

DATE OF MEETING March 15, 2021

AUTHORED BY DAVID STEWART, SOCIAL PLANNER

SUBJECT MID-ISLAND REGION CHILD CARE ACTION PLAN

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To present the Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan to Council and request that it be included as formal stakeholder input into the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process.

### **Recommendation**

That Council:

1. receive the Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan;
2. endorse the child care space targets for the city of Nanaimo included in the report; and
3. include the Action Plan as formal stakeholder input into the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process.

## **BACKGROUND**

In early 2019, the City of Nanaimo collaborated with the District of Lantzville, City of Parksville, Town of Qualicum Beach, and the Regional District of Nanaimo to study childcare needs in the region. The partnership received a \$125,000 grant from the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) to assess existing child care spaces and identify current and future demand for child care spaces in the mid-island region, of which \$108,360 was used to complete a Child Care Action Plan. Completion of a childcare needs assessment or plan is one of the eligibility requirements for school districts, local and First Nations governments, and non-profits to be considered for funding through the Child Care BC New Spaces Fund.

To guide and support the project, a working group of regional childcare stakeholders was formed. The Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) was hired to complete this work on behalf of the group. The result was the development of a Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan (the “Action Plan”) and supporting documents. Engagement on the project included feedback from child care providers, parents and caregivers, First Nations and Urban Indigenous groups, specific vulnerable and underserved populations (new immigrants, parents of children with special needs), and other key stakeholders (non-profits supporting children, chambers of commerce, etc.).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Role of Local Government in Supporting Child Care**

While the Provincial and Federal Governments have the primary roles to play in the policy and funding of child care, local governments have authority over local planning and land use as well as the most in-depth understanding of local area needs. Local governments may also have the capacity to host third-party child care operators within municipal facilities or, in some cases, operate child care centres themselves.

### **Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan**

The Action Plan (see Attachment A) identifies how many child care spaces currently exist and would be needed for each local government to keep pace with anticipated demand for the five local governments and three First Nation governments within the project area. The Action Plan establishes targets for each municipality and the entire region, and includes child care priorities and recommended actions within four priority areas:

1. Access to child care
2. Affordability
3. Quality
4. Collaboration and partnerships

The Action Plan also includes the following supporting information:

- An inventory of existing child care spaces;
- A community engagement report (Appendix C of the Action Plan);
- City of Nanaimo neighbourhood-level child care status maps (included within the City of Nanaimo portion of the Action Plan);
- Child care space target information for each jurisdiction; and
- Community profiles (Appendix D of the Action Plan).

The Plan includes recommended actions to increase child care spaces and improve the quality and accessibility of child care within the region. There are 49 recommended actions with associated timelines identified to achieve plan priorities. This includes 32 collaborative regional actions and 21 more specific recommendations for partner local governments. Of the 21 more specific recommendations, 7 are for the City of Nanaimo.

A summary of recommended actions involving the City and an analysis of implication for the City is included as Attachment B.

### **Space Targets and Recommendations**

The Action Plan establishes targets for the region and each municipality in each child care age category (See Attachment C). There are no established Federal or Provincial standards or recommendations for child care space targets (number of child care spaces per capita). Subsequently, the Action Plan targets were developed using scans of other jurisdictions, population projections, local demographic and labour force data, and consultation with municipal representatives and key partners in the child care sector. It should be noted that it remains to

be seen what long-term impacts COVID-19 may have on demand for child care should there be a long-term increase in parents working from home after the pandemic.

In order to ensure child care opportunities are equitable throughout the region, the same targets were applied consistently for each local or regional government. Child care space targets were set at 50% coverage for children under age three, 75% coverage for children ages three to five not yet in school, and 50% coverage for school age children under age ten.

Due to its larger share of population in the region, the City of Nanaimo would require a higher number of child care spaces to meet its proportional share of the Action Plan's regional child care space targets. To reach the 2030 targets, the City of Nanaimo would need an estimated 3,410 new licensed spaces over the next ten years.

