

Attachment 1  
*Staff Memo*

## **MEMO**

### *Climate Action, Planning and Development*

**To:** Emilie K. Adin, Director of Climate Action,  
Planning and Development

**Date:** December 12, 2022

**From:** Jackie Teed, Senior Manager of Climate  
Action, Planning and Development

**File:** 01.0195.10

**Subject:** Att 1 - Staff Memo.docx

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#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Director forward this memo and the following resolution to Council for consideration:

**THAT** Council direct staff to send a letter from Mayor and Council to the Minister of Education and Child Care, outlining the need for additional senior government support to address short- and long-term school capacity and child care needs in New Westminster.

#### **PURPOSE**

To update Council regarding school capacity and child care needs in the community, and the potential loss of Neighbourhood Learning Centre spaces, including two purpose-built child cares, on school sites in and on the periphery of the Downtown.

#### **SUMMARY**

The City continues to meet its commitments under the Metro Vancouver Regional Growth Strategy by developing plans and policies to accommodate population growth. To this end, the City regularly communicates demographic information to the School District to assist in its school facility planning and programming. The City also collaborates with the School District to capitalize on opportunities to address community needs (e.g., Neighbourhood Learning Centres) and to address challenges (e.g., lack of school age care spaces in Queensborough).

The School District is finding it increasingly difficult to accommodate student growth within its existing facilities and as a short-term strategy for addressing its capacity issues, it has determined that Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC) spaces, including

purpose-built child cares, are secondary to its school age educational focus. As such, it is proposing to utilize NLC spaces at École Qayqayt Elementary School and Fraser River Middle School (FRMS), which are located in and on the periphery of the Downtown, to realize additional classroom space needed for September 2024.

As proposed by the School District, the two non-profit child care programs, with a total of 74 spaces, including 24 infant/toddler spaces, would be relocated to Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary School in the West End and F.W. Howay Elementary School in Massey-Victory Heights, by spring 2024. This would significantly impact child care families, particularly those with limited transportation options. Additionally, the other NLC spaces, including a community kitchen, flex offices and multi-purpose area, at École Qayqayt Elementary School, would be converted to classroom space, which would displace community programming, including New West Family Place. This programming addresses the needs of Indigenous, lone-parent, low-income and newcomer families, many of whom live in and on the periphery of the Downtown.

This report provides background context regarding the school capacity challenges, and the child care shortage that exists. The report builds on the recent correspondence between the School District and the City (letters are included as Attachments 2 and 3), as well as subsequent meetings between staff and elected officials of both organizations, and recommends advocating to the Province for additional resources to meet school capacity and child care needs in New Westminster.

**BACKGROUND**

**School Capacity Challenge**

The School District is facing capacity issues for school-age learning, as it is currently operating at 110% of capacity across all schools. Capacity shortage is most acute in and on the periphery of the Downtown. In recent years, the School District has updated their projections, and their Long Range Facilities Plan now establishes a 15-year strategy for expanding and developing new schools where needed, including developing a new elementary school in the Simcoe Park area, and a new middle school in the Grimston Park area. The School District estimates these large capital projects will take approximately five years to be funded and to be completed.

To help support the creation of these new schools and others, a Joint School Planning Working Group was established in 2022, bringing together senior City and School District staff, as well as elected officials from both organizations. This Working Group is intended to facilitate continued communication and problem solving, such that school projects can be as successful as possible.

To meet more immediate needs, the School District is developing a Short-Term Capacity Review Strategy, which will include locating more portables on school sites where possible, and juggling programs. The City has approved Building Permits for portables at a range of schools in recent years, including a new portable at Qayqayt for the current school year.

At their meeting on June 21, 2022, the School Board approved the following principles to guide their short-term strategy:

- Prioritize the utilization of space within our schools to support K-12 in-catchment regular enrolment while also ensuring sufficient play and outdoor learning space.
- Programs of choice, community partnerships (including infant/toddler child care), and non-instructional uses of space will be operated, and when necessary, relocated to school facilities where space permits.

