



LIBRARY REQUISITION

Issue

The Okotoks Public Library has requested an additional 2% in 2025 resulting in a budget adjustment of \$0.025M.

Motion Proposed by Administration

Due to the requested increase by the Library Board being over the approved multi year budget Council’s direction is required.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

The Okotoks Public Library Board manages, regulates, and controls the Okotoks Public Library as per the Libraries Act. Their purpose is to oversee the operation of the Library and the development of services, programs, and activities for the benefit of the users.

At the November 27, 2023, Special Meeting of Council the following budgets were approved and communicated to the Library Board. Providing multiyear amounts allows the Library to plan appropriately for the future and ensures that it is in line with the Town’s tax rates as approved by Council.

2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Budget \$1,294,333	Budget \$1,359,000	Budget \$1,427,002	Budget \$1,498,352	Budget \$1,660,283
Request \$1,319,061	Request \$1,427,887	Request \$1,503,325	Request \$1,575,029	Request TBA
(\$24,728) -1.9%	(\$68,887) 5.1%	(\$76,323) 5.3%	(\$76,677) 5.1%	TBA

The Okotoks Public Library has submitted a budget increase of 2% which is over the approved 2025 council appropriation amount. If approved the total requisition amount for 2025 increases from \$1,294,333 to \$1,319,061.

The Library has indicated that this increase offsets unchanging or decreased funding from the Province and the regional library systems, as well as enabling the Library to stay competitive in today’s job market and retain and/or hire skilled employees.

Strategic Plan Goals

<input type="checkbox"/>	Responsibly Managed Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrated Environmental Leadership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong Local Economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced Culture & Community Health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizational Excellence		

Equity/Diversity/Inclusivity Impacts and Strategy

The Library continues to provide thoughtfully developed programs and services for all users using an equity, diversity, and inclusivity lens.

Environmental Impacts

n/a

Governing Policies/Bylaws/Legislation or Agreements

The *Libraries Act* outlines that the Board shall, before December 1 annually, prepare a budget to operate and manage the Okotoks Public Library for the ensuing fiscal year. Council may approve the requisition in whole or in part. The Town is also required to contribute a per capita amount to the Marigold Library System.

Community Engagement Strategy

Libraries are key facilities that inspire communities through books, resources, community events, outreach activities, and partnerships.

Alternatives for Consideration

n/a

CAO Comments

At its September GPC meeting, Council requested that the Okotoks Public Library respond to a series of questions to inform their budget request. Their responses are included as attachments to this report. Council is not the governing board of the library, however has authority to approve the overall budget requisition. Council has discretion to approve the full budget requested, or modify the overall budget. Council direction is requested.

Attachment(s)

1. Marigold Library System - Okotoks Public Library Value of Your Investment 2023
2. Additional 2025-2027 Budget Information for Mid-Range Pay Parity for OPL Staff
3. Requisition for Marigold Library System

Prepared by:
Janette Messer
Special Projects Manager
October 31, 2024

Okotoks Public Library

2023 Value of Your Investment



This report shows the value of services provided by Marigold Library System. **Working together, Marigold members accomplish more than any one library or municipality could achieve alone.** Members benefit from economies of scale including bulk purchasing and streamlined operations from centralized workflows, IT infrastructure and delivery logistics. Marigold provides essential and community-focused services that enhance local library operations and the experience of library patrons.

2023 Levy Payments from Okotoks to Marigold (2022 Alberta Population)

	Per Capita Levy	Population	Contribution
Municipality	\$6.35	31,959	\$202,939.65
Library Board	\$4.50	31,959	\$143,815.50
Levy Payments from Okotoks to Marigold TOTAL			\$346,755.15

Direct Financial Return from Marigold to Okotoks Public Library

Operating grants and allotments from Marigold to the member library.

Services Grant (Operating Grant from Marigold)	\$79,898.00
IT Capacity Fund (Spending Account from Marigold)	\$1,000.00
Physical Library Collection Allocations & Bestsellers	\$114,022.50
SUBTOTAL	\$194,920.50

Financial Value of Marigold Services

These amounts indicate what it would cost your library to offer the same standard of service to meet community needs and interests. Details on following pages.

SUBTOTAL **\$1,829,408.30**

Direct Financial Return & Value of Marigold Services TOTAL **\$2,024,328.80**

2023 Total Levy Payments from Okotoks to Marigold

\$346,755.15

2023 Total Direct Financial Return & Value of Marigold Services

\$2,024,328.80

Okotoks Public Library

2023 Value of Your Investment



Financial Value of Marigold Services

These amounts indicate what it would cost your library to offer the same standard of services to meet community needs and interests.

Collections

Collections Discounts for Your Library

\$55,872.60

Marigold's bulk purchasing power provides deep discounts for new collections allotted to your library. Without membership in Marigold, your library would spend more to purchase the same collection materials. Marigold staff save library staff time by assisting with collection selection.

Marigold's membership in TRAC (The Regional Automation Consortium) gives **your library patrons access to over 3.3 million items in over 185 public library collections across Alberta**. The TRACpac online catalogue and app allow your patrons to place holds on an item anywhere in Alberta and have it delivered to their local library through Marigold van delivery.

Cataloguing & Processing of New Materials by Marigold

\$34,015.00

Professional cataloguing makes it possible for patrons to locate and request popular books, video games, movies, equipment and more in the online catalogue or app. New materials are delivered shelf-ready to your library with barcoding, mylar protection, durable cases for AV and labelling.

Unique eBook & eAudiobook Titles Borrowed by Your Cardholders

\$780,821.75

Marigold provides a wide range of digital collections for reading, watching, listening and learning! The average cost for an eBook is \$36 and \$53 for an eAudiobook. Marigold's membership in TRAC provides your patrons with access to shared Overdrive/Libby and Cloud Library collections.

Kits, Games & Travelling Displays Borrowed from Marigold

\$660.00

Libraries save money by borrowing kits, games and displays from Marigold, such as craft and makerspace kits, travelling book displays, a karaoke machine, life-size games like Snakes and Ladders, and more.

Collection Insurance

\$2,099.79

Marigold insures the physical collections at member libraries.

Okotoks Public Library

2023 Value of Your Investment



Delivery & Resource Sharing

Unique Physical Titles Borrowed from Other Libraries by Your Patrons

\$704,125.00

As a member of TRAC and an Alberta Public Library Network Partner, patrons registered at Marigold libraries can request an item through tracpac.ab.ca or the TRAC app from any of the 185+ libraries in TRAC, plus other libraries across the province.

Library to You (L2U) is a free mail service for those who face physical or geographic difficulties in visiting their public library in person. For patrons across Marigold, Marigold staff fill holds for homebound or remote patrons and mail items to the patron with a free return label.

Weekly Van Delivery Service

\$106,235.71

All interlibrary holds requested by patrons pass through Marigold headquarters for sorting, and transportation to their destination through Marigold van delivery. Likewise, items being sent out for loan at other libraries and library systems are transported to Marigold for sorting before going on to the next location, either by Marigold van, provincial courier (other systems) or by mail (e.g. academic libraries). Drivers also deliver new collection materials, kits, games, supplies and promotional materials to member libraries.

IT

IT Site Visits, Helpdesk, Remote Support & Consultation

\$13,320.01

IT staff provide remote support, troubleshooting, cyber security training, and onsite installations and upgrades for your library, with the goal of reliable IT support for library staff and a positive patron experience. Marigold helps library staff plan for the lifecycle of their computer equipment.

Marigold IT manages the network of computers, devices, and systems that connect member libraries and library service to the world. Member libraries can rely on our team to offer technical support, monitor bandwidth, implement firewall protocols, troubleshoot connection issues, and perform software updates.

Equipment, Software, Licensing, and Library Software

\$62,450.45

Libraries need the right equipment, the right software, the right network, and Marigold provides the expertise to help put it all together. Networked services include email hosting, cloud-based file storage, software licensing, file sharing, a toll-free telephone system, and patron access to library collections and digital content in a safe and secure environment. Marigold staff negotiate complex IT vendor contracts on behalf of the system.

Okotoks Public Library

2023 Value of Your Investment



Supernet & Internet \$9,994.00

Internet and wifi available to patrons and staff at member libraries are provided via Marigold on a robust, secure fibre-optic network. The Alberta Public Library Services Branch (PLSB) pays for monthly SuperNet costs for libraries that are members of Marigold. Marigold pays for monthly internet costs (bandwidth).

Website \$9,197.37

Marigold provides a website for your library to share information on everything your library has to offer! The websites allow libraries to engage with community members and provide information, resources and services to the public. Marigold staff are available to assist libraries with website updates.

Training, Professional Development & Consultation

Training Sessions (in-person & webinars) \$1,180.00

Marigold provides training to library staff on topics such as using eBooks for mobile devices, or using eMagazines, eResources and library apps.

Marigold Conference & Professional Development \$3,525.60

Marigold pays for up to two library staff to travel and attend the Marigold Conference, which featured keynote speaker Timothy Caulfield in 2023, in addition to a day of sessions and networking with peers. Marigold also organizes and pays for library staff to travel and attend Library Leaders training in September, which featured sessions on accessibility and how to create a salary grid in 2023.

Consultation, Support & Expertise \$3,130.23

Each member library is assigned a consultant from our team of professional librarians. Our consultants have a wide range of skills and backgrounds and are experts in problem-solving and teamwork!

Your Library Services Consultant provides advice, solutions and support for library manager and staff training, personnel management, needs assessments, professional development, program planning and support, outreach program development, collection development, weeding and inventory, board and policy development, standards and best practices, reference questions, performance measures and space planning.

Okotoks Public Library

2023 Value of Your Investment



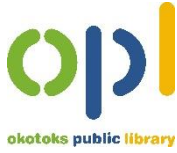
Marketing Materials & Supplies

Paper and Supplies for Local Collection Processing	\$937.04
Marigold provides a paper allocation to support resource sharing and the cost of interlibrary loans. For eligible items added by library staff into the library catalogue, Marigold provides a supply of barcodes, spine labels and library location stickers.	
Customized Plastic Library Cards	\$0.00
Marigold pays for new batches of library cards, which require a special numbering sequence for each library.	
Printing of Promotional & Training Material	\$39,772.00
Marigold prints custom promotional materials on behalf of your library. Marigold develops and provides professional quality publications, displays and marketing software to promote resources, events and services available at the library.	

Marigold Programming at Member Library

Marigold Staff Led Programs	\$2,071.76
Marigold staff delivered 41 programs at 30 libraries to 337 participants in 2023, saving libraries staff time and money.	

Financial Benefit TOTAL **\$1,829,408.30**



Additional 2025-2027 Budget Information for Mid-Range Pay Parity for OPL Staff

Mid-Range Pay Parity in 1 Year

Year	Appropriation Amount	Percent Increase
2025	\$1,427,561	15.8%

Mid-Range Pay Parity in 3 Years

Year	Appropriation Amount	Percent Increase
2025	\$1,378,661	12%
2026	\$1,483,661	8%
2027	\$1,575,661	6%

In preparing these budget scenarios, we've focused specifically on wage increases for staff. The numbers you see reflect the costs associated with those wage increases only and do not account for potential changes in other future operational costs like utilities, supplies, or programming expenses.

The projected wage increases are spread over three years and include adjustments for cost-of-living and inflation. This ensures that staff wages remain competitive and in line with rising living costs, which is critical for retention and recruitment.

I wanted to separate out wage increases to provide clarity and transparency on the specific impact they have. This way, we can address the essential issue of compensation first, while acknowledging that we'll need to take a broader look at other operational costs as part of our overall budget process.

Sarah Gillie
Director
Okotoks Public Library
librarian@okotokslibrary.ca
403.938.2220 ext. 4

Schedule C
Requisition for Marigold Library System

Attached to and part of this *Agreement by and between the Parties comprising the Marigold Library System.*

Part I For those Municipalities without Library Boards

The contributions to the Marigold Library System by Counties, Municipal Districts, Special Areas, Improvement Districts, or any other Municipality without a Library Board shall be as follows for the period stated:

- 2025 \$11.18 per capita paid to the Marigold Library System
- 2026 \$11.46 per capita paid to the Marigold Library System

Part II For those Municipalities with Library Boards

The contributions to the Marigold Library System by Municipalities having Municipal Library Boards or Intermunicipal Library Boards* shall be as follows for the period stated:

- 2025 \$6.59 per capita to be paid directly to Marigold Library System
- 2026 \$6.75 per capita to be paid directly to Marigold Library System

Part III For Municipal Library Boards


The contributions to the Marigold Library System by Municipal Library Boards or Intermunicipal Library Boards* shall be as follows for the period stated:

- 2025 \$4.50 per capita to be paid directly to Marigold Library System
- 2026 \$4.50 per capita to be paid directly to Marigold Library System

IN WITNESS THEREOF, the undersigned being one of the Parties set out in Schedule A - Parties which shall be admitted to Marigold Library System, has duly executed this amendment to the Agreement:

 _____ 9/4/2024
(Member Municipality) Authorized Signature Date

Print Name and Title  _____ (Seal)

 _____ March 28/2024
(Member Library Board or Intermunicipal Library Board*) Authorized Signature Date

Print Name and Title  _____

Retain one copy for your files and forward one original copy signed by both parties to Marigold Library System.

