



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: November 28, 2006
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Meeting Date: December 14, 2006

TO: Standing Committees on City Services & Budgets

FROM: Deputy General Manager, Community Services

SUBJECT: Application of Childcare Design Guidelines to a Private Childcare Centre at 990 Homer Street

CONSIDERATION

THAT Council advise staff that it does not favour approval of an application of the proposed childcare development at 990 Homer Street, given the lack of contiguous outdoor space.

OR

THAT Council direct staff to receive the childcare application at 990 Homer Street, and to waive the condition of contiguous outdoor space for this applicant.

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Community Services submits the foregoing for CONSIDERATION.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager submits the foregoing for CONSIDERATION.

COUNCIL POLICY

In 1990, City Council approved the Civic Childcare Strategy that set out to:

- support the viability, accessibility and quality of child care services;
- assist child care initiatives in high need areas;
- encourage and support efficient, coordinated administrative services required for a child care system in Vancouver to lever other sources of child care funding, wherever possible.

In 1993, Council approved the City "Childcare Design Guidelines" to be applied where childcare facilities are required as a condition of rezoning and for conditional approval development applications.

Vancouver City Council approved "Moving Forward Childcare: A Cornerstone of Childhood Development" in April 2002, which set out a strategic plan for child care and child development services for the City and reinforced the principles of quality, affordability, accessibility.

In 2003, Vancouver City Council, Park and School Boards adopted the Childcare Protocol, which includes the objective to maintain and expand child care by 5 percent over the next two years.

SUMMARY

Ms. Beim has approached the City for an initial assessment of her proposed centre at 990 Homer Street in Yaletown. Staff have reviewed the information provided to date, have conducted a site visit, and advise that this proposed application does not meet the intent of the Guidelines - specifically the requirement of outdoor contiguous space. On October 5, 2006, Council directed staff to review the Childcare Guidelines in relation to eco-density and economic development strategy; however, the applicant cannot wait until February 2007, for the result of this review. The proposed development would utilize a rooftop space accessible by elevator and stairs and cannot meet the condition of contiguous outdoor space.

This matter is being referred to Council for advice as the proposal does not comply with the intent of the current Childcare Design Guidelines, which are under review. The Guidelines, to date, have been applied to all childcare centres, including private childcare developments, since their approval by Council in 1993. Specifically, this proposal does not meet the intent of the Guidelines as required, regarding the provision of outdoor contiguous space.

This proposal does address a need for service and is under time constraints to secure the proposed site. The report back to Council on the review of the Guidelines is scheduled for February, 2007. This review will assess the Guidelines in the context of responding to eco-density and economic development.

BACKGROUND

On October 5, 2006, Council directed staff to review the Guidelines in relation to eco-density and economic development strategy. This work is underway. The City's Guidelines were developed to assist with new construction of purpose-built facilities. They apply as a

condition of rezoning, and for conditional approval development applications. They were developed based on best practice, research and experience, with broad public input.

The rationale for City's contiguous space guidelines includes:

- visual relationship with the outdoors is important for sunlight, a connection with nature, and provides knowledge of larger world specifically in high density facilities
- seamless and transparent connection to outdoors enhances opportunities and access to outdoor play
- supervision of children requires staff ratios be maintained - staff has ability and flexibility to meet child's needs as they arise rather than as the schedule or logistics will allow.
- large group "herd and wait" transitions to outdoor play are eliminated.
- greater likelihood of outdoor use when connected to outdoors overall and specifically greater likelihood of use in inclement weather.

Daycare development is also regulated by the Province. The Province's regulations pre-date purpose-built childcare and, as such, do not fully address space design. Several reviews of provincial standards have been conducted recognizing the need for regulatory change, but to date, no changes have been made. Regional policy applied by Community Care Facilities Licensing Officers is consistent with many aspects of the City's Guidelines.

Vancouver currently has 95 licensed group child care facilities. Only 4 do not meet contiguous outdoor space requirements. One was given a variance due to restricted hours, one as a temporary facility and 2 were well established and "grandfathered".