### **City's Role in Facilitating Child Care**

Funding and provision of child care is a senior government responsibility, and within the Province, it now resides with the Ministry of Education and Child Care. The City plays a facilitative role, including but not limited to: developing needs assessments and strategies, applying for and managing grants, coordinating rezoning applications in support of child care, prioritizing permits for child care spaces in schools, and advocating to the senior levels of government on child care issues, including related to funding, staff remuneration, subsidies, etc.

### **Child Care Shortage and Downtown Need**

There is a shortage of child care spaces in the city, particularly related to infant/toddler (0 to 36 months) and school age (5 to 12 years) care. The 2018 Child Care Needs Assessment Update found that there were 28.2 child care spaces per 100 children in the city, and slightly less than that (27.5) in the Downtown. The City has been proactive in collaborating with non-profit child care operators to locate and expand spaces.

The recent closure of Queens Avenue Daycare with 33 non-profit child care spaces, which is on the periphery of the Downtown, was a major loss for this neighbourhood and the surrounding community. The loss of an additional 74 non-profit child care spaces associated with the two schools in question, which are in and on the periphery of the Downtown, will further erode child care availability in this neighbourhood, and specifically impact families who rely on more affordable child care and have limited transportation options.

Downtown is also the neighbourhood with the highest rate of early childhood vulnerability in the city, according to the 2021 Early Development Index. 2020 Taxfiler data found a higher proportion of children in lone-parent families in the Downtown (21.5%) than for the city-as-a-whole (16.9%), and a slightly higher child poverty rate in the Downtown (13.6%) compared to the city-as-a-whole (11.2%). Resources like non-

profit child care in purpose-built facilities and early childhood and family strengthening programming are critical in this context.

### **Child Care and Community Uses on School Sites**

Recognizing that there are many advantages to delivering community services, especially for children and families, on school sites, the City has a long history of collaborating with the School District to support creating space for non-profits to deliver child care, early learning and family strengthening programming, as well as other community services.

This collaboration was enshrined in 2009, when the City and School District endorsed a Child Care Protocol, committing both organizations to working together “to maintain, stabilize and increase the viability of existing licensed child care spaces within their collective control, and to plan for and develop, if feasible, new child care spaces on their collective lands.” The process of developing and adopting this protocol supported collaboration between the City and the School District.

In the years that followed adoption of the Child Care Protocol, a key strategy for delivering community spaces on school sites has been to develop Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC) spaces in new school projects. The Province provided funding to allow up to 15% additional floor space for dedicated community uses such as child cares and early learning programming.

In 2010, the City and School District engaged over 1,000 residents and conducted an extensive needs assessment in developing a vision for NLC spaces as part of three new schools: École Qayqayt Elementary School (Qayqayt), Fraser River Middle School (FRMS), and New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS). The spaces that were created at the time included purpose-built, non-profit child care facilities at Qayqayt and FRMS, community flex office and multi-purpose areas at both of these schools, and a community kitchen at Qayqayt. The NWSS NLC space was put towards a Welcome and a Wellness Centre, and a new Performance Arts Theatre. Regarding the latter, this was not pursued with the eventual retention of the Massey Theatre.

The City provided \$44,000 in financial assistance to furnish and equip these spaces; facilitated a donation in support of a community kitchen; and covers the administrative costs of a navigator position at the Welcome Centre.

Additionally, the City has funded the development of new pre-school age and school age child care spaces in schools. More specifically, it contributed \$1,200,000 in support of a pre-school aged child care facility at the Skwo:wech Elementary School and contributed \$180,950 to relocating, retrofitting and operationalizing three redundant school portables to create 78 school age care spaces in Queensborough. The City has also provided numerous child care grants to Westminster Children’s After School Society, which operates 10 school age care programs in the schools.

In 2022, the Ministry of Education expanded to become the Ministry of Education and Child Care. The Minister's expanded mandate, including prioritizing locating child care on school grounds, reinforces the importance of existing facilities on school sites and sets the stage for future expansion.