*Established pursuant to the Province of Alberta *Libraries Act and Regulation R.S.A. 2000 Chap. L-11.*



2024 REVIEW & 2025 BUDGET

August 19, 2024



2024 SUCCESSES



INCREASED FOOT TRAFFIC

- 10.5% increase in foot traffic over 2023 (Jan-Jul)



INCREASED PUBLIC COMPUTER USE

- 18% increase in public computer sessions over 2023 (Jan-Jul)



INCREASED PROGRAMS

- Increased number of programs, tours & outreach by 56% over 2023 (Jan-Jul)
- Increased programs participation by 10% over 2023 (Jan-Jul)

COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENT SERVICE

“Board Games @ the Library is our favourite event. [It’s] always fun and a great way to meet new people!”

“My child was smiling and making friends with common interests when I picked them up [from the library], we don’t see this often as they’re struggling with bullying.”

“Very impressed! Haven’t been in yet and so happy we did! Love the diversity and inclusion! Great to see ourselves represented. Thank you!”



2024 CHALLENGES



INCREASED COSTS

- Office & archival supplies
- Books and other library material



STAFFING

- Staying competitive in today's job market
- Experiencing a reduction in qualified candidates for full-time positions.

WAGE COMPARABLES

LIBRARY CLERK

(Customer Service, provide information, membership services)

- Okotoks Public Library - \$17.35/hr
- Fort Saskatchewan Library - **\$19.58/hr** (2022)
- Airdrie Public Library - **\$19.66/hr** (2022)
- Cochrane Public Library - **\$20.10/hr**

PROGRAMMER

(Plans and facilitates programs for various age groups)

- Okotoks Public Library - \$22.75/hr
- Airdrie Public Library - **\$24.25/hr**
- Town of Okotoks - **\$31.67/hr** (2023)

**OPL
BUDGET
COMPARISON:
REVENUE**

	2024 Budget	2025 Budget
Local Appropriation	\$1,232,698	\$1,319,061
Provincial Grants	\$171,411	\$171,411
Regional Library Grants	\$79,898	\$77,152
Board Fundraising	\$7,000	\$10,000
Other Revenue (printing, meeting room rentals, etc.)	\$96,000	\$115,000
TOTAL	\$1,587,007	\$1,692,624

**OPL
BUDGET
COMPARISON:
EXPENSES**

	2024 Budget	2025 Budget
Wages & Benefits	\$1,096,231	\$1,192,000
Library Collections	\$31,500	\$32,500
Rent, Building Maintenance & Equipment Repair	\$231,100	\$231,500
Administrative Expenses	\$73,700	\$89,250
Marigold Library Levy	\$145,976	\$138,874
Capital Expenses	\$8,500	\$8,500
TOTAL	\$1,587,007	\$1,692,624

KEY POINTS

1

Overall, we are asking the Town of Okotoks for **\$86,363** over last year's appropriation request.

This is a **7%** increase and continues to support **78%** of our overall budget.

2

Increased other sources of revenue to offset unchanging or decreased funding from province and regional library system

3

Stay competitive in today's job market.
Retain and hire skilled employees.



THANK YOU

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Okotoks, AB T1S 1A6

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August 13, 2024

Mayor and Council
Town of Okotoks

Dear Mayor and Council,

On behalf of the Town of Okotoks Library Board please find attached our budget request for the fiscal year 2025. This budget was approved by the Okotoks Public Library Board on July 25, 2024.

The attached budget requests a local appropriation of \$1,319,061 from the Town of Okotoks.

The Board would like to be placed on the agenda of the August 19, 2024 meeting confirmed by email with Patty Huber, Legislative Services Administrator. We will need approximately 30 minutes to present our budget and answer any questions that council may have.

Yours Respectfully,



Kazem Mashkournia
Board Chair
Town of Okotoks Library Board



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

OKOTOKS PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD REQUISITION

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Institutional Partnerships - Town of Okotoks Public Library	Provision of funding or in-kind support to provincially regulated organizations to provide services to the community.	Libraries create informed, connected, educated, and empowered communities.	The Library request an additional 2% in 2025 resulting in a budget adjustment of \$0.025M

Reason for the Change?

The Okotoks Public Library has submitted a request of \$24,728 which is over the approved 2025 council appropriation amount reflecting an increase an additional increase of 2%. If approved the total requisition amount for 2025 will be \$1,319,061.

Why change now? What is the need?

The Library has indicated that this increase offsets unchanging or decreased funding from the Province and regional library systems, as well as enabling the Library to stay competitive in today's job market and retain and/or hire skilled employees.

At the November 27, 2023, Special Meeting of Council the following budgets for 2024 through 2028 were approved and communicated to the Library Board. Providing multiyear budget amounts allows the Library's to plan appropriately for the future and ensures that it is in line with the Town's approved tax rates as approved by Council.



	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Town of Okotoks Approved OPL Budgets in 2024	\$1,294,333	\$1,359,000	\$1,427,002	\$1,498,352	\$1,660,283
Requested amount from the Library	\$1,319,061	\$1,427,887	\$1,503,325	\$1,575,029	TBD
Variance	(\$24,728)	(\$68,887)	(\$76,323)	(\$76,677)	TBD
	-1.9%	-5.1%	-5.3%	-5.1%	

OPL will be presenting their overall budget that has the requisition amount included. Council will need to consider if the requested amounts, which exceed the forecasted amount should be approved. If Council does not approve the additional ask from OPL, they will need to adjust their budget accordingly.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

The Okotoks Public Library Board continues to manage, regulate, and control the Okotoks Public Library as per the *Libraries Act*. Their purpose is to oversee the operations of the Library and the development of services, programs, and activities for the benefit of users.

The Library has indicated that an additional increase of 2% will enable them to continue to provide appropriate programs and services with qualified staff who are passionate about their work.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

The expected impact for the Okotoks Public Library will be the continuation of programs and services that meet the changing needs of a growing community. As well, staff feel valued and appropriately compensated.

Budget Change M's

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.025	0.069	0.076	0.077	TBD	\$0.247

Attachments:

1. Okotoks Public Library Board Requisition Letter
2. Okotoks Public Library Board Budget Presentation



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

2025 MUNICIPAL CENSUS AND ELECTION

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Municipal Census	Organization and coordination of municipal census.	Allow for the collection of important demographic data to assist in the planning and provision of community services.	Delay conducting Census in 2025. On ramp the Census in 2028.
Municipal Elections	Organization, coordination and delivery of municipal elections.	Provide residents the opportunity to elect community members to represent their interests and govern their community.	Transfer census funding in 2025 to Municipal Elections with new Bill 20 requirements.

Why change now? What is the need?

Under the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)* a municipality has the discretion to conduct a census. A municipal census is a count of all the residents living within a municipality, as of the designated census day. A census can be used to collect additional information to assist in the planning of municipal services, programs and resource allocations. The Town of Okotoks has never collected any data beyond the number of individuals residing in the dwelling or location.

In 2019, the Government of Alberta announced that it would develop a system to estimate the population of each municipality annually instead of using municipal censuses between each federal census year. The change was driven by the province’s goal for greater consistency in population data due to municipal censuses only being used by a limited number of municipalities. Okotoks 2023 population estimate calculated by AB Treasury Board is 32,563, which is usually used for grant purposes.



In 2023 a new census regulation and manual was created to acknowledge municipal census results. In 2023 only 5 municipalities conducted a municipal census. The City of Leduc was one of the 5 municipalities that conducted a census in 2023 at a cost of \$83,000.

Most municipalities rely on the information provided from the federal census prepared by Statistics Canada and released once every five years. The most recent federal census was completed in 2021 and released on February 9, 2022.

The last municipal census conducted by the Town was in 2018. The next federal census will be in 2026.

2021 Federal Census – 30,405
2018 Municipal Census – 29,002
2016 Federal Census – 29,016
2016 Municipal Census – 28,016
2014 Municipal Census – 27,331

Considering the new election processes for 2025, arising from Bill 20, Administration recommends that the 2025 municipal census be cancelled and the census budget of \$95,500 be allocated to the 2025 new election processes (manual ballot counts, recounts, special ballots, creation and use of a permanent electors' list). Administration is awaiting the new election regulations to finalize logistics for the new processes under Bill 20.

Administration is recommending that an on ramp for budget for census be considered for the 2028 budget to explore enhanced data needs and analysis at that time. The next federal census will be conducted in 2026 with information releases in early 2027.

What is the expected community impact/benefit? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit from the change?

No direct impact to the community by cancelling the Census.

Redirecting the funds for the election will help with a more effective and efficient process.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

The impact of canceling the municipal census in 2025 for Okotoks would have limited impact as there is no need to strategically connect the household survey and census processes. The Town has collected limited data asking only the number of residents. Other tools have been developed to collect data to assist in decision-making processes such as social pinpoint, and public engagement activities including the household and budget surveys. In addition, the regular federal census information, provides much more accurate, and detailed data at no cost to the Town.



For the election, it is anticipated that an extra 60 people will need to be hired to manually count ballots on election night (excluding any recounts). This is based on 15 counting tables of 3-4 people (caller out of ballot, 2 tally sheet markers, and one bundling ballots/processor). It is anticipated that it will take approximately 6 hours to count the ballots with results announced around 3 a.m. the day after Election Day.

Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	\$0.000

We will reallocate the money between the cost centers for the Business Center. Overall no budget change required.



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND INNOVATION

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Business Solutions Delivery	Integration, implementation, and sustainment of corporate business application software.	Technology investment that focuses on the Town’s business and technology strategy to add value.	Microsoft Copilot – Opportunities to improve effectiveness, efficiency and consistent communications across the organization.
Business Intelligence – Data Integration and Analysis	Partner with Business Centres to build the tools, technology, and knowledge needed for effective data analysis. Actively identify and develop opportunities that promote data literacy and drive data-informed decision making. Develop and manage data standards that improve how data is stored and exchanged, for the consistent collection and interoperability of that data across different systems, sources, and users.	Empower the organization to make decisions based on real-time, accurate data and insights.	Microsoft Fabric Enhance the Town’s ability to manage, analyze, and leverage data effectively.
NEW SERVICE Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Innovation	Explore AI’s potential within the organization and identify suitable use cases. Design and launch small-scale AI pilots to test solutions in real-world conditions. Expand successful pilots into full-scale implementations across the organization.	Proactively explore and implement AI technologies to be responsive to the community’s evolving needs.	Budget for ongoing research and innovation.



Why change now? What is the need?

In 2024, the Town conducted research and piloted two new Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. These initiatives revealed opportunities to enhance service delivery and data-driven decision-making.

Microsoft Copilot

Microsoft Copilot, powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) is designed to work alongside employees, providing real-time assistance with automating routine tasks, and offering intelligent suggestions that help staff work more effectively. Copilot for Microsoft 365 integrates with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams, and OneNote. Some benefits include:

- Preparing reports
- Note taking abilities and creating meeting summaries
- Providing research assistance
- Drafting responses
- Automating repetitive tasks
- Interacting with complex data

Microsoft Fabric

One challenge with municipal data is that data is located on many different systems. It is not easy to gather and analyze the data in a quick, efficient, and real-time manner. Microsoft Fabric offers significant benefits by providing a unified platform that integrates and centralizes data from various sources across business centres. This integration enhances data accessibility, providing real-time, consistent information for informed decision-making. Additionally, Microsoft Fabric's advanced analytics and AI capabilities enable the extraction of valuable insights from large datasets, optimizing services and operational efficiency.

To build on these successful pilots, Administration proposes the establishment of an Artificial Intelligence and Innovation service, which will drive future AI initiatives and foster ongoing innovation. This service will position the Town as a leader in municipal technology. Investing in these technologies is essential to responding to the community's evolving needs.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

The community will benefit through improved service delivery and increased access to information.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

Incorporating Microsoft Copilot into the municipality's operations is a strategic investment that can significantly enhance consistent communication, productivity, streamline processes, and improve the overall efficiency of service delivery. Some organizations have shown a time saving of 30 minutes per user daily, in which the employees can dedicate more efforts to initiatives and services. If it can save a user just two hours a month, the license cost is already paid for with a return on investment (ROI) of over 100%. Microsoft Fabric will significantly enhance the Town's ability to manage, analyze, and leverage data effectively.



Microsoft Fabric offers numerous benefits that align with the Town's goals of improving service delivery, operational efficiency, and data-driven decision-making. According to a Forrester Total Economic Impact™ (TEI) study, Microsoft Fabric delivers a 379% ROI over three years with a payback period of less than six months. This substantial ROI is driven by several factors, including increased productivity, enhanced business outcomes, cost saving via consolidation, improved efficiency, and contributes to employee satisfaction and retention.

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-fabric/blog/2024/06/03/forrester-total-economic-impact-study-microsoft-fabric-delivers-379-roi-over-three-years/>

AI has the potential to transform many aspects of our operations, enhancing efficiency, improving service delivery, and driving innovation across various areas of municipal services. Artificial Intelligence and Innovation as a new service will allow the Town to pilot innovative AI products and build the infrastructure necessary to integrate AI into our operations.

Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.150	0.150	0.1500	0.150	0.150	\$0.750



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

BUSINESS LICENSING

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
B.4.2.a Business Licensing Bylaw Stewardship	Services related to the review and issuance of land use and development permits or licenses	Remove process steps in the issuance of business licenses to ensure, when all licensing requirements are met, the license is issued within 1 business day.. Payment is available in person and phone.	\$0.079 per year revenue reduction

Reason for the Change?

To streamline business licensing processing, ensure a registry of new and existing businesses is created to ensure the Town is able to properly support new business growth and business expansion in the Town.

Why change now? What is the need?

Requirements to obtain a business license have grown over time to include roles and functions that are more properly the responsibility of the applicant to obtain from other levels of government.



What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

Scenario	Estimated Yearly Revenue Change	Remaining Variance
Flat \$200 Fee	(\$21,000)	82%
Flat \$160 Fee - Metro Region Average	(\$79,000)	33%
Flat \$140 Fee - Provincial Average	(\$108,000)	8%
Flat \$60 Fee - Lowest Provincial Fee	(\$224,000)	(91%)

Currently, the Town of Okotoks business license fee is not reflective of average fees. Council has the discretion of establishing the appropriate fee. Based on a review there are four options, provided above. Administration is recommending to reduce the current annual licensing fee to the Metro Region Average option which will result in a revenue loss of \$0.079M annually.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	-\$0.079	-0.079	-0.079	-0.079	-0.079	-\$0.395M

Improvements in the Town's service delivery model is expected to benefit the annual renewal process from a speed and quality perspective.

**WHO
DOES
WHAT**
SERIES



The Municipal Role In **CHILD CARE**

Contributors:

Martha Friendly, Gordon Cleveland, Sue Colley, Rachel Vickerson,
Carolyn Ferns, Carley Holt

Editors:

Gabriel Eidelman, Kass Forman, Enid Slack

About IMFG

The Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance (IMFG) is an academic research hub and non-partisan think tank based in the School of Cities at the University of Toronto.

IMFG focuses on the fiscal health and governance challenges facing large cities and city-regions. Its objective is to spark and inform public debate, and to engage the academic and policy communities around important issues of municipal finance and governance. The Institute conducts original research on issues facing cities in Canada and around the world; promotes high-level discussion among Canada's government, academic, corporate, and community leaders through conferences and roundtables; and supports graduate and post-graduate students to build Canada's cadre of municipal finance and governance experts. It is the only institute in Canada that focuses solely on municipal finance issues in large cities and city-regions.

IMFG is funded by the City of Toronto, the Regional Municipality of York, the Regional Municipality of Halton, the Regional Municipality of Durham, the Regional Municipality of Peel, Avana Capital Corporation, Maytree, and the Neptis Foundation.

About the Urban Policy Lab

The Urban Policy Lab is the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy's training ground for urban policy professionals, offering students career development and experiential learning opportunities through graduate fellowships, skills workshops, networking and mentorship programs, and collaborative research and civic education projects.

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Gordon Cleveland is Emeritus Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Toronto Scarborough and a researcher in the field of early childhood education. In 2017–18 he was the main author of *Affordable for All: Making Licensed Child Care Affordable in Ontario*, a comprehensive report to the Ontario Ministry of Education. From November 2022 to date, he has been a member of the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care, advising the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development on the implementation of the \$10-a-day program. He writes on child care policy issues at www.childcarepolicy.net.

Sue Colley is the Chair of the Board of Building Blocks for Child Care (B2C2) www.b2c2.ca. B2C2 is a community resource that assists not-for-profit and public child care and community organizations in Ontario prepare to expand by providing advice and support in all phases of the project. Sue was a founder of Action Day Care and first Executive Director of the Ontario Child Care Coalition. She has played an important role in major studies of child care policy and programs for the University of Toronto, the City of Toronto, and the Province of Ontario. Sue is also the Secretary-Treasurer of Rise Up Feminist Digital Archive (<https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/>), a digital archive of feminist activism in Canada from the 1970s to the 1990s. She has an M.B.A. from Edinburgh Business School.

Rachel Vickerson is the Policy and Project Manager at Child Care Now, coordinating their pan-Canadian project Educators Matter: Workforce Policy for Quality Early Learning and Child Care. She has previously held positions as the Interim Executive Director at the Association for Early Childhood Educators Ontario and a Research Officer at the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, and has published on child care governance, early childhood educator well-being, and child care programs' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rachel holds a Master's degree in Public Policy from the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, and is committed to bringing the voices of educators, families, and children into the policy-making process.

Carolyn Ferns is the Public Policy Coordinator at the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC), Ontario's central advocacy group for a universal, affordable early learning and child care system. Carolyn has been active in Canada's child care movement for over 20 years, including as an early childhood educator, a policy researcher, and an advocate. Carolyn sits on the boards of both Child Care Now (Canada's national child care advocacy association) and the Childcare Resource and Research Unit. She is the author of many articles, reports, and position papers on child care policy, including the *Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario*. Carolyn has a Master of Arts degree in Early Childhood Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University.

Carley Holt is a Registered Professional Planner and Principal Planner at the City of Edmonton with over a decade of experience in policy planning and project management. She holds a Master of City Planning degree from the University of Manitoba, with her graduate research focusing on the municipal role in supporting child care, including a comprehensive analysis of Canadian precedents.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

In 2021, the federal government introduced a Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program, to be implemented through federal–provincial/territorial bilateral agreements. The program followed on the federal government’s budget commitment to provide parents with, on average, \$10-a-day regulated child care spaces within the next five years.

With the notable exception of Ontario, along with, to a limited degree for some years, Alberta, child care in Canada has not historically been delivered by municipalities. The CWELCC provides an opportunity for a significantly enhanced role for municipalities to increase access to quality child care.

In this series of papers, the authors examine the ability of municipalities to fund, manage, and deliver child care in response to the increased demand. Martha Friendly reviews international precedents for federally funded and municipally managed and/or delivered child care with a view to learning from their experiences and considers the advantages that a heightened municipal role could play in strengthening Canada’s newest social program. Gordon Cleveland and Sue Colley investigate the roles and responsibilities of the different orders of government and how they will change in light of the CWELCC, with a focus on actions that Ontario will need to take over the next 20 years. Rachel Vickerson and Carolyn Ferns discuss how governments can play a role in addressing the dire need for early child care educators, while Carley Holt proposes a roadmap for municipalities that brings stakeholders together to establish distinct approaches for their communities.

Municipal

Friendly explores how municipalities can become more significant players in boosting access to early learning and child care, considering both public management and public provision as opportunities.

Cleveland and Colley look at the history of the delivery of child care in Ontario, the changes that the CWELCC will bring to the municipal role, and the importance of municipal involvement in provincial planning.

Vickerson and Ferns discuss the importance of staffing; they argue that municipally operated child care provides, on average, better working conditions and wages than private or non-profit care.

Holt provides examples of cities across Canada that have defined a role in supporting accessible, equitable, and high-quality early learning and child care initiatives, and presents a list of seven key actions that municipalities can take to achieve these goals.

Provincial

Friendly notes that the implementation of the CWELCC’s goal of reducing parent fees substantially was met, or nearly met, by all provinces and territories by the end of 2022 – but that this success has driven demand for more child care programs, turning a spotlight on the need for equitable expansion in each province.

Cleveland and Colley provide a list of actions Ontario will need to take over the next 20 years to fully develop the early learning and child care system, including more operational funding, better compensation for educators, loan guarantees for capital expansion for both non-profit and public organizations, and increased subsidies for children with special needs.

Vickerson and Ferns recommend that provinces improve their expansion planning, including removing legislative barriers, and develop province-wide workforce strategies and pay scales for early childhood educators.

Federal

Friendly notes that, until 2021, there was no defined federal role in, or funding for, building a Canada-wide child care system. She reviews international precedents from the European Union, where senior governments provide funding and goals, while municipalities largely manage and deliver child care, based on the principle that services should be delivered by the level of government closest to those who are affected (i.e., subsidiarity).

Cleveland and Colley foresee the necessity for further funding from the federal government to meet the expected demand for child care spaces in Ontario over the next 20 years.

Intergovernmental cooperation

Friendly points to examples of new kinds of partnerships between municipalities and provinces, such as a municipal organization in Manitoba that worked with the provincial government, using provincial and federal funds, to create and

construct modular child care centres in rural and First Nations communities.

Cleveland and Colley criticize Ontario's lack of collaboration with local municipalities in child care planning since signing the CWELCC agreement, and call for the formation of a new provincial body to ensure that Ontario's Child Care Action Plans reflect municipal knowledge and priorities.

Vickerson and Ferns argue that the federal government should include municipalities in child care policy-making. Involving municipalities in the CWELCC agreements' intergovernmental meetings and its Implementation Committees would enable them to align child care with other priorities and bring local expertise in operation and system management to the table.

Holt notes the importance of creating a board or committee that focuses on early learning and child care and involves key stakeholders and all order of governments in order to form partnerships and create collaborative, sustainable solutions.

About the Who Does What Series

Canadian municipalities play increasingly important roles in addressing policy challenges such as tackling climate change, increasing housing affordability, reforming policing, and confronting public health crises. The growing prominence of municipalities, however, has led to tensions over overlapping responsibilities with provincial and federal governments. Such "entanglement" between orders of government can result in poor coordination and opaque accountability. At the same time, combining the strengths and capabilities of different orders of government – whether in setting policy or in convening, funding, or delivering services – can lead to more effective action.

The Who Does What series gathers academics and practitioners to examine the role municipalities should play in key policy areas, the reforms required to ensure municipalities can deliver on their responsibilities, and the collaboration required among governments to meet the country's challenges. It is produced by the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance and the Urban Policy Lab.



Image by Tanaphong Toochinda via Unsplash <https://bit.ly/4cr6p0N>

Who Does What: The Municipal Role in Child Care

Backgrounder: Municipalities and Child Care

By Gabriel Eidelman and Spencer Neufeld

Gabriel Eidelman is Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, and Director of the Urban Policy Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy.

Spencer Neufeld has a Master of Public Policy degree from the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy.

Child care is a necessity for millions of Canadian families. More than half of children under the age of six attend either licensed or unlicensed child care.¹ Despite recent progress by the federal government toward developing a universal, Canada-wide child care system, child care and early learning services – often referred to as early childhood education (ECE) – remain the primary responsibility of provincial

and territorial governments, as the constitutional division of powers grants provinces jurisdiction over education and related social services (child care does not appear in the 1867 *Constitution Act*). Less obvious is the role Canadian municipalities play in designing and delivering child care and early learning services in their communities.

This backgrounder outlines the role of municipal governments in the funding, regulation, planning, and provision of child care in Canada. First, we review the extent to which municipalities work independently to provide child care and early learning within provincial legislative constraints. Next, we outline where and how municipalities collaborate with provincial and federal governments in child care policy development and service delivery.

Municipal action within legal and fiscal constraints

Overall, municipalities “do not play a large role in child care Canada-wide.”² In most parts of the country, local governments have no formal responsibility for child care. Instead, provinces and territories oversee child care policy, with partial funding from the federal government through both conditional and unconditional grants. Very few municipalities have their own child care policies; even fewer

Table 1: Number of Municipal Child Care Centres and Spaces, by Province

Province	Centres (% of provincial total)	Spaces* (% of provincial total)
Newfoundland and Labrador	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Prince Edward Island	2 (1%)	90 (1%)
Nova Scotia	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
New Brunswick	3 (<1%)	97 (<1%)
Quebec	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Ontario	109 (2%)	6,173 (1%)
Manitoba	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Saskatchewan	3 (<1%)	157 (1%)
Alberta	4 (<1%)	77 (<1%)
British Columbia	63 (2%)	2,218 (2%)

*Regulated spaces for children 0–12 years, including before- and after-school programs. Number of municipal spaces are authors’ estimates except for Ontario, which is specified in source data.

Source: Compiled from Jane Beach, Martha Friendly, Ngoc Tho (Tegan) Nguyen, Patrícia Borges-Nogueira, Matthew Taylor, Sophia Mohamed, Laurel Rothman, and Barry Forer, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2021* (Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2023).

operate their own child care centres, accounting for less than 1 percent of all regulated child care spaces (Table 1).

Ontario is a notable exception where local governments have operated or overseen child care centres since the 1940s. As set out in the 2014 *Child Care and Early Years Act*, municipal governments in Ontario are mandated by law to serve as “service system managers” with primary responsibility for child care and ECE services.³ The province retains authority to prescribe overall standards related to licensing, health and safety inspections, maximum class sizes, staffing levels and qualifications, wages, and training requirements. Within these bounds, municipalities are responsible for drafting service plans and setting local operational policies, as well as, most importantly, administering financial subsidies to service providers on behalf of the province.

