



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: April 17, 2008
Author: Carol Ann Young
Phone No.: 604.871.6042
RTS No.: 06475
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Meeting Date: May 10, 2008

TO: City Services and Budgets Committee

FROM: Director of Social Planning

SUBJECT: Report Back on the Review of Childcare Design Guidelines

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council:

- a. Endorse the Childcare Design Guidelines with respect to new construction and retro-fit construction where the guidelines can be met, and
- b. Establish a Retro-fit Feasibility Committee, where retro-fit space is being proposed for childcare that does not meet the Childcare Design Guideline. This committee will be comprised of internal and external participants and will recommend appropriate adaptations to the design guidelines on a case by case basis as set out in the attached Terms of Reference. Proposed adaptations will be tracked by the committee and considered for future guideline revisions.
- c. Direct staff to develop and distribute design information for use by designers, architects and Childcare service providers to increase awareness of effective practice in Childcare design at a maximum cost of \$15,000; source of funds to be the existing Social Planning Operating Budget.

COUNCIL POLICY

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

- support the viability, accessibility and quality of childcare services;
- assist Childcare initiatives in high need areas.

In 1993, Council approved the City Childcare Design Guidelines to be applied where child care facilities are required as a condition of rezoning and for conditional approval in development applications. See: <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/Guidelines/C017.pdf>

In 2003, Council approved the financing growth policy, specific to Community Amenity Contributions, which states; “as the purpose of CACs is to secure amenities through rezonings, and rezonings are localized changes to land use, the amenities provided should serve the immediate site and/or community in which the rezoning occurs”.

In March 2004, Council signed the Joint Civic Childcare Protocol, which committed to maintain and expand Childcare spaces by 5%.

July 2006, Council adopted “Guiding Principles - Economic Development in the City of Vancouver” and the “Principles for EcoDensity”.

October 2006, Council directed staff to review the guidelines, with respect to City of Vancouver Childcare standards, to facilitate principles of EcoDensity and Economic Development Strategy.

PURPOSE

This is a report back to Council on the findings from a review of the City of Vancouver Childcare Design Guidelines to facilitate principles of eco-density and the City’s economic development strategy. The report provides Council with information on the establishment of a City a Retro-fit Feasibility Committee to facilitate resolutions regarding retro-fit situations that do not meet the City of Vancouver Childcare Design Guidelines.

BACKGROUND

In the Fall of 2006, Council directed staff to “review the guidelines with respect to City of Vancouver Childcare standards, to facilitate principles of EcoDensity and the City’s Economic Development Strategy”. The challenge of increasing licensed group Childcare spaces to meet the growing demand of parents in need of child care, while ensuring best practice for healthy child development, was addressed through the guideline review.

The City of Vancouver has played a significant role in supporting the development of Childcare through private/public partnerships, with developers and non-profit societies, in which the City secures capital and amenity contributions to help create spaces in purpose built Childcare facilities. The City has leveraged significant funding towards new Childcare spaces in past years.

In 2005, Council questioned whether or not the Childcare Design Guidelines, in particular the contiguous indoor/outdoor space, was a barrier to creating new Childcare spaces and directed staff to review the Childcare Design Guidelines in relation to EcoDensity and Economic Development. While the provincial government has funded the creation of 3,300 new spaces since 2001, over 400 spaces have been created in Vancouver as a direct result of City partnerships in this timeframe. These spaces have met the design guidelines. In addition, child care in the City of Vancouver has been acknowledged by the Organization of Economic

Cooperation to be the most favourable in the country. International research suggests a direct link between government spending and increased accessibility/affordability of Childcare.

The guideline on outdoor space indicates that:

- outdoor space should be at the same level as the indoor space (plus or minus .5m) and contiguous with it,
- provide a strong visual connection between the indoor and outdoor activity areas, and
- ramps are to be included for children/adults with mobility challenges to ensure accessibility and facilitate use of other wheeled equipment.

