



Subject: Community Engagement on Licensed Childcare in Port Colborne - Update

To: Council

From: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Report Number: 2025-78

Meeting Date: April 8, 2025

Recommendation:

That Corporate Services Department Report 2025-78 be received; and

That Council direct staff to move forward with a request for proposal for a childcare facility at 76 Main Street using a two-stage design-build project model; stage one to include the design of the facility and stage two to include the construction of the facility (subject to funding); and

That Council approve \$250,000 from the Opportunity Reserve Fund for stage one of the project; and

That Council direct staff to come back with a recommended funding model for stage two, that also reimburses the Opportunity Reserve Fund for stage one costs, upon updating the development charge background study.

Purpose:

This report presents Council with a comprehensive summary of public engagement activities and feedback gathered between February 3 and February 14, 2025, regarding the future of licensed childcare in Port Colborne.

It also seeks Council approval to proceed with the development of a childcare facility at 76 Main Street using a two-stage design-build project model. It recommends that Council direct staff to move forward with a request for proposal, with stage one involving the design of the facility and stage two involving construction, contingent on available funding.

Background:

On January 28, 2025, Council considered report 2025-20 regarding a proposed community engagement plan aimed at gathering feedback related to the future of childcare in Port Colborne. At that meeting, Council requested that staff report back with a summary of results received from the public during the month of April. This report provides a summary of the engagement activities and feedback received from the public between February 3 and February 14, 2025.

Overall, the engagement plan aimed to gather feedback from the community through a brief online and paper-based survey. It sought input from the community about the future of licensed childcare in Port Colborne, focusing on key issues such as the current requirements for childcare spaces in Port Colborne, the potential use of the former Visitors Centre (Main Street and Mellanby Avenue) as a new location for childcare, the City's involvement with the creation of childcare spaces within Port Colborne, and more.

The survey was distributed online and in paper format.

The detailed results and findings from the survey are provided in Appendix A of this report. In the interest of transparency, a full list of open-ended responses received in both the online and paper surveys will be posted on www.portcolborne.ca/childcare (for surveys received between February 3 and February 14, 2025).

Discussion:

Public engagement activities related to the future of childcare in Port Colborne launched on February 14, 2025.

Quick stats about the engagement activities to date:

- 305 people completed the survey (295 online and 10 on paper)
 - 7 from City Hall
 - 2 from Vale Health & Wellness Centre
 - 1 from Port Colborne Public Library
- 315 open-field comments to analyze and categorize
- Average time to complete the survey: 3 minutes (online survey)
- Estimated completion rate: 91% - this is the number of people who started and finished the survey.

Detailed results from the survey and a summary of feedback collected is available in Appendix A of this report.

Overall, survey responses indicate a strong need for more licensed childcare spaces in Port Colborne, with 86% of participants expressing that the city requires additional

facilities. Notably, 62% of those with children in childcare currently travel outside the city to access these services. There is also considerable support for municipal involvement, with 82% of respondents believing the City has a role to play in creating licensed childcare facilities.

The idea of repurposing the former Visitors Centre at Main Street and Mellanby Avenue received widespread support. Seventy-three per cent of respondents agree that it would be a good location for licensed childcare, and an equal percentage support renovating the space for that purpose. However, there is clear concern about funding methods: only 8.5% of respondents support raising property taxes to fund development, while 86% believe funding should be sourced through grants from upper levels of government.

The former Visitors Centre building at 76 Main Street was originally built in 1852 and was made from cut stone taken from the Welland Canal. It was designated a property with heritage value under By-law 1062/9/81. It is the oldest architect-designed structure in Port Colborne, and was originally used as City Hall, and later as a jail.

The proposed expanded childcare project would bring an additional 3,500 to 3,900 square feet in additional space to the existing building footprint. The project would include a single-storey addition to the back (south) side of the existing building. Proceeding with the design phase of the project would include working closely with a heritage planner and continued consultation with the City's Heritage Committee.

The expansion at the former Visitors Centre would bring an additional 49 childcare spaces for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; and bring new purpose to this vacant building in the heart of Port Colborne.

Feedback received through public engagement and recent discussions with industry leaders has emphasized an urgent need to expand childcare in the community.

This report recommends moving forward with a request for proposal for a childcare facility at 76 Main Street using a two-stage design-build project model. A two-stage approach is recommended to limit risk while the financial model is developed.

Stage 1 – Move forward with the request for proposal for a childcare facility using a design-build project model with an up-set limited of \$250,000.

Stage 2 – Move forward with the project subject to a Council approved funding model.

This two-staged approach is recommended to move this project forward with a limited scope of risk. The approach provides the City with the opportunity to introduce new childcare by the end of 2026.

Throughout the project, staff will update Council on the progress of funding, design, construction, and operator agreement. As a reminder, this project is put forward as a partnership with the YMCA of Niagara and with consultation with the Niagara Region.

Internal Consultations:

The Corporate Leadership Team proposed the original expansion of licensed childcare spaces in Port Colborne. Since then, staff from Finance, Recreation, Public Works, Corporate Communications and Planning have provided input on the potential project.

Financial Implications:

All expenses related to the public engagement activities are captured in the 2025 operating budget.

The childcare facility, as noted in previous reports regarding this topic, is intended to be financed through lease payments, development charges and partnership sponsorships and/or grants. To develop a funding model for the project, an update to the development charge study will need to occur. An update to the background study on development charges is anticipated to take six months.

Feedback received through public engagement and recent discussions with industry leaders has emphasized an urgent need to expand childcare in the community.

This report recommends moving forward in two stages, to limit risk, as the final funding model is developed. Funding for these two stages is recommended as follows:

Stage 1 – Use \$250,000 from the Opportunity Reserve Fund. This reserve was funded with proceeds from the City's sale of its portion of the Niagara Regional Broadband Network. These funds would be replenished through Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Staff would develop a funding model of lease payments, development charges and other partnership sponsorships and/or grants. This model will require debt financing, but that debt would be financed by way of the funding sources identified.

Public Engagement:

This report provides a detailed summary of the public engagement campaign aimed at gathering feedback from residents about the future of childcare in Port Colborne. It includes results received between February 2, 2025 and February 14, 2025.

The City continues to have discussions with the YMCA of Niagara and Niagara Region Children's Services regarding expanding the number of licensed childcare spaces within Port Colborne.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

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

In conclusion, the public engagement process clearly demonstrates that residents of Port Colborne recognize the importance of expanding access to quality licensed childcare within the community. The feedback gathered through both online and paper-based surveys highlights a demand for additional childcare spaces, support for repurposing the former Visitors Centre as a potential location, and a desire for the City to take an active role in addressing childcare needs.

The input collected provides valuable insight into the community's priorities and will help inform Council's decision-making as it explores options for improving childcare access in Port Colborne. The results of this engagement process serve as a foundation for future planning and potential partnerships aimed at enhancing support for families and young children across the city.

Appendices:

- a. Future of Childcare in Port Colborne Survey Results
- b. Future of Childcare in Port Colborne Presentation

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.