

Beausoleil daycare may not reopen under city management, councillors told ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

It's looking less likely now that a French-language child-care centre in Lowertown will reopen under municipal management, even though parents were told last summer that the closure of Centre éducatif Beausoleil for repairs was temporary.

At a committee meeting Thursday, the city's general manager of community and social services told councillors a lot has changed since then.

Budget pressures under a new provincial funding formula have left the city's child-care department short \$2.2 million, leaving the city with only enough money for the 11 municipally-run child care centres operating now — not a twelfth — Aaron Burry said.

Another recent change means child-care subsidies are no longer tied to centres, but to children, wherever their families are able to find spots for them. Beausoleil relied on the former system, Burry said.

"That's what most of the [Beausoleil] families did," said Burry. "They've been accommodated [elsewhere] in the neighbourhood."

Ottawa Community Housing, which owns the York Street building that housed Beausoleil, is looking for other daycare providers to rent the space.

"We don't actually have a lease on the space," Burry said. "What we do know from the province is it will be a brand new [child-care] licence for that facility, which will bring some additional costs."

Still demand for francophone child care

Coun. Tobi Nussbaum said he understood Beausoleil's closure was to be temporary and was surprised by the update.

"My assumption, and we have to look at the available data, is they found much less convenient locations," said Nussbaum of families who used Beausoleil but were forced to make other arrangements.

Nussbaum said the area has a significant francophone population, and believes the need for French-language child care could still exist.

The councillor for the ward that includes Lowertown, Mathieu Fleury, wanted reassurance the space will remain a francophone child-care centre once repairs are done, and said he plans to table a motion at the next city council meeting.

"I understand the city's under financial pressure based on the gap of funding, but we shouldn't use that as an excuse not to reopen that daycare."

Fleury said he's open to a private, non-profit or municipally-run model — as long as there's a daycare at the same location.

Father not surprised

A father whose child was in care at Centre éducatif Beausoleil said he wasn't surprised by Burry's comments. Étienne Trépanier said he believes Beausoleil's closure was "well orchestrated."

"They wanted to get rid of that daycare," said Trépanier.

He said he suspects the city wants to get of the child-care business, and suggests parents with children at 11 other municipally-run centres should be concerned

"It raises a broader issue of, what is the city's role in terms of operating daycares?" said Trépanier. "That debate hasn't happened."

Trépanier said municipally-run child-care centres provide well-paying jobs for caregivers and can set higher standards for other centres to follow.

City-run child care centres to be reviewed

The viability and future of the remaining municipally-run child-care centres will be reviewed over the next five years, Burry confirmed Thursday.

Burry told councillors the city's mandate is to run child-care centres in vulnerable, low-income communities where there are no alternative programs run by non-profit groups or school boards.

A recent review found that an increasing number of families pay full fees for child care and don't rely on subsidies, Burry said.

"We are going to go back and look at that fundamental mandate, and ensure that the fees people are paying are appropriate for the locations, all these types of things," said Burry.

The city operates 11 child-care centres:

- Borden Farm Child Care Centre
- Charmian Craven Child Care Centre
- Dr. E. Couture Child Care Centre
- Elsie Stapleford Child Care Centre
- Esther By Child Care Centre
- Foster Farm Child Care Centre
- Huron Early Learning Centre
- Centre éducatif Pinocchio
- Centre éducatif Tournesol
- St. Luke's Child Care Centre
- Woodridge Court Child Care Centre

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