The review of the Childcare Design Guidelines on outdoor space consisted of:

- establishment of a steering committee (internal and external stakeholders)
- review of the provincial regulations in relation to the design guidelines
- cost premiums of the guidelines
- review of the literature on outdoor play environments on children's development
- key informant interviews
- 5 key stakeholder focus groups
- final report on outdoor environments
- workshop to council in June 2007

This report highlights key considerations as they relate to the review of the Childcare Design Guidelines in relation to outdoor space. See:

<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/childcare/PDF/CC-OutdoorPlay-Herrington.pdf>

Evidence based on literature and the community consultation process support contiguous space. However, the report notes the increasing difficulty in finding adequate green space, or other types of contiguous outdoor space suitable for Childcare is a challenge that requires additional consideration.

DISCUSSION

Findings identified below build on the research, stakeholder input (e.g. private and non-profit operators, architects, developers, Provincial Licensing staff, etc.), committee input and views of key informants.

ADDRESSING RETROFIT SITUATIONS IN EXISTING BUILDINGS

The research review and consultations recognized that the physical design of Childcare facilities contributes to healthy child development. The lack of contiguous outdoor space is linked to less time spent outdoors and a marked decrease in physical activity. Good practice in Childcare outdoor play environment design is dependent upon three elements: amount of space per child, presence of greenery and other living things, and the relationship between outdoor and indoor space. In addition, international studies found the quality of Childcare in Canada lower than most other countries in the developed world, with Childcare in the City of

Vancouver an exception. Quality of programs and physical environment in centres in Vancouver were viewed favourably by the OECD (2004).

Some operators, however, have expressed concern about finding suitable and affordable real estate in Vancouver, which can be renovated to meet the design guidelines. While all groups in the review process acknowledged the challenges of meeting the guidelines in retrofit situations, participants suggested that variances be considered on a case-by-case basis for both City-owned and non-City owned facilities. To address this, an assessment process has been recommended to review programs in retro-fit construction where the design guidelines cannot be met (see Terms of Reference attached).

Staff will continue to use the existing guidelines for new construction, retro fit situations where the guidelines can be met, but develop design adaptations for retrofit construction in high density developments, existing residential and commercial structures and educational facilities where it is challenging to meet the guidelines. This process is described in the attached Terms of Reference and as noted in Recommendation A II.

To facilitate a broader knowledge base of physical environments with respect to Childcare developments, it is recommended that information packages for operators, licensing staff, architects, developers and parents be created and distributed. These materials will include information on the impact of the physical environment in supporting children's experiences, effective practices in design of outdoor play spaces in Childcare facilities and curriculum that supports physical activity and outdoor experiences. Such materials would increase efficiencies by reducing staff time in design inquiries.

EcoDensity

Through the City's tools, such as density bonusing, amenity contributions and development cost levies, the City has realized a number of new spaces consistent with EcoDensity principles. The City's proposed EcoDensity initiative builds on the recommendations of the review and provides the opportunity to create quality Childcare spaces in varying density neighbourhoods.

The built form and typology, compatible with EcoDensity principles, already exists. Podium style typology, such as Shaw Tower Childcare Centre, enables 37 and 49 space childcare in high-rise towers with contiguous outdoor space. Mid-rise building towers, such as Shannon Day Care at Airport Square, provide child care on the second level with rooftop contiguous outdoor space. Renovated residential settings, such as Mole Hill Childcare Centre, provide indoor/outdoor space at grade level. Moreover, childcare located close to where families live and/or work enables families to walk, ride or use public transit, reducing emissions.

The review also recommended that the City facilitate opportunities to create Childcare on green space and integrated with school and recreation facilities, consistent with the EcoDensity principles. Staff will continue to work with City planners as the EcoDensity initiative proceeds.

Economic Development

The importance of Childcare in economic growth is well recognized. Childcare plays a crucial role in economies where quality care is needed for children, so that parents can participate in

the labour force. Organized Childcare also creates a significant number of jobs and contributes to revenues of other sectors. As labour market recruitment and retention issues escalate Childcare is becoming a key recruitment advantage. Additionally, a positive experience in the early years contributes to school readiness as well as social and emotional competence. Economists have estimated that for every \$1 spent of quality early childhood education there is up to a \$7 return.