The Act also allows municipalities to operate their own child care premises and early years programming. As of 2021, 16 Ontario municipalities operated 109 child care centres, totalling 6,173 spaces (out of a provincial total of 464,538 spaces for children 0–12 years, including before- and after-school programs).⁴ These numbers have declined dramatically in recent decades, down from 18,143 spaces in 1998, due to municipal fiscal challenges.⁵ The City of Windsor, for instance, closed all its municipally operated centres in 2010.⁶

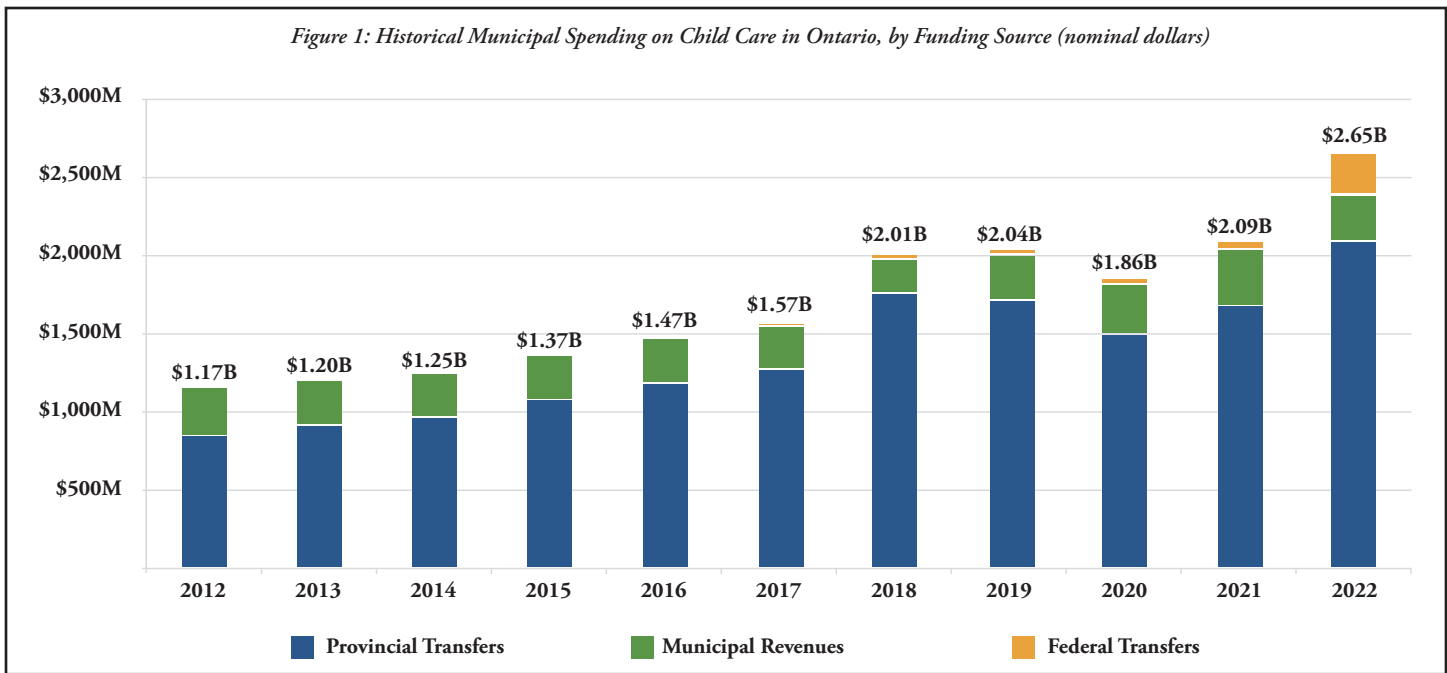
In large, single-tier municipalities such as the City of Toronto, child care is overseen by dedicated municipal departments that, in addition to operating their own facilities, oversee dozens of private and non-profit local operators. In two-tier municipalities such as Peel, York, Durham, and Halton, child care is administered, but rarely operated, by the upper-tier regional municipality. In small

or rural municipalities, responsibilities are often shared across multiple municipalities via district social services administration boards. All told, Ontario’s 444 municipalities are organized into a total of 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs).

Funding for child care in Ontario is shared between the province and municipalities, formally allocated via a complex formula last revised in 2019–20 that considers demographic figures, cost-of-living indicators, existing service levels, and expansion plans.⁷ In practice, however, this formula is as much a product of political negotiations between provincial and municipal officials as of technocratic decision making.⁸

According to Financial Information Return data from the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario municipalities spent \$2.7 billion on child care services in 2022 (Figure 1), covering staff salaries and benefits, subsidies for eligible families, and rents and other system management costs. Approximately 78 percent (\$2.1 billion) of this total was offset by provincial transfers.⁹ Until 2021, the federal government provided less than 2 percent of child care funding. After signing on to the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Agreement in 2022, federal transfers to Ontario rose to 10 percent of overall expenditures (including retroactive payments for the 2021–2022 fiscal year), and are projected to eclipse total provincial funding to the system by the time the agreement expires in 2026.¹⁰ The remainder, in the order of \$300 million per year – 11% of expenditures in 2022, is funded via municipal own-source revenues (i.e., property taxes and user fees). Toronto’s net expenditures for child care amount to approximately \$90 million per year.¹¹

Figure 1: Historical Municipal Spending on Child Care in Ontario, by Funding Source (nominal dollars)



Source: Compiled by author from Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Financial Information Returns. <https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/fir/index.php/en/financial-information-return-en/>

Outside Ontario, only a few dozen municipalities operate their own child care centres, mainly in British Columbia. The B.C. Ministry of Education and Child Care is ultimately responsible for child care and early learning across the province, including operational funding and fee subsidies for low-income families. Nevertheless, several municipalities actively engage in child care policy, such as amending zoning bylaws and land use plans to encourage new construction of child care spaces, or placing conditions on the type of child care operators eligible to receive public funding.

The City of Vancouver, for example, has played a “significant voluntary role” in child care planning and funding.¹² In 2022, Vancouver City Council adopted a 10-year child care strategy to expand access to child care across the city – the city’s fourth child care plan since 1990.¹³ The strategy defines child care as an essential service, sets out goals to secure more non-profit child care spaces, affirms the rights of Indigenous families to access Indigenous-led care, extends city capital grant programs and nominal lease arrangements for non-profit child care operators, and streamlines planning approvals for non-profit child care centres located within civic facilities (e.g., community and recreation centres), particularly in low-income and under-served communities.

Similarly, the City of Richmond adopted its own 10-year child care strategy, an update to the Child Care Development Policy it first published in 2006. The plan calls for a net increase of 3,741 child care spaces by 2031, to be enabled by a review and update of city bylaws, zoning, and development approval processes.¹⁴ This strategy is in addition to other

supportive city policies and programs, such as a child care needs assessment program; a child care development reserve fund, financed through developer contributions, earmarked for creating child care centres in city buildings and on city lands and for covering non-capital expenses such as program development and research; and a child care development advisory committee, which reports to city council.¹⁵

In Alberta, just four small, rural municipalities currently operate their own child care centres.¹⁶ But this was not always the case. At one time, Alberta’s municipalities both delivered public child care and supported non-profit child care. Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and several other municipalities operated as many as 66 child care centres, with thousands of spaces. Many local governments also provided direct subsidies for low-income families. However, in the 1980s, the province took back authority for child care, redirecting operational funding to the for-profit sector. As a result, the municipally operated child care sector in Alberta “has almost entirely disappeared.”¹⁷

In recent years, Alberta’s largest cities, such as Edmonton and Calgary, have developed some strategies and policies related to child care. For example, the City of Edmonton established the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care in 2019, which brings together municipal, provincial, and civil society representatives twice a year to coordinate child care services, with particular emphasis on low-income and vulnerable families.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the City of Calgary recently introduced a new regulation and licensing regime

for home-based child care businesses outside the scope of provincial regulations.¹⁹

Municipal cooperation and coordination with other orders of government

Local governments are rarely included in meaningful consultation or cooperation arrangements between provincial and federal governments. Consider the recent series of CWELCC agreements, negotiated and signed bilaterally between the federal government and all 13 provinces and territories. The agreements, which collectively aim to create 250,000 new child care spaces across the country and reduce parent fees to \$10 a day by 2026, mention municipal governments sparingly, and were negotiated without meaningful consultation or input from local governments.²⁰ Even in Ontario, where municipal “service managers” administer child care services province-wide, and will be expected to develop updated service expansion plans, register licensed operators, and distribute federal funding, municipalities were not invited to the negotiating table.²¹

British Columbia arguably exhibits the most collaborative policy environment. For example, in 2019, the City of Vancouver, the Government of British Columbia, and the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council signed a \$33 million memorandum of understanding, which sets out joint targets for new child care spaces in the city and includes funds for a dedicated Early Learning and Child Care Planner staff position to support urban Indigenous children and families.²² This work is supported by the Vancouver Child Care Council, formerly known as the Joint Council on Child Care, which meets twice a year to improve coordination between the City, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, the Vancouver Board of Education, and Vancouver Coastal Health.²³ British Columbia also recently provided up to \$1 million to local governments, through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, to create new non-profit or public child care spaces in municipal facilities.²⁴

Outside British Columbia, however, municipalities seldom collaborate with provincial governments on child care policy beyond routine land use planning and building approvals. For example, in the Quebec system, the provincial government oversees every aspect of child care services, with no role for municipalities. The province distributes all operational funding to non-profit and for-profit providers (known as *centres de la petite enfance*, *garderies*, or *jardins d'enfants*); sets maximum parent fees; approves business licences; conducts health, safety, and quality inspections;

and establishes training and certification standards. No municipalities in Quebec operate their own child care centres (nor do any other public authorities), though provincial legislation does allow municipalities to sell, donate, or rent municipal buildings to child care centres free of charge.²⁵

Conclusion

All in all, the municipal role in child care is limited, in both scale and scope. Only a small number of municipalities have voluntarily adopted dedicated child care strategies, action plans, or policy frameworks. Those that do choose to engage tend to offer capital grant programs for operators, provide fee subsidies for low-income families, convene child care planning tables or advisory committees, or conduct child care needs assessments.²⁶

Ontario is the major exception. There, municipalities are mandated by law to serve as child care system service managers, with primary responsibility for service planning, implementation, and

financial administration – as well as involvement to a lesser extent with funding and direct provision, given that the majority of services are delivered by not-for-profit and private entities. In no cases, however, are municipal governments treated as equal partners in intergovernmental policy discussions or funding negotiations.

Local governments are rarely included in meaningful consultation or cooperation arrangements between provincial and federal governments.

The Role of Municipalities in Canadian Child Care: What Do They Do? What Could They Do? How Could They Make a Difference?

By Martha Friendly

Martha Friendly is the Founder and Executive Director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU).

New challenges and opportunities for child care

Early learning and child care is undergoing unparalleled change in Canada today. Although most of the country's supply of regulated child care survived the COVID-19 pandemic, child care emerged in a weakened state as financial and staffing crises severely affected the viability of services across Canada. As these challenges have coincided with the introduction of a new, ambitious federal pledge to build a universal Canada-wide child care system, new solutions to the policy conundrum of dramatically and rapidly expanding access to child care are very much needed for the program's success.

In most of Canada, municipalities have never played a key role in child care.

This paper explores whether municipalities could become a significant partner in enhancing access to the much more available, publicly funded, publicly managed, high-quality child care system now envisioned Canada-wide. This is timely, as a political commitment has been made to transform Canada's child care situation from a market model with limited public funding and limited accessibility for parents to a universal, high-quality, inclusive system. As Canadian child care in a policy and provision sense is still in its infancy, the possibilities for learning from experience and evidence are many.

Until 2021, there was no defined federal role in or funding for building a Canada-wide child care system, and provinces' and territories' policies have been varied and shifting. Despite some discrete advances, no jurisdiction has taken a sufficiently comprehensive approach to develop a workable system, leaving child care as a scarce and inequitable market service.

One important element of Canada's market child care model has been that responsibility for creating the supply of child care services has been almost entirely a private one. This has meant that developing child care programs has been left mostly to private non-profit voluntary organizations and parent groups and to the for-profit sector, which runs the gamut from individual "mom and pop" centres to "big

box" private-equity-backed corporate chains.²⁷ As a result, regulated child care is in short supply or non-existent in many locales; research shows that in 2022, almost half of children below school age lived in "child care deserts,"²⁸ with marginalized low-income, newcomer, and rural families especially left out.^{29,30}

In 2021, the federal government initiated the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan, setting out a framework by which the federal government and provincial and territorial governments will transform Canada's child care market into an accessible child care *system* over time. Its first concrete step was to begin reducing parent fees substantially, a goal met, or nearly met, by all provinces and territories by the end of 2022. This significant change, however, has had the effect of bumping up public demand for more, and more equitably distributed, child care programs, turning a spotlight on the critical need for greatly expanded and more fairly distributed child care services.

As Canadian child care in a policy and provision sense is still in its infancy, the possibilities for learning from experience and evidence are many.

It is here that the clear fit of an enhanced role for municipalities with a transformed early learning and child care system is most striking. The idea of a significant municipal role in child care is neither unique to Canada nor new within Canada. However,

an analysis of such a role, where it exists both in Canada and beyond our borders, and of what it could achieve in a transformed Canadian child care system, has not yet been on the agenda. This paper is concerned with the potential role municipalities³¹ (or municipal-level governments) could play in strengthening access to high-quality child care services. It discusses two main areas in which municipalities could be more extensively involved in Canada:

- local public management of child care supply and the service system, and
- public delivery of child care services.

The paper includes examples of municipal roles in several of the early childhood education and child care systems in the European Union, then discusses municipal roles in Canada. Finally, it considers the advantages that a heightened municipal role could play in strengthening Canada's newest social program as it rolls out.

Why a municipal role in child care?

