, permanent subsidized child-care spaces.

Coun. Sean Strickland, the lone vote to close the centres, responded to accusations he doesn't support child care.

"My position on this has been pretty clear in terms I think that we should proceed with this recommendation. ... I support child care," he said. "I support child care for the entire 10,000 children that are in the system."

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.

Parents with children in the centres and union representatives for the estimated 50 workers who would lose their jobs fought the idea. They packed a public input meeting earlier this month and gave politicians an earful.

They were back at it Wednesday with a rally outside regional headquarters on Frederick Street in Kitchener prior to the vote. About 50 parents and children gathered outside and in the lobby to sing songs, many wearing shirts that read, "I love my children's centre."

A staff report released Friday made no specific recommendation on how council should proceed.

It pointed out challenges of closing the centres, including concerns that the system could not absorb an additional 200 spaces.

"(KPMG is) recommending we eliminate 250 spaces over a five-year period but yet we don't see any capacity in the system to pick up those 250 spaces from the private or not-for-profit sector," Coun. Tom Galloway said in support of keeping the centres.

Under provincial legislation, the Region of Waterloo must 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.

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 waiting list for immediate child care in the region.

Other KPMG recommendations to council and their decisions:

- Politicians voted not to cancel delivery of Employment Ontario. The move would have saved about \$384,000. The vote was nine in favour of continuing the program and six against.
- Politicians voted unanimously to work with local municipalities to review the possibility of a shared data centre, service desk and desk-side support service.
- Politicians voted 15-1 not to restructure the road maintenance agreement with local municipalities to include the same rate structure for all municipalities. The idea was referred to staff for the next road maintenance contract.
- Politicians voted unanimously to focus on increasing revenue and cutting operating and capital costs at the Region of Waterloo International Airport.

Staff were asked to come back with the potential financial implications of dozens of other recommendations from KPMG.

-reprinted from The Record

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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