To continue to engage private and public partners on strengthening the child development/care perspective, staff will work with the Economic Development Commission through the City's Social Development Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of staff time and/or contractor time to develop and distribute design information will not exceed \$15,000 and will be covered within the existing Social Planning Operating Budget or Provincial grant application if approved.

Honorariums of \$200 per year for external committee members, if requested, will also be covered through the existing Social Planning Operating Budget.

CONCLUSION:

This report recommends the following for Council approval:

- continued endorsement of the Childcare Design Guidelines with respect to new construction and retro-fit construction where the guidelines can be met, and
- a review process to facilitate resolutions where retro-fit space is being proposed for childcare that does not meet the Childcare Design Guideline. The establishment of a Childcare Design Guideline Retro-fit Feasibility Committee, comprised of internal and external participants, will recommend appropriate adaptations to the design guidelines on a case by case basis as set out in the attached Terms of Reference. Proposed adaptations will be tracked by the committee and considered for future guideline revisions, and
- the development & distribution of design information for use by designers, architects and Childcare service providers to increase awareness of effective practice in Childcare design.

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Terms of Reference

City of Vancouver Childcare Design Guideline: Retro-Fit Feasibility Committee
May 1, 2008

Purpose:

The City of Vancouver Childcare Design Guidelines are currently applied with flexibility. However, in retro-fit situations where the guidelines are not being met, this committee would be convened to review the proposed design and provide written advice to the potential applicant to better meet the guidelines prior to the development application process.

Goal:

Establish a committee to assess the feasibility of Childcare designs in retro-fit situations that do not meet the City of Vancouver Childcare Design Guidelines. The committee will examine design alternatives and strategies, which facilitate growth and development of childcare spaces in existing buildings, while promoting healthy child development.

Objectives:

- To establish a Childcare Design Guideline: Retro-fit Feasibility Committee comprised of internal and external members with a knowledge base in architecture, child development, childcare operations and Provincial licensing regulations.
- To utilize current research and best practice on childcare design and the impacts on child development, while reviewing retrofit designs.
- To propose modifications to designs and/or programming in order to maximize the creation of new child care spaces which meet the developmental needs of the children served.
- To track reoccurring issues and make recommendations to advise the overall revisions to the guidelines in high-density developments, existing residential, assembly spaces and commercial structures and educational facilities.

Membership

The Retro-fit Feasibility committee would be comprised of internal and external participants including:

- Child Development Coordinator
- Senior Planner
- Facility planner
- Architect
- Childcare operator (1 private operator and one non-profit operator)
- Parent user of Childcare

Activities:

The committee will review, on a case by case basis, proposed Childcare designs in retro fit situations that do not meet the guidelines. This process will take place prior to the formal development permit application process. Potential applicants may request that Social Planning convene a meeting of the Retro-fit Feasibility Committee to provide advice and suggestions to achieve the guidelines for the development application process. A summary of where exemptions to the design guideline are being sought, and demonstration of how the curriculum would support such exemptions, would be submitted with drawings to Social Planning. Emphasis on how programmatic issues would be addressed would be documented.

Within four weeks of receiving complete documentation, the committee will meet, review submissions and make recommendations, in writing to the potential applicant.

Decisions will be made on the basis of committee consensus. A written summary of the findings from the committee will be provided to the applicant for consideration and incorporation into their design drawings, prior to development permit submission. The advice of the committee is focused on meeting space program requirements from the childcare users' perspective. The Committee process does not replace or over-ride the full review of an application through the DE process.

Committee Term:

The committee will operate based on these terms of reference and will meet on an as needed basis for a two-year term. At the completion of the two years a review of the committee's findings will be summarized for input into the guideline revisions for high-density developments, existing residential and commercial structures, assembly uses and educational facilities.

Cost:

An honorarium of \$200.00 per year will be paid to each of the external committee members, should such be requested. Source of funds - Social Planning budget.