In many countries, the local level of government plays an important role in early learning and child care (ELCC).³² In countries with child care systems that are further developed than Canada's, such as Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, France, Slovenia, and Germany, the municipal level of

government is most often responsible for managing and administering child care services, planning and supporting these services, and ensuring child care is available to meet parental demand. The operation of child care programs – both centres and regulated family child care where it is part of the system – is a second important municipal role; in many countries, most child care services are operated by municipal governments.

One of the drivers for a strong local role in child care in Western Europe’s relatively well-developed child care systems has been the concept of subsidiarity: an approach to social organization based on the view that the lowest-level competent authority available should take responsibility for an undertaking. A key benefit of applying this concept to local management of child care systems is that it enables democratic participation of community members, parents, and children to ensure that child care provision is responsive to local needs, since

the local level “best understands the needs of local populations and where participation can most easily occur.”³³

This arrangement, however, will not be successful without balance: it is important to recognize that although communities are the place where the policies of senior levels of government are implemented “on the ground,” local responsibility is sustainable only if it is supported by both the high-level policy control and the financing that are generally the purview of more senior government levels. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has described how decentralization in early childhood education and care may lead to weak policy and to inequality unless there is close collaboration among all orders of government and civil society, as well as key roles for senior levels of government. Based on a wide-ranging analysis of 20 countries’ early childhood education and care systems, the OECD observed that

it seems important to ensure that early childhood services are part of a well conceptualised national policy, with on the one hand, devolved powers to local authorities and on the other, a national approach to goal setting, regulation, staffing, pedagogy and quality assurance.³⁴

A 2023 report by the Jimmy Pratt Foundation in St. John’s, Newfoundland, posed the question “Why should municipalities play a role in child care?” and went on to answer it as follows:

One of the drivers for a strong local role in child care in Western Europe’s relatively well-developed child care systems has been the concept of subsidiarity: an approach to social organization based on the view that the lowest-level competent authority available should take responsibility for an undertaking.

Governments have tools at their disposal that not-for-profit organizations do not. They have access to demographic data to help them forecast demand for child care. They also benefit from economies of scale in the areas of construction, human resources, and administration. Governments can more easily use vacant public buildings for new projects. Generally speaking, public-sector centres are the best employers, providing the best working conditions for ECEs with less staff turnover, better working conditions and better benefits.³⁵

International approaches to public management and public provision

Internationally, municipalities play two main roles in child care. The first is the public operation of child care services,³⁶ whereby municipal governments themselves deliver the services. The second is one of public management and

administration of many aspects of local child care provision. This may include administering funds from senior levels of government; managing staffing; structuring community and parent involvement; assessing quality and implementing improvements; providing pedagogical input and management,

in-service training, and professional development; forecasting demand; and – not least – planning and developing services.

The international examples of municipal involvement in child care that follow are all drawn from unitary countries – Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. These countries offer useful examples at least in part³⁷ because municipal governments generally have an expanded role in unitary systems. The examples are offered not as much to suggest that Canada should mimic Sweden, Denmark, or Norway, but to illustrate the role governments that are responsive to local needs can play in making a child care system function well. As the principal level of sub-national government in unitary countries, municipalities necessarily perform some of the functions that may be performed at a provincial or state level in a federation. When considering the application of the Scandinavian approach to child care management and provision to a federal country like Canada, the enhanced fiscal capacity of municipal government in a unitary context must also be taken into account.

Public management

In Sweden's well-developed, mature child care system, municipalities have been responsible for child care policy and provision since 1975 when, with the introduction of the first national *Preschool Act*, child care became a mandatory area of municipal responsibility: "municipalities were obliged to take responsibility for [child care] expansion."³⁸

The recognition that adequate provision of child care is in the self-interest of local communities to ensure their sustainability, prosperity, and growth emerged during Swedish child care's expansion phase. This was a key factor in the successful roll-out of Sweden's child care system between 1970, when the major expansion was initiated, to the mid-2000s, by which time the number of child care spaces for preschool- and school-aged children had increased from 70,000 to over 750,000 – more than tenfold.³⁹ Barbara Martin Korpi attributes Swedish child care's successful growth from the 1960s to the 1980s to this "municipalization":

The state and municipalities undertook to provide an increasingly larger proportion of the financing, day care centres and play schools gradually came under the auspices of the municipalities. Municipalisation of nurseries received strong support from the municipalities themselves and the trade union organisations. The need for coherent municipal planning was the main reason behind the municipalisation process, as well as more even and higher quality combined with more secure financing. The staff wanted municipalisation in order to get more secure working conditions.⁴⁰

Norwegian municipal responsibility for child care provision also dates to 1975, with Norway's first *Kindergarten Act*.⁴¹ The Norwegian national government made child care a children's right in 2009, but it is still "municipalities and counties that are the key players in providing significant social and education programs including child care, education and health care," with municipalities responsible for reaching specific targets set by the national government and for making local decisions within the national framework and objectives.⁴²

The role of municipalities in public management of child care is similarly central in Denmark. The national child care framework legislation assumes that "the state has the overall responsibility, and municipalities are responsible for local organization [of child care] within the framework of

the law."⁴³ Danish municipalities not only create, supervise, and inspect centres but are responsible for managing parent involvement and administering funding, including the collection of parent fees. Municipal pedagogical experts work closely with educators on quality improvement on an ongoing basis, and local child care curricula are based on the national government's early childhood act. Key decisions on matters such as program standards, however, are usually made at the national level. For example, the national parliament recently passed a new law strengthening staff-to-child ratios across all of Denmark.⁴⁴

Public delivery

Municipalities in many countries also play a key role in the direct delivery, or operation, of child care as a public service.⁴⁵

In countries that have built relatively mature child care systems with universal coverage over the last 30–40 years, municipal operation of child care services is the norm, although there are also private non-profit and some for-profit provision almost everywhere.

This is the situation in Austria,⁴⁶ Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, and elsewhere. The Canadian landscape is quite different, as the following section describes, as is that of other countries that rely heavily on market-based child care: the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. In these countries, the operation and provision of services are primarily privatized, with hefty reliance on parent fees, as well as demand-side funding such as vouchers, benefits, and low-income parent subsidies to distribute public funds.⁴⁷

Sweden provides a good example of a system with a high level of public child care provided by municipalities. It was during the period of Swedish child care's rapid expansion that publicly operated child care services mushroomed, with municipally run centres built in old and new housing, as well as in a variety of public spaces and free-standing facilities. Korpi noted that

[i]n 1941 the municipalities ran around seven per cent of the few institutions existing at that time... By the end of the 1960s, the expansion of day care centres under the municipalities had clearly started. In 1970 almost all pre-schooling [i.e., child care] – 96 per cent – was municipal.⁴⁸

The concept of government "steering" of child care provision, as used by the OECD in a 20-country thematic review of early childhood education and care provision, can

The recognition that adequate provision of child care is in the self-interest of local communities to ensure their sustainability, prosperity, and growth emerged during Swedish child care's expansion phase.

be applied to municipally operated child care. This concept suggests that linking child care more closely to government is usually more effective than relying on the market.⁴⁹ Local government – which is well positioned to respond to local needs – can plan, locate, and design child care to address needs at the neighbourhood level, as well as consider cultural factors, child age groups, and parental needs, such as child care at non-standard hours. Responsiveness and equity are more elusive in child care markets than in more publicly managed models, and can be better achieved with appropriate government steering, including municipal service delivery.

Although recent research suggests that child care in the Nordic countries and in France has been experiencing “intense marketisation and privatisation development,” child care in these countries remains predominantly publicly provided, usually by municipalities.⁵⁰ In Denmark, municipally operated child care made up 80.2 percent of total provision in 2021 (including family child care); 11.2 percent of centres were “independent” (non-profit) and 8.5 percent were “private” (for-profit).⁵¹ In Sweden, although private (both non-profit and for-profit) child care provision has grown, more than 70 percent is municipally operated.⁵² In Germany, where child care provision is quite variable by state, about one-third is reported to be municipally provided, with most of the remainder non-profit or church-run.⁵³ Norway, where for-profit provision has been allowed to grow to represent a more sizable minority of services than in other Nordic countries, recently issued new requirements and accountability for for-profit operations.⁵⁴

The role of Canadian municipalities in child care

Although there has long been some municipal involvement in Canadian child care, it has been quite limited, with models of municipal involvement remaining local and regional. Canada has mostly relied on the “third sector”⁵⁵ to “initiate and deliver child care – part of a long tradition of voluntary sector delivery of social and personal services,”⁵⁶ with mainly small or midsize entrepreneurs playing a sizable service-provision role in some regions and child care from “big box” corporations and sizable chains growing in the last decade or so.⁵⁷

Outside Ontario, the municipal level of government has rarely assumed responsibility for the management or administration of child care services. Nor has there been much interest in municipalities operating child care services in much of Canada, with exceptions in Ontario, Alberta, and, more recently, in British Columbia.

Ontario

Ontario municipalities have long played a unique role both in managing child care services – a role that has strengthened over the years – and in operating public child care (both child care centres and family child care) – a role that has diminished substantially in the last two decades. Municipalities have been an important aspect of child care in Ontario since World War II, when child care centres were set up for women working in war-related industries. Post-war, the municipal role was enhanced as municipalities began to share child care funding with the province to replace withdrawn federal funding.

A 1981 Ontario government child care policy paper stated, “The significant municipal role contributes to greater appropriateness of local services...and should be retained and strengthened.”⁵⁸ A 1987 policy paper, *New Directions for Day Care*, strengthened the municipal role in child care by increasing support for local planning, community

participation, and local initiatives such as community needs assessments.⁵⁹ Ontario municipalities’ “local service management” role was mandated by a Conservative government in 2000, building on the network of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and

District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). These municipal and regional entities were established to oversee social services during a period of provincial social-service cutbacks, downloading, and amalgamation of municipalities.⁶⁰

Today the Ontario government retains primary control over child care but delegates responsibility and some discretion to the 47 CMSMs and DSSABs. These are tasked with managing provincial child care funding, including fee subsidies for lower income families; paying a specified local share; conducting local service planning; and managing child care services. They have also voluntarily assumed other roles, such as quality assessment⁶¹ and improvement, professional development, and research. Local service system managers may shape some aspects of their child care services within provincial rules and permission. Recently, some discretionary municipal policies, such as using the results of quality assessments to determine funding disbursements or choosing not to fund for-profit operations,⁶² have been curtailed by the current Ontario government.

In addition to this mandated local service management role, Ontario was at one time the primary provider of

Outside Ontario, the municipal level of government has rarely assumed responsibility for the management or administration of child care services.

municipally operated child care in Canada. During World War II, Ontario was one of two provinces to take advantage of the federal government’s offer to share child care centre operating costs, and its municipalities operated many wartime day nurseries. When federal support for child care ended after the war, a number of Ontario municipal centres remained open. In Toronto, the municipal government ran most programs for children below school age, leaving the school board responsible for care for older children. This post–World War II municipal involvement came to play a significant role in the development of child care in Ontario after the federal Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was introduced in 1966, with its provisions that were to shape Canadian child care for more than 40 years.⁶³

Municipal child care delivered a substantial minority of Ontario child care for many years, often prioritizing low-income families. As recently as 1998, 18 percent (18,143 spaces) of Ontario’s child care supply was municipally operated. This number has since diminished very substantially, as both the non-profit and for-profit sectors grew and many municipally operated services closed. For example, all of Peel Region’s 12 regional centres closed in 2012, all five of the Region of Waterloo’s centres closed in 2020, and by 2023 even the City of

Toronto was only operating 39 centres and one family child care agency, down from 56 centres only a few years earlier. In 2021, only 16 Ontario municipal entities were operating 109 centres with 9,464 centre spaces (6,980 full-time spaces for children five years old and under, and 2,484 before- and after-school spaces for 4-to-12-year-olds) out of a total of 464,538 centre spaces for children 12 and under; 13 CMSMs and DSSABs operated regulated family child care agencies.

Alberta

Alberta is the only other province with a long history of municipal child care involvement. Unlike Ontario’s, Alberta’s municipal role was never mandated and did not include a local service management role. At one time, Alberta municipalities both delivered public child care and supported non-profit child care. In the 1960s and 1970s, Alberta’s provincial *Preventive Social Services Act* allowed municipalities to operate and support child care as an “approved preventive social service.” When the federal government introduced the CAP’s child care provisions, some child care costs were shared by Alberta municipalities, the province, and the federal government, as in Ontario. But at the end of the

1970s, the Alberta government “largely removed municipal level governments’ financial capacity to develop, support and deliver child care services in response to community needs, and repositioned them as potential service providers or supporters of services, on a similar footing with private non-profit and for-profit organizations.”⁶⁴ Several of the large Alberta municipalities then sought, and the federal government allowed, direct transfer payments for child care through the CAP without a provincial contribution (a “flow-through”).⁶⁵

In the mid-1970s, Alberta municipalities supported or operated 66 child care centres. At the peak level of municipal child care in Alberta in the 1980s, 11 of these centres were municipally operated by Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer, while Grande Prairie operated a family child care agency. By the end of the 1990s these had all been privatized, a shift attributed to the end of the federal CAP and its flow-through funding, along with the rise of

the neo-liberal Reform Party.⁶⁶ Today, four other Alberta municipal entities – Beaumont, Jasper, Drayton Valley, and the Municipal District of Opportunity (a northern, primarily First Nations, community) – operate child care centres, all of which are local, rather than provincial, initiatives that arose after

During World War II, Ontario was one of two provinces to take advantage of the federal government’s offer to share child care centre operating costs, and its municipalities operated many wartime day nurseries.

the demise of Alberta’s first phase of municipal involvement in child care.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, which has a different history of municipal involvement in child care, there is a unique and growing municipal role. In the absence of a provincial mandate for municipalities to participate in child care, the City of Vancouver has played a significant voluntary role in the planning, funding, and/or support of non-profit child care since the 1990s, when Vancouver established a Civic Child Care Strategy.⁶⁷ Over the last 30 years, Vancouver has developed and adapted its child care policy. Most recently, a ten-year strategy approved by City Council in 2022 outlines how the City “aims to support access to a new universal system of early care and learning led by provincial and federal governments.”⁶⁸

The City of Vancouver’s child care strategy incorporates policy on child care directions, demand forecasting, creating services through a City-initiated non-profit child care agency, and negotiating for child care as a community benefit in the City’s land use planning and development process. It also

provides capital grants to non-profit services, funded by the municipality mainly from development fees. The City of Vancouver does not operate any municipal child care centres.

Several of the other municipalities that make up Metro Vancouver also play a role in child care, although a less extensive one, supporting child care through zoning, demand measurement, and rental provisions; some have also developed child care strategies or included child care in their official community plans.⁶⁹ For example, suburban Surrey has adopted a child care strategy that includes planning, assessment, monitoring, and consultation with the community, as well as advocacy to the province for funds. The 2022 Surrey Community Child Care Action Plan outlines a proactive planning and initiating role to increase the supply of non-profit child care, although it does not raise the possibility of municipally operated child care.⁷⁰ The City of Richmond has undertaken multiple child care initiatives, including needs and assessment research, annual action plans, community advisory committees, needs forecasting, and – most recently – the development of publicly owned child care facilities with non-profit operators.

Building on Vancouver's now several-decades-long experience in child care planning, the British Columbia government has supported child care planning as part of its effort to expand the supply of services. Using federal funds, the provincial government provided funds for child care planning and space creation to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) through the Child Care Community Planning Program and the Community Child Care Space Creation Program.⁷¹ With these funds, UBCM engaged municipalities to develop local child care needs assessments, create child care services, and begin integrating child care into local initiatives and public spaces. For example, the City of Delta recently submitted a motion for consideration at the 2023 annual meeting of the UBCM “requesting the provincial government to provide funding to local governments to coordinate implementation of municipal child care action plans and projects developed through New Spaces Funding to support the expansion of child care.”⁷²

Municipal operation of child care centres in British Columbia has been increasing markedly, with the provincial government identifying 63 municipal child care centres in 2021. Interestingly, non-municipal publicly operated child care in British Columbia is also increasing: the Province reported 302 publicly operated child care centres in 2021,

including both centres operated by school authorities and those operated by First Nations.⁷³

Other provinces and territories

A very small number of municipally operated centres are found in other provinces and territories. In addition to the Ontario, Alberta, and BC municipal child care provision already described, in 2021 municipally operated child care was identified in five other provinces and territories, with centres operated by three small rural Saskatchewan municipalities, two centres in Prince Edward Island, and three in New Brunswick.⁷⁴

In the current climate of pressure for child care expansion, new kinds of municipal initiatives have also emerged. In southern Manitoba, for example, JQ Built, an organization created by municipalities, has developed a collaborative approach to designing and constructing important community infrastructure. The JQ Built team

has worked with the Manitoba government to create and construct modular child care centres in rural and First Nations communities using federal and provincial funds. In addition to collaboration among municipal governments, part of the idea is to try out a “day care in a box” template for the rapid construction of child care facilities that can be adapted and replicated elsewhere.⁷⁵

It is also of note that, while Newfoundland and Labrador municipalities are not permitted to operate licensed child care, a 2023 report by the Jimmy Pratt Foundation aimed at “driving public sector expansion” has recommended that the province

[a]mend the Municipalities Act (1999), City of St. John's Act (1990), City of Mount Pearl Act (1990), and City of Corner Brook Act (1990) to allow municipalities to directly provide child care services.⁷⁶

Could enhanced roles for municipalities make a difference in child care access in Canada?

Cities matter. This perspective motivated the Alberta-based Muttart Foundation's proposition that it is “important to at least consider how municipal governments might participate more fully in the management, planning and delivery of early learning and care in partnership with the provincial and federal governments.”⁷⁷ This proposition was put forward before the introduction of the CWELCC plan; it is even more salient today.

Building on Vancouver's now several-decades-long experience in child care planning, the British Columbia government has supported child care planning as part of its effort to expand the supply of services.

Given the pressure to expand child care in every part of Canada, there is substantial room for municipal governments to become more significant players in boosting access to early learning and child care, considering both public management and public provision as opportunities. The transformation of Canada's scarce, inequitable, market-based child care provision system into one that is universal, high quality, inclusive, and equitable will necessarily be a long-term process. Thus, there is considerable room for learning from experience and evidence originating both inside and outside Canada. The international examples in this paper of municipal management and delivery of child care in the Scandinavian countries are provided not to illustrate off-the-shelf solutions but to indicate what Canada can learn from the experiences of other countries. Although the countries discussed are unitary states with different circumstances, there remains value in not only knowing why we do what we do, but also asking ourselves how we can do it better⁷⁸ by adapting good ideas to Canadian realities.

Pragmatically speaking, municipalities have, or could have, the capacity and tools to take a leading role in the local exploration and planning, improvement, development, and expansion of expanded child care services. As the local sites responsible for urban planning of residential, recreational, and commercial development, municipalities are in a prime position to assess, anticipate, and document local needs, and well placed to respond by making public buildings and land available. Adopting a proactive steering role could make municipalities key in the processes and possibilities of service expansion activities. As child care services expand to fulfill coverage targets, local public management also has the capacity to create efficiencies of scale while remaining sensitive and responsive to local needs.

It would also be logical at this time – in which a substantial, equitable expansion of regulated child care is urgently needed – for Canadian municipalities to undertake to operate more public child care services than the relatively few currently available across the country. This undertaking could, in the broadest sense, take inspiration from the “municipalizing” dimension of child care system-building in Sweden described by Barbara Martin Korpi, keeping in mind that such an undertaking would require support from senior levels of government – the federal government and provincial/territorial governments.

It is worth reiterating that there is no jurisdiction with a well-developed universal child care system in which publicly operated services are not prevalent – they are in fact usually the predominant mode of delivery. Policy analysts note that, although non-profit service providers will continue to play an important role in Canadian child care, they need additional support and funding. But it is unfair and impractical to assume that the non-profit sector has sufficient resources and capacity to fill the many large gaps in Canada's child care supply. Thus, a mixed not-for-profit model that combines substantially more public child care and more, better-supported, non-profit child care has much promise.

The CWELCC plan is ambitious, setting out to transform child care provision from a scarce, costly market model to an equitably distributed, affordable, accessible, high-quality opportunity for all families and children – and a social and economic benefit to Canada. In support of the principle of accessibility, it has laid out targets for expanding the number of child care spaces Canada-wide. To live up to these aspirational principles, effective strategies, planning, and tools are indicated.

Strengthening the role of municipalities in child care through policy and practice is not the sole catalyst needed to successfully implement the envisioned universal system. But along with other policy fundamentals – such as sufficient, effective public funding of services, and solutions to the pervasive “wicked” child care workforce issues – more local public management and more public service provision by municipalities can be important factors in securing the early learning and child care system that so many have envisioned for so long.

Given the pressure to expand child care in every part of Canada, there is substantial room for municipal governments to become more significant players in boosting access to early learning and child care, considering both public management and public provision as opportunities.

The Municipal Role in Child Care in Ontario: What Should the Future Look Like?

By Gordon Cleveland and Sue Colley

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In the next few years, child care is set to become one of the largest areas of municipal government expenditure in Ontario, rivalling roads, transit, wastewater, and policing. By 2026, funding to make child care more affordable and accessible – most of it managed and distributed by municipalities – will reach about \$5 billion annually in Ontario. This is more than double its level in 2018.⁷⁹ The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario believes that an additional 227,000 child care spaces will be needed beyond what is planned for 2026, so \$5 billion is certainly not the final figure.⁸⁰

On top of the operating funding managed by municipalities, substantial capital funding from a combination of public and other sources will be needed to create these new child care spaces, at upwards of \$50,000 a space. The intent is that most of the new spaces will be in the not-for-profit sector, and municipalities will be heavily involved in planning and facilitating this expansion.

Since the funding and management of child care services will be such an important municipal government activity in the near future, it makes sense to look at the roles and responsibilities of different orders of government that are jointly responsible for what will happen.

Municipalities are mandated to have a central role in planning and delivering child care in Ontario; this municipal role is unique across Canada's provinces and territories. According to Section 65(1) of Ontario's *Child Care and Early Years Act* and the accompanying regulations, 47 single-tier (city) and upper-tier (regional) municipalities are designated to be service system managers for the delivery of child care services. Known, respectively, as Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs), they are now collectively referred to as service system managers (SSMs).

Most child care funding does not come from municipal own-source revenues,⁸¹ but is provided to these service

system managers by the provincial government. Since the signing of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement between Canada and Ontario in March 2022, the federal government is also a very significant funder of child care, in support of its strong policy vision of a universal and affordable system of largely not-for-profit and public child care services. There are also child care programs operating on 58 First Nations territories in Ontario – 73 licensed centres and 65 child and family programs. These child and family programs provide a range of services and supports to family and child well-being in Indigenous communities.

Looking backward: What provincial and municipal roles have been

We need to look both backward and forward to understand the appropriate roles of Ontario's municipalities and the provincial and federal governments in relation to child care.

Before the federal-provincial agreement of March 2022, municipal and provincial responsibilities were reasonably well defined. Right now, the roles of different orders of government are in considerable flux.

In the next few years, child care is set to become one of the largest areas of municipal government expenditure in Ontario, rivalling roads, transit, wastewater, and policing.

Situating the provincial role

The province has established a legislative framework for licensed child care,⁸² and is responsible for licensing new programs and for monitoring and enforcement. It established the broad income and activity eligibility rules for child care subsidies. Until now, it has provided the large majority of funding for child care in Ontario, and in 2013, in consultation with municipalities, it established the funding formula that allocated early years and child care funding among the province's municipalities. The legislation requires that licensed services implement the provincial play-based pedagogy *How Does Learning Happen?*

The *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007*, established the College of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario. The College is the self-regulatory body for the early childhood education profession in the province. In 2015, the province also established and funded a wage supplementation program for some staff in regulated child care services. Starting in 2010 the province phased in and funded free full-day junior and senior kindergarten for children aged four and five during the school year, operated in schools by school boards. The program was fully implemented by 2014. Full-day kindergarten had important short-term negative impacts on the demand for licensed child care, destabilizing the sector.⁸³

Situating the municipal role

As service system managers, municipalities across Ontario have been the direct providers of most of the public funding that child care operators receive, including child care subsidies on behalf of eligible parents, operational funding, and wage enhancement grants. They administer special-needs resourcing in their communities to allow children with special needs to participate in early years and child care programs. Municipalities have also been responsible for developing multi-year local early years and child care service plans to meet future needs. This planning is typically collaborative with local school boards and service providers, parents, and community representatives. In many municipalities, there are some child care services owned and operated by the municipality. Municipalities also provide support to local child care providers in areas such as governance, finance, operations, and service planning. In many communities, municipal authorities have developed and implemented quality-assessment programs that provide important oversight of safety and quality standards.⁸⁴

The planning and system management roles of many Ontario municipalities are large. Outside Ontario, only British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec have more child care centres than Toronto, which has nearly 1,000.

There are 11 Ontario municipalities that have well over 100 child care centres to monitor and fund.

The municipalities have had considerable discretion in the expenditure of child care funding. In particular, they could reflect local priorities in allocating money to child care subsidies versus operational funding or to lower parent fees versus operational funding directed at improving staff compensation. Some municipalities gave operating funding to not-for-profit centres only; others gave operating funding equally to both not-for-profit and for-profit centres.⁸⁵

Toronto could decide, as it did, to allocate child care subsidies to eligible families on a first-come-first-served basis, refusing to choose which eligible families were most in need; other municipalities used different allocation rules. Municipalities could establish rules about which child care services should be preferred in contracts to care for subsidized children. By 2018, 16 out of 47 municipalities had decided, based on judgements of service quality, that they would only sign new purchase-of-service agreements with not-for-profit child care operators. Other municipalities made different decisions.

Toronto decided that financial accountability was best served by insisting that all operators with purchase-of-service agreements should submit detailed annual budgets justifying the fees they charged the City for the care of subsidized children. In contrast, many other municipalities decided that they were willing to pay purchase-of-service operators the average municipality-wide parent fee in each age category, without further financial documentation. In short, there was considerable municipal discretion in the way that general provincial child care policies were implemented. Municipalities were attuned to local needs and preferences, as determined by their local Councils.

Changes in the municipal role

The CWELCC agreement has begun to change almost everything about child care in Ontario. For the first time,⁸⁶ the federal government came to the table with very significant sums of money; by 2026, it will be spending more money on child care in Ontario than the provincial government does. Before these agreements were signed, the provincial

government had been reducing expenditures on licensed child care, favouring instead tax expenditures on a child care credit that would subsidize parent expenditures on any form of care. The offer of federal money convinced the Ontario government

to shift gears and apparently adopt the federal vision. This vision would transform Ontario child care from a service predominantly funded by parents to one overwhelmingly funded by governments, where licensed services are widely available to parents at a fee of \$12 a day on average. Additional child care subsidies would reduce the parent fee for some families even further, bringing the average fee down to \$10 a day.

The CWELCC changes are having important impacts on the municipal role. Municipalities no longer have discretion over the provision of operating funding to providers participating in the CWELCC program – they must provide exactly the amount of funding that replaces revenues lost by what was initially a 25 percent cut from the fee charged on March 27, 2022, and now is a cut of slightly more than 50 percent compared to that date. Ontario is now discussing a new funding formula to amend this revenue-replacement model,⁸⁷ but the rules governing the funding of each centre will still be determined by the province rather than by municipalities. Municipalities will become pass-through agents – deliverers of funding – rather than decision-makers regarding the local allocation of child care funding.

As service system managers, municipalities across Ontario have been the direct providers of most of the public funding that child care operators receive.

On top of this shift, Ontario has effectively frozen the total number of child care subsidies available, further reducing municipal discretion. In addition, Ontario has passed regulations eliminating municipal discretion about which centres should be preferred to provide services to subsidized children. Municipalities in Ontario previously had the discretion to use measures of quality as a criterion for their willingness to purchase child care services from operators; this is no longer permitted.

Moving toward universal, affordable, accessible child care

If Quebec's experience is a relevant guide, it is likely to take at least 20 years before the early learning and child care system in Ontario is fully developed. It took about that long for the supply of child care spaces in Quebec to catch up with demand. What that means is that each Ontario municipality will be preoccupied for at least the next 20 years with managing the development of a universally accessible and very popular local child care system.

These municipalities will be dealing with the turbulence associated with a system in which service demand exceeds service supply and in which issues of access, expansion, adequacy of funding, and quality require very regular attention.

What actions will Ontario need to take over the next 20 years?

- As demand for child care services increases, there will need to be more operational funding from governments. In Ontario, \$5 billion per year will not be enough. If the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) is right about the eventual need for over 227,000 additional spaces beyond those currently planned, both federal and provincial governments will need to come up with more annual money.⁸⁸ In the meantime, there will be shortages of capacity and waiting lists for inexpensive child care.
- Educators in child care centres are currently paid as if they had a high school education, instead of the two-year college diploma that is actually required.⁸⁹ It is becoming increasingly urgent to raise the compensation and working conditions of qualified educators; current compensation levels are insufficient to maintain and increase the supply. Colleges will have to graduate more new educators, and graduates who have left the sector will have to be attracted back.

If Quebec's experience is a relevant guide, it is likely to take at least 20 years before the early learning and child care system in Ontario is fully developed.

- Non-profit and public child care facilities will need to expand much more rapidly than they currently are. Provincial and municipal governments will have to make significant planning decisions about priorities for expansion and will need to coordinate getting local permissions, new licences, and access to predictable operating funding. Either provincial or municipal governments will need to make loan guarantees to ensure non-profit child care providers have access to billions of dollars of one-time capital funding from private or public sources over the next decade. Organizations that can design and develop child care facilities will have to be mobilized, and there will need to be a major expansion in the number of not-for-profit or public organizations willing and able to operate child care facilities.

- The Ontario Ministry of Education has mandated that the municipalities prioritize expansion of child care spaces to low-income, racialized, Indigenous, francophone, new immigrant and special-needs children in the context of supply shortages. Meeting this goal will require increased numbers of child care subsidies and increased funds dedicated for children with special needs. It may also require public management of child care waiting lists.

Taking the actions required to meet the challenges of the next two decades cannot be done without full involvement of municipalities in the planning and administration of all aspects of the CWELCC system. It has inappropriate and counterproductive for Ontario to plan the development of the province's child care system without consulting municipalities. However, that is exactly what happened in 2022 when Ontario signed the Canada-wide agreement with the federal government, including its detailed plans for multiple years of system expansion.

Since negotiating the CWELCC agreement, Ontario has changed its plans frequently. It has already made major revisions to the workforce compensation plans detailed in the agreement. It has zigzagged on system funding and management rules. It is anticipating substantial capital expansion without any capital grants for community spaces. If we want to know why Ontario has done such a poor job so far of designing workforce compensation supports, of planning system expansion, and of developing a new operational funding system, an obvious contributing cause

would be its failure to develop these plans collaboratively with Ontario's municipalities.

Recommendations for a municipal-provincial partnership in child care

Ontario has been slow in developing a new funding system for the radically altered child care system it is bringing to birth. So far, the province's modus operandi is to issue a new plan and then ask for comments on an online, preset form. Much better would have been to involve municipalities in designing new funding rules with the following principles in mind:

- Operational funding that is predictable, indexed, and multi-year is a prerequisite to expand system capacity to meet local needs.
- Funding should be based on a consistent and equitable formula that reflects the true costs of local services.
- Operational funding should incentivize quality (through, for example, regular professional development, increased numbers of registered early childhood educators, adequate planning time, higher wages, benefits, and pension plans), should encourage parental involvement, and should cover new administrative requirements for providing information on costs, enrollments, and accountability.
- Funding and management rules need to guarantee the provision of sufficient data to public managers and need to ensure substantial financial and program accountability. Further, the funding formula should provide a flexible framework within which service system managers can operate that allows them to use the right mix of approaches to address unique local needs and circumstances.

Without a doubt, responsibility for child care and early years services is shared. Provincial legislation and regulations establish the framework within which the child care system will develop; therefore, changes in legislation and regulations occur necessarily at the provincial level. However, delivering affordable child care services so that they are universally accessible to meet the diverse needs of different families across Ontario has to be a collaborative, ongoing activity. Further, the province and the federal government have the money; municipalities do not. Property taxes will not rise as women's labour-force participation and GDP rise, but provincial and federal income taxes will. Therefore, municipalities should

not be expected to rely on the property tax base to share the costs of child care services with the provincial government.

The municipal role is different:

- Municipalities can and should be principal actors in planning the locations and characteristics of the rapid local expansion of capacity that will be necessary, including finding public lands, building new child care centres, and holding and managing some child care assets. The province should provide financial support for this critical municipal role.
- Municipalities are likely to have a prominent role in monitoring and assessing funding claims by operators, administering child care subsidies to low-income families, administering services for children with special needs, and providing funding both for family home child care and for child and family centres (typically branded as EarlyON centres). Municipalities will also be responsible for assessing the quality of services locally. And they will provide essential feedback to the province about what is and is not working for local providers and families.
- Municipalities should have substantial control over licensing decisions. This would include the decision to grant a licence based on the need for early learning and child care in a particular location as specified in the local municipal service plans. Currently, provincial licensing consultants have the power to grant exemptions from existing regulations to child care centres if they do not have sufficient qualified staff. These are called "Directors' approvals." Such exemptions are on the rise and really need to be curtailed. Municipalities should have a role in these kinds of decisions.

Going forward, it seems clear that action plans⁹⁰ negotiated every several years between provincial and federal governments will be the major system planning tool, establishing multi-year priorities for billions of dollars of federal funds. A new province-wide body needs to be formed to ensure that Ontario's CWELCC action plans reflect municipal knowledge and priorities. It would involve large and small municipalities from different parts of the province, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, francophone and anglophone school boards, First Nations and other Indigenous representatives, and other key stakeholders, such as representatives from community colleges, the College of Early Childhood Education, the

Ontario has been slow in developing a new funding system for the radically altered child care system it is bringing to birth.

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, Building Blocks for Child Care, and the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario, in discussing and deciding on multi-year plans with the provincial government.

If the transition of Ontario child care toward a universally accessible service is going to be successful, municipalities will need to be full partners in how this transition is managed. The municipal role in child care – unique to Ontario amongst provinces – has been and still is potentially a source of enormous strength. Now is the time to transform the shared provincial and municipal responsibility as regards to early learning and child care into a more productive and collaborative partnership.

Public Works: How Municipal Child Care System Management and Operation Can Help Solve the Child Care Workforce Crisis

By Rachel Vickerson and Carolyn Ferns

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A Note about Terminology: *The term "early childhood educators" (ECEs) is used to describe individuals who have completed a one- or two-year post-secondary program in early childhood education. Every province, and Yukon Territory, has its own certification process that identifies the level of education required. Ontario is the only province in which Registered Early Childhood Educator is a legislatively protected and regulated title. There are also many staff working within child care settings who do not have ECE certification and may have completed a six-week orientation course or have no recognized credentials.*

Introduction

This paper will focus on the role of municipally operated child care and how it can provide accessible child care built on a foundation of quality work environments for early childhood educators (ECEs), particularly within the new Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program. It will highlight several case studies of municipal child care programs in order to explore the policies and governance structures that enable these programs to provide, on average, better working conditions and wages than privately delivered non-profit or for-profit care and discuss how each level of government can support municipal child care and play a role in solving the ECE recruitment and retention crisis.

The current context of early childhood education

The federal government's CWELCC plan includes a commitment to create 250,000 new child care spaces by 2025–26.⁹¹ However, in every region of the country, these expansion goals are constrained by a child care workforce retention and recruitment crisis. Across the country, child care programs are struggling to staff their existing spaces and cite the lack of educators as a major factor preventing them from expanding.⁹²

ECEs have long cited poor working conditions and low pay as deterrents to staying in the sector long-term. In the first cross-Canada survey of ECEs in 1991, respondents selected "providing a better salary" as the most important thing needed to make child care a more satisfying work environment.⁹³ While there have been modest improvements to wages in the last 30 years, 2021 Census data shows that early childhood educators and assistants working in child care

centres only earned median hourly wages between \$18.65 and \$21.32 nationally, depending on the number of hours in the full-time work week.⁹⁴ This makes work in child care uncompetitive compared to occupations with similar levels of education and training.⁹⁵

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated systemic issues facing the child care workforce. In a survey by the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child care in 2021, ECEs reported increased stress with the onset of the pandemic, and 43 percent of respondents reported that they had considered leaving the sector since then.⁹⁶ The factors that motivate ECEs to stay in the field are similar across the country: ECEs want livable wages that recognize their qualifications and skills, compensation such as benefits and a pension, and a working environment that supports professional learning and career advancement.⁹⁷

Recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs are not only necessary for expanding the availability of child care services, but are also crucially important for providing high-quality programs for children. For both accessibility and quality reasons, retaining a qualified, engaged workforce of ECEs should be a priority for governments at every level.

Role(s) of municipalities in child care management and provision

While the majority of child care in Canada is operated by the private sector (71 percent non-profit and 29 percent for-profit), in many parts of the country there is also a small amount of publicly operated child care. Public bodies that operate child care include First Nations, school boards, and municipalities.

Ontario is the only province in which municipalities are mandated to act as service system managers for child care and are responsible for the administration and funding distribution for licensed child care programs within their regions. Some Ontario municipalities also operate child care programs directly, although this role is discretionary rather than mandated. These municipalities are unique in their dual role of child care system management and operation.

In 2021, Ontario had 109 municipally operated child care centres, and the largest proportion of municipally operated spaces of any province or territory, although municipally operated centres also exist in smaller numbers in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.⁹⁸

Municipal child care in Ontario: Trend, countertrend, and a new provincial attack

The next section will use case studies to explore the advantages of municipal child care operation, especially for the child care workforce, and the potential that the expansion of municipally

operated child care could have for stabilizing the sector, improving access, and ameliorating the workforce crisis.

Starting in 2010 with the closure of centres directly operated by the City of Windsor, publicly operated child care centres began a decreasing trend that lasted a decade. As municipalities struggled with budget shortfalls, they were often spurred on by consultants' reports that identified child care as a target for cuts, and chose to cut discretionary spending on directly operated child care.⁹⁹ But more recently, some municipalities have responded to pressure from families needing access to child care and to the challenges of the child care workforce shortage by starting or expanding municipal child care operation. As highlighted in the Rainy River and Russell Township cases discussed below, we have begun to see a countertrend as some municipalities have expanded their directly operated services, and some rural and northern municipalities have found that public delivery is the solution to providing child care where the private market has failed to provide reliable services in less-populated and more remote areas.

In January 2024, the Ontario government announced requirements which could lead to further closure of municipal child care and produce a chilling effect in municipally operated child care expansion. According to Ontario's 2024 Early Years and Child Care Funding Guidelines, all municipal child care programs are required to undergo independent "value for money" audits.¹⁰⁰ The purpose of the audits is to determine if funding is "being used efficiently and effectively by directly operated centres, and whether the child care services could be offered by a third-party provider instead." Further, although service system managers are responsible for local expansion planning, the Province is requiring them to de-prioritize expansion of publicly operated child care. According to the 2024 funding guidelines, service system managers are required to ensure that "opportunities for community-based delivery participation are exhausted before direct child care delivery by the CMSM/DSSAB (Consolidated Municipal Service Managers/District Social Services Administration Boards)." (Note that "community-based delivery" is not required to be non-profit.)¹⁰¹

Benefits of municipal child care for the child care workforce and sector stability

Public operation of child care can be important to "steering" the system by "linking planning and implementation more effectively than waiting for the market to respond."¹⁰² Publicly operated child care programs have also been found to be effective in meeting service gaps, piloting innovative practices, and addressing emerging issues. In the current context, the child care workforce crisis is a major issue that public innovation can help address.

