



PORT COLBORNE

Subject: Licensed Child Care
To: Council
From: Corporate Services Department

Report Number: 2024-155

Meeting Date: August 27, 2024

Recommendation:

That Corporate Services Department Report 2024-155 be received;

That Council direct staff to jointly apply with the YMCA of Niagara to the Niagara Region for more licensed child care spaces in Port Colborne; and

That, subject to Niagara Region approval for more licensed child care spaces, staff be directed to procure architectural services for a child care centre at the Vale Health and Wellness Centre.

Purpose:

This report seeks Council support to expand child care spaces and access in Port Colborne.

Background:

The Ontario and Canada governments signed the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Agreement in 2022, focusing on five priority areas, including lowering fees, increasing access, enhancing quality, supporting inclusion, and strengthening data/reporting. Central to this agreement is achieving average child care fees of \$10 per day by March 2026 for children under six years old. The Ontario government reports that 25,500 new child care spaces were created as of December 2023, and their goal is to reach a target of 86,000 spaces by the end of 2026.

Niagara Region Children's Services is a Ministry of Education (MED) agency operating five licensed child care centres throughout Niagara. Additionally, as the Early Years and Child Care Service System Manager, they coordinate early years and child care

operators region-wide through licensing, and manage a Home Child Care Program that contracts qualified independent caregivers to provide in-home child care for children up to age 12. In May 2023, the MED confirmed Niagara Region's allocation of 4,067 new child care spaces through the CWELCC Agreement by 2026. This allocation has been divided among the priority communities selected by Children's Services, taking into account child care demand, demographic, and socioeconomic factors. While Port Colborne was not initially identified as a priority community, there is a strong case to be made for including it in the allocation due to population growth projections and the expected rise in child care demand.

Of the five child care centres operated by Children's Services, one is located in Port Colborne. There are also four other licensed child care centres in the city from among the region-wide total of 181 (approx. 12,000 total spaces). Approximately three operators in Port Colborne are licensed to provide home child care services.

Program	Category	Spaces
Port Colborne Regional Child Care Centre	Regional Licensed Facility	95
La Boite a Soleil - St. Joseph	Licensed Child Care Facility	76
ACW - First Friends	Licensed Child Care Facility	93
ACW - Oakwood	Licensed Child Care Facility	50
ACW - McKay	Licensed Child Care Facility	25
*Home Child Care Providers	Licensed Home Child Care	18 (approx.)
Total Spaces		357
ACW = A Child's World		
*Home child care providers can serve a maximum of six children and must count their own children in this allotment if they are younger than four years old.		

Discussion:

As Niagara Region Children's Services works with child care operators to determine the feasibility of adding new licensed child care spaces in priority communities – mainly by monitoring supply and demand – they may consider expanding into more communities. City staff have had meetings with Children's Services' management about increasing child care spaces in Port Colborne on account of the city's current level of need and population growth rate. Staff will continue to advocate for Port Colborne to be designated a priority community until the Region and the province give their approval.

Partnering with the YMCA on an application for increased child care spaces would be beneficial given that the charitable organization currently operates eight early learning and child care centres and 47 school age centres (before and after school hours) across Niagara. Subject to the Region's approval for more child care spaces in Port Colborne, staff recommends engaging the services of an architect to design a child care centre at the Vale Health and Wellness Centre (VHWC), which could be operated by the YMCA.

Architect services would be procured on a phased project basis with the first phase to assess the feasibility of the VHWC location and the possibility of adding a second floor to expand indoor recreational space with the City to support recreation programming, clubs, camps, public events and/or gatherings, and additional space to house recreation equipment.

As the CWELCC system improves affordability for families, the demand for licensed child care will further increase. Niagara Region Children's Services estimates that the provincial child care expansion targets for Niagara are not reflective of what the local area municipalities need in the future, with a 31% increase in the number of children expected over the next 20 years. Without priority community status, Port Colborne will face mounting pressure to expand child care access as the need continues to rise. City staff remain mindful of this growing gap, and they envision working with the development community on a model where designated space in multi-family buildings is set aside for non-profit child care operators to purchase or rent.

Internal Consultations:

The Corporate Leadership Team proposes this initiative and the VHWC child care centre project for Council consideration.

Financial Implications:

Fees for an architect would be paid from the project budget, and neither the City nor the architect will be bound by a commitment to continue beyond the feasibility stage.

Financial implications will not arise until the Region approves more child care spaces in Port Colborne. An addition to the VHWC to accommodate a new child care centre will require debenture financing, though grant opportunities will be pursued. The debenture for the child care centre would be financed as follows:

Source	Percentage of Space
Lease payment for child care space	50%
Development charges	25%
Property taxes from growth	25%

The operating costs of the new child care centre would be the responsibility of the service provider. There would be no cost to the City to provide these services.

Development charges and property taxes are only considered as funding sources if the second floor is deemed feasible by the architect and approved to move forward by Council once presented.

Public Engagement:

The City continues to have discussions with the YMCA of Niagara and Niagara Region Children's Services.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillars of the strategic plan:

- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
 - Economic Prosperity
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Conclusion:

Faced with lengthy waitlists – the waitlist in Niagara for toddlers and preschoolers has experienced a dramatic surge of 227% since March 2022, jumping from 712 to 2,326 – parents and guardians across Niagara continue to seek out affordable child care in their communities. Advocating for an increase in the provision of licensed child care services in Port Colborne is essential for fulfilling the City's strategic objectives of economic prosperity and fostering a welcoming, liveable, and healthy community. Expanded access to quality child care supports childhood learning and development, and enables working families in Port Colborne to achieve a work-life balance.

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.