Nanaimo already has 475 new spaces under development, which could be increased to 741 should funding be approved for a further 266 spaces. This would result in achieving approximately 22% of the Action's Plan's ten-year target of 3,410 spaces for the city. Confirmed new spaces include 88 infant/toddler spaces, 182 preschooler-age spaces, and 205 school-age spaces. School District 68 (the "School District") has received funding for 140 spaces to be integrated within existing school sites. The School District is awaiting funding confirmation for the above-noted additional 266 spaces. If approved, the School District will be able to add 406 child care spaces within ten elementary schools. A summary of the School District's child care spaces is included as Attachment D. On 2019-DEC-12, the City of Nanaimo provided a letter of support for the School District's application.

### **Parent and Caregiver Engagement and Implications**

As part of the engagement process, 905 parents and caregivers responded to a child care needs and preferences survey. Parents rated child care quality metrics (reputation of the program, quality of indoor play, activities for children, program licensing) well above cost and locational considerations. However, when asked about location preferences, parents indicated a greater desire for child care space to be located closer to their homes as opposed to near their work or child's school.

Attachment C of the Action Plan provides the City with a neighbourhood breakdown by number of children versus child care spaces. This shows that child care spaces in the city tend to be concentrated in areas with a lower portion of children under 14 and where more jobs are located, including in or near downtown, the university, and the hospital areas.

Comparatively, areas with a higher portion of children under 14, in central and northern Nanaimo, have proportionally less child care spaces than other areas of the city. This includes neighbourhoods such as Hammond Bay, Departure Bay, Long Lake, and Diver Lake. Increasing childcare spaces in these areas will require consideration of providing more child care spaces in residential areas.

There is an opportunity to use School District 68's capacity to meet a significant portion of existing and future child care needs at existing school sites in neighbourhoods. This is an important consideration when reviewing the implications of this research and recommendations as part of the REIMAGINE Nanaimo Strategic Policy Review process.]

## **OPTIONS**

### **1. That Council:**

1. receive the Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan;
  2. endorse the child care space targets for the city of Nanaimo included in the report; and
  3. include the Action Plan as formal stakeholder input into the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process.
- **Advantages:** Including the Action Plan as input into the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process will ensure child care needs are considered in the City's strategic policies related to land use and community facility planning. Endorsing child care space targets for the city will help support partnerships as well as the initiatives of other levels of government, including The School District, First Nations Governments, and other non-government agencies, to increase child care spaces.
  - **Disadvantages:** The proposed space targets for Nanaimo are ambitious and may take considerable cooperation among stakeholders in order to meet the target goals. The targets may be impacted by permanent shifts in work from home for some parents following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - **Financial Implications:** There are no direct financial implications with receiving the report; however, a number of the recommendations within the report include financial implications. The financial implications of individual recommendations are addressed within Attachment B of the report.

### **2. That Council:**

1. receive the Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan; and
  2. include the Action Plan as formal stakeholder input into the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process.
- **Advantages:** Including the Action Plan as input into the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process will ensure child care needs are considered as part of the City's strategic policies related to land use and community facility planning. However, beyond this, it will not require any further commitment by Staff or Council. The Action Plan would serve as a reference document for funding applications by the School District, the City, and other potential partners to create more child care spaces.
  - **Disadvantages:** By not endorsing the child care space targets, Council may limit the City's ability to support actions to increase child care spaces within the city, including supporting funding applications.

### **3. That Council provide alternative direction.**

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan provides an overview of existing and projected child care needs within the City of Nanaimo, Regional District of Nanaimo, District of Lantzville, City of Parksville and Town of Qualicum Beach.
- The Action Plan includes 32 regional recommendations and a total of 17 more specific recommendations for each local government, including 7 for the City of Nanaimo.
- The Action Plan includes specific child care space targets (number of child care spaces per capita) for the region and each municipality for different child care age categories.
- In order to meet the space targets for Nanaimo, the City of Nanaimo would have to add 3,410 new child care spaces by 2030; 475 child care spaces are currently in development.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

ATTACHMENT A: Mid-Island Region Child Care Action Plan  
ATTACHMENT B: City of Nanaimo Recommendations Summary  
ATTACHMENT C: Child Care Space Targets Summary  
ATTACHMENT D: School District 68 Child Care Funding Spaces

#### **Submitted by:**

Lisa Bhopalsingh  
Manager, Community Planning

#### **Concurrence by:**

Bill Corsan,  
Director, Community Development

Richard Harding  
General Manager, Parks, Recreation and  
Culture

Dale Lindsay  
General Manager, Development Services