The specific objectives behind operating municipal child care centres, and the centres' characteristics, vary, but there are

overall trends. ECEs and other program staff at municipally run centres are usually employees of the municipality, and are afforded the same decent work standards enjoyed generally by other public sector employees: pensions, benefits, a salary scale, pay equity, and transparent human resource policies. As public sector employees, they are also unionized at a higher rate than ECEs in the private sector, and able to engage in the collective bargaining process to win higher compensation and benefits.¹⁰³ Opportunities for learning, career growth, and full-time hours are often more accessible in municipal child care, due to the larger scale of the public entity and its diverse opportunities, than in a standalone child care centre.¹⁰⁴ For example, in the small municipality of Fort St. John, British Columbia, the part-time program staff of the municipality who operated the Strong Start program (a drop-in family resource program) were also able to work part-time in the municipally operated child care program – resulting in more stable, full-time hours for the staff and an increased ability to retain these educators for both programs.¹⁰⁵ As the 2021 review of Toronto’s directly operated centres notes, “Public delivery of early learning and child care is associated with better working conditions, increased compensation for educators and higher-quality programming.”¹⁰⁶

Municipal child care also has a positive spillover effect on the employees of privately operated child care centres in the area. In Peterborough, Ontario, when the City Council proposed closing municipal child care centres in 2019 as a cost-saving measure, local non-profit child care operators joined the municipal workers’ union and local families in successfully advocating to keep municipal centres open, arguing that the public programs provided a benchmark for wages and working conditions and played a leadership role in the community.¹⁰⁷ In the 2023 City of Toronto Budget Guidelines for Child Care Centres with Fee Subsidy, the salary schedule that the City encourages community programs to meet is comparable to Toronto’s directly operated centres.¹⁰⁸ Municipal centres and other publicly operated programs often host professional development and additional pedagogical training that is open to all ECEs, increasing capacity in the community as a whole.¹⁰⁹

Case studies of municipal child care in Ontario

The following case studies, which encompass the City of Toronto, Russell Township, and the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board, illustrate how improved working conditions, relative to private and non-profit operators, have improved the stability and quality of child care services.

City of Toronto

Canada’s largest city directly operates 46 child care centres, as well as a home child care agency, Toronto Home Child Care (THCC), which employs independent providers to deliver

licensed early learning and child care in their homes. A 2021 external review of the City of Toronto’s directly operated child care centres found that these programs

- have a larger number of educators who are qualified compared to both the for-profit and non-profit sectors,
- provide staff with more hours of professional development, and
- offer career development and career pathways within directly operated child care and other City divisions.

As a result, Toronto’s directly operated programs

- do not experience the staff turnover challenges that are frequent in the private sector,
- have better quality scores and less variability in Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) rankings, and
- have fewer licensing infractions compared to other centres.¹¹⁰

Overall, reviewers concluded that the directly operated programs “operate efficiently with lower than average administrative and related costs while providing high-quality jobs to a largely low wage, racialized, female-dominated sector.”¹¹¹ In a 2020 study of 501 child care centres in Toronto, ECEs in Toronto’s 41 municipally operated centres made an average of \$31.85/hour, significantly higher than average wages at for-profit multi-site centres (\$18.16/hour) or non-profit multi-site centres (\$22.21/hour).¹¹²

Russell Township

On January 30, 2023, the small Eastern Ontario community of Russell Township’s Council took the latest steps in the municipality’s ongoing development as a local child care operator: a 20 percent increase in salary for all staff.

As a lower-tier municipality, Russell Township has no obligation to operate child care or even a mandate as a service manager. But in a letter to residents, Mayor Pierre Leroux described the Township’s work in this area as “an invaluable necessity for the continued growth of our community. This step is part of the Township of Russell’s plan to attract and maintain personnel in a field of work currently facing significant labour shortages while increasing daycare spaces in our Township.”¹¹³

The child care initiatives are part of the Township’s response to growth, including a 21.6 percent increase in children aged nine and under between 2016 and 2021. The Township’s current plans for child care include

- taking over the operation of one closed and one struggling private child care centre and expanding them to create 456 new spaces, bringing the total number of directly operated spaces to 831;

- helping non-graduate educators with the cost of schooling toward obtaining a Registered Early Childhood Educator designation.

Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB)

The Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) in northwestern Ontario currently operates four child care centres, or “Ateliers” – half of the licensed child care programs in the region. Two are in Fort Frances and the other two are in the small communities of Atikokan and Emo, where they are the only child care programs available. But the DSSAB is in the process of assuming direct operation of all programs in the district.¹¹⁴

The motivations for this transition include improving the governance of programs and the retention and recruitment of qualified staff. The goal is to improve compensation for staff, including making child care staff eligible for pensions and benefits. The DSSAB is also aiming to improve the training of the early childhood workforce in the district, where only half have ECE qualifications; it is currently working with the local college to design in-service training and to support current staff in obtaining their qualifications.

Lessons to help governments meet CWELCC’s promise

The success of the federal government’s CWELCC system hinges on two linked objectives: increasing the number of child care spaces families can access across the country, and recruiting and retaining the thousands of ECEs needed to lead these programs and provide quality early learning environments and experiences for young children. Municipal child care offers insight into both: how to create the positive working environments that translate into staff retention and high-quality programs, and how to expand child care through public management and delivery. Each level of government has a role to play in meeting the two interconnected goals of workforce recruitment/retention and program expansion.

Municipalities should take a leadership role and open directly operated centres

International child care policy research suggests that countries that are further along the path to universal child care than Canada have reached this progress by slowly reshaping their

market-based systems into more publicly managed ones, including significant public delivery.¹¹⁵

Currently, municipal child care makes up less than 2 percent of Canada’s child care spaces. Public child care, particularly offered by municipalities, has a mostly untapped potential to reach the provinces’ child care expansion goals. Instead of hoping for private providers to decide to open a child care centre in underserved areas, municipalities can take a lead role in steering the public planning and implementation of child care expansion by building and operating their own centres. As public entities, municipalities are eligible for federal and provincial funds reserved for non-profit and public bodies.

Provinces should improve planning and remove barriers to public operation

Each province and territory has its own child care space commitments under its CWELCC bilateral agreement, and many are struggling to meet those commitments due to a lack

of provincial planning. The general approach has been to expect child care programs to independently decide to expand – something that is in any case difficult for them to do because of capacity and staffing challenges in the non-profit sector.¹¹⁶ Instead, publicly managed expansion plans are necessary – plans in

which the province can tap into resources, capacity, and facilities through a government-to-government relationship with municipalities. Ontario’s recent move to curtail public expansion goes in the opposite direction to what is needed; municipally operated child care should be the first resort, not the last.

Although most provinces and territories already allow for municipalities to own and operate child care, expanding the municipal role Canada-wide would also mean making legislative changes when necessary. For example, municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador are currently not allowed to directly operate licensed child care programs, and advocates and sector experts have urged the government to amend their municipal legislation to remove this barrier.¹¹⁷

Each province should develop its own workforce strategy and salary scale, looking to leaders in their jurisdictions for best practices

Municipal expansion cannot shoulder the workforce crisis alone. As Armine Yalnizyan noted about the initial rollout of the CWELCC, municipalities struggled with

Municipal child care offers insight into how to create the positive working environments that translate into staff retention and high-quality programs, and how to expand child care through public management and delivery.

implementation because there was “no overarching strategy or system for tackling this ambitious project.”¹¹⁸ But with the proper strategic direction, mandate, and support, municipalities could be a vital part of the CWELCC’s development. Provinces and territories should also learn from the best practices in place at municipal centres to implement competitive salary scales, benefits, and pensions, and decent working conditions for all educators in their jurisdictions in the form of province-wide workforce strategies. Municipal child care can continue to lead the way, piloting new human resources possibilities and acting as sites of innovation and exploration of best practices.

The federal government should include municipalities in child care policy-making and in intergovernmental policy spaces

Through the mechanisms in the CWELCC agreements, the federal government can facilitate municipal involvement in the agreement’s intergovernmental structures. Each agreement has an Implementation Committee which meets twice a year with representatives from the provincial and federal government to share data and monitor progress. So far, municipalities have not been invited to participate in negotiations or on these governance committees – a particularly problematic omission in Ontario, where municipalities have a legislated role as service system managers. As recommended in Tomas Hachard’s IMFG paper “A Seat at the Table,” priority policy areas, such as child care, are excellent spaces to implement quadrilateral relations and bring local knowledge and expertise to the federal and provincial government.¹¹⁹ In the case of child care, participation in these structures will enable municipalities to align child care with their other social-service priorities and to bring their experience with direct operation and system management to the provincial and federal governments.

A Roadmap for Empowering Municipalities: Improving Access to High-Quality Early Learning and Child Care Programs

By Carley Holt

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The rollout of the 2017 Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework across the provinces and territories offers hope for families grappling with the challenge of accessing suitable care.¹²⁰ Through investments, agreements, and established frameworks, this initiative signifies a transformative shift away from considering child care solely as a private concern for Canadians. However, the question remains: how do municipal governments contribute to advancing these endeavours, and what form does their involvement assume? Furthermore, what is the rationale behind their commitment to supporting these initiatives?

This paper aims to address these questions through a proposed roadmap that draws upon examples from municipalities across Canada that have already taken steps to define a role in supporting accessible, equitable, and high-quality early learning and child care (ELCC) initiatives. Through this examination, seven key actions emerge:

- creating a committee to pursue collaborative relationships,
- employing a child care coordinator,
- conducting a child care need assessment,
- creating a municipal child care strategy,
- establishing design guidelines for child care service providers,
- reviewing municipal zoning regulations to reduce land use barriers, and
- utilizing funding mechanisms that have already been implemented in most cities.

Each of these will be explored in more detail below.

A roadmap approach is not a novel concept for cities, as it has been employed in addressing challenges related to infill, housing, and economic initiatives. Roadmaps serve as important tools in identifying and formulating multifaceted approaches to tackling complex challenges using inclusive consensus-building processes that engage the community, stakeholders, and decision-makers. Through these processes, objectives are identified, a guiding strategy is developed, and policies and regulations are established or amended to address the identified challenges. Moreover, roadmaps help identify funding opportunities and ensure ongoing oversight and

continuous monitoring, enabling a proactive and responsive approach to implementation.

Note that this paper uses assumptions and illustrative examples; it is important to recognize that each local government may possess distinct resources or alternatives that warrant consideration in crafting a customized approach to address the distinct needs and requirements of its specific community.

Why Municipal Action Is Crucial

Municipal governments in Canada, defined by provincial or territorial legislation, hold specific responsibilities that go beyond mandated services like road maintenance, transportation, utilities, waste management, and emergency services. They have the flexibility to address community needs and desires, promoting overall well-being and economic sustainability.

Unfortunately, child care often gets overlooked amidst a multitude of competing priorities. In recent years, local governments have been actively reshaping cities and combatting urban sprawl and housing issues, while improving strategic approaches for the efficient use of capital spending to build more equitable, resilient, and sustainable communities. Guided by the principles of the Smart Growth planning movement, concepts such as Complete Communities and the 15-Minute City guide the strategic vision for municipal planning, aiming to provide residents with access to amenities, services, and job opportunities in close proximity to their homes. Recognizing the vital role of child care in enabling parental and guardian engagement to support this vision of community life, municipalities must prioritize child care as an integral part of their community planning efforts.

In a recent survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2022, the highlighted challenges associated with accessing child care services were found to have detrimental effects on the employment status of parents and guardians.¹²¹ The data showed that 38 percent of parents who used child care services had to make changes to their work or study schedules, 37 percent had to reduce their working hours, and 33 percent had to bear a higher financial burden than they had intended. Furthermore, among parents and guardians who were unable to find available child care spaces and therefore postponed their return to work, the percentage

was as high as 42 percent. When considering these statistics within the context of neighbourhoods characterized by significant family populations, it is important to contemplate the potential barriers to employment for some families and the adverse effects on the local economy.

By recognizing child care as a necessary service in neighbourhoods and defining solutions to reduce barriers to access, municipalities can directly contribute to supporting employment opportunities for families and fostering economic sustainability at the local level. Drawing upon the success of roadmaps in tackling various initiatives, the roadmap approach proposed in this paper is a practical method to create tailored solutions that prioritize accessible, equitable, and high-quality child care services for families within a community, particularly for municipalities that have not yet taken steps to address this issue.

The roadmap: Seven key actions for municipalities

1. Create a committee to pursue collaborative relationships

Initiating an ELCC-focused committee is a necessary first step for a local government committed to child care initiatives. These committees bring together a diverse range of stakeholders, including community development experts, educators, social-service and health-care providers, internal departments, and orders of government to collaborate on successful outcomes.

The aim is to provide more than an advisory role – rather, to actively engage in developing partnerships that support both