This specific application was first assessed in 2005. The initial inquiry (with drawings) proposed to provide full-time care for 56 children and infant/toddlers to 3 to 5 years of age. Feedback to the applicant advised that the preliminary drawings did not provide adequate information to assess interior and exterior space in relation to design Guidelines, nor did the facility meet the intent of contiguous outdoor space. The applicant had approached the provincial regulatory body, Community Care Facilities Licensing, with preliminary plans; however, details to make a full assessment had not been provided. The applicant has not proceeded with the application based on the initial feedback from staff regarding the contiguous space requirement. The applicant has now indicated a desire to proceed, given the inability to find other space.

DISCUSSION

Core Education & Fine Arts® (the Applicant) has experience in operating facilities of this size. The proposed location would be the fourth one to open under the name Core Education & Fine Arts®, and one of 6 in process. It would be the first in Vancouver. The applicant has advised that all existing locations are successfully operating, respectively, in West Vancouver, Burnaby, and Langley.

Core Education & Fine Arts® is proposing to open a day care facility at 990 Homer Street to serve two groups of 12 infant-toddlers and two groups of 16 preschoolers (3 to 5 year olds). According to recent market research, there is great demand for daycare in the Downtown and Yaletown areas which could be alleviated, at least in part, by opening this facility.

Core Education & Fine Arts® is proposing to offer the following programs to the community:

- cefababy®
An infant-Toddler program which would accept 12 children between the ages of 1 and 2 (or the equivalent in part-time spots)
License required: Group Daycare <36 Months - Class 1 (maximum number: 12)
- Junior Kindergarten (JK)1
An infant-Toddler program which would accept 12 children between the ages of 2 and 3 (or the equivalent in part-time spots)
License required: Group Daycare <36 Months - Class 1 (maximum number: 12)
- JK2
A 3-5 program which would accept 16 children between the ages of 3 and 4 (or the equivalent in part-time spots)
License required: Group Daycare >36 Months - Class 3 (maximum number: 16)
- JK3
A 3-5 program which would accept 16 children between the ages of 4 and 5 (or the equivalent in part-time spots)
License required: Group Daycare >36 Months - Class 3 (maximum number: 16)

SITE DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT

The site is the fifth floor and rooftop at 990 Homer Street. The centre will utilize the entire 5th floor of the building and requires a complete renovation to meet licensing and guideline intent. With such renovation, the interior space could be functional. However, the intent of the design guideline regarding contiguous outdoor space (clear space for activities and play space clear of mechanical equipment and vents) is not available on this 5th floor. The outdoor space is planned for the rooftop (one floor up), accessible by elevator and stairs. The Guidelines state:

- outdoor space should be at the same level as the indoor space (plus or minus 0.5m) and contiguous with it. The two areas should be planned together -a strong visual connection should exist between the indoor and outdoor activity area.
- outdoor play space should have a favorable microclimate (i.e. wind protection and direct sunlight)
- outdoor space should be a clear space for group activities and physical movement
- space should be acoustically buffered from traffic and parking and other disruptive noises, fumes and odours. Particular attention should be given to the buildings mechanical equipment and noise
- outdoor space located on a roof should be free of skylights, roof vents and/or other mechanical equipment.

Existing space of this size that would meet all requirements is very difficult to find in the downtown core. Real Estate Services has attempted to assist Ms. Beim in finding space but they are not able to identify alternate space at this time.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to the City. This is a private childcare centre and not eligible for civic grants.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Other childcare centres have been subject to the Childcare Design Guidelines. The childcare community in general, has been supportive of the Guidelines. The childcare community is aware that the current Guidelines are under review.

The proposed site is located where there is a need for a variety of childcare services.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Ms. Beim is prepared to go through the required processes; however, at this time, she is aware of the need to meet the intent of the Guidelines' requirement for contiguous outdoor space and is seeking resolution regarding the need for contiguous outdoor space. She has proposed an alternative which does not meet the intent of the Guidelines.

CONCLUSION

Council has approved the Childcare Design Guidelines including guidelines for contiguous outdoor play space based on best practice. This report seeks guidance on this development in an area that has a need for this service.

Notwithstanding, there is a need for increased childcare options in high density communities and staff have been directed to review the Childcare Guidelines with a view to their impact on eco-density and economic development.

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