### **Displacement of Neighbourhood Learning Centre Uses**

It is in the context of classroom and child care space shortage that the School District is exploring relocating purpose-built, non-profit child care facilities from Qayqayt and FRMS, and converting to classrooms the community kitchen, flex offices and multi-purpose area at Qayqayt, out of which New West Family Place currently operates programming. The 74 child care spaces would be moved out of the Downtown and to Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary School in the West End and F.W. Howay Elementary School in Massey Victory Heights. The School District is in need of more classroom space at the former schools (six new classrooms could be created from the child care spaces), and the latter schools can accommodate additional portables.

The School District is currently targeting spring 2024 for the child care spaces to be relocated, and September 2024 for the purpose-built, non-profit child care spaces to be converted to classroom spaces. The School Board has indicated that it has been successful in obtaining \$2,800,000 in funding from the Child Care BC New Spaces Program to support this relocation, though no new spaces are being created. The School District is also applying to amend their capital plan to obtain additional provincial funding to convert the purpose-built, non-profit child care spaces at Qayqayt and FRMS to classroom spaces.

### **DISCUSSION**

City staff was informed about the School District's intention regarding NLC spaces on October 3, 2022, during Council's break due to elections, with a decision by the School Board scheduled for December 13, 2022. In the correspondence from the School District dated November 7, 2022 (Attachment 2), the School District states: "We are writing to you now, as a community partner, but also as an entity tied to, responsible for, and intimately aware of the child care challenges New West families face, to work alongside the District and Purpose Society (the non-profit operator), in helping them with their search for an alternate location Downtown for child care spaces for infant/toddler programming."

Typically, it would take months of planning to identify a potential location for a child care, including undertaking due diligence regarding site analysis and facility costing, as well as conducting consultation with Fraser Health Community Care Facilities Licensing. In this case, the City has been given a little over two months. Complicating matters, and as outlined in a School District Memo dated November 8, 2022 (Attachment 3), it states: "that the funding received from the Ministry of Education and Child Care is specifically for the application that was put forward by the District using District-owned property and cannot be transferred to another entity." It further states: "The District has no ability to

lease or purchase property to re-house a child care facility which is why no other sites have been examined.” Additionally, it states: “The operational funding model does not currently include amounts for the operation of the child cares.”

The above all but precludes identifying an alternate location or locations in or on the periphery of the Downtown, and raises questions as to if it is even feasible from an operational perspective. Further, the \$2,800,000 allocated for capital costs for both child cares, while possibly sufficient for the placement of portables on paved and serviced school sites, would likely be insufficient to construct new child care facilities or purchase modular structures for such purposes, particularly factoring in site development, foundation, servicing, and outdoor play space costs. Additionally, there is no funding to relocate or replace the other NLC spaces, including the community kitchen, flex offices and multi-purpose area.

For these reasons, the City’s letter in response to the School District (Attachment 4) emphasizes exploring retention of the purpose-built child care facilities and NLC space, and identifying other options to address school capacity issues.

The School District and City continue to work together to try to address classroom, child care and other community needs. It is anticipated that in advance of the December 12, 2022 Council meeting, City and School District staff will have had an opportunity to meet on site at Qayqayt and FRMS, and the Joint School Planning Task Force will have met to explore options.

Building on these efforts, it is proposed that the City also advocate to the Province for additional support in meeting short- and long-term school capacity and child care needs. Both of these issues, which impact New Westminster residents, are fundamentally within provincial jurisdiction, and with the expanded mandate of the Ministry of Education and Child Care, they are within one Ministry. The City has been successful at accommodating growth, in alignment with regional plans and provincial efforts, and needs to be supported in meeting community needs to maintain and enhance livability as we increase our density.

## **OPTIONS**

The following options are presented for Council’s consideration:

1. That Council direct staff to send a letter from Mayor and Council to the Minister of Education and Child Care, outlining the need for additional senior government support to address short- and long-term school capacity and child care needs in New Westminster; or
2. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends Option 1.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 2 – November 7, 2022 Letter from School Board to the City

Attachment 3 – November 8, 2022 School District Memo

Attachment 4 – November 29, 2022 Letter from the City to the School Board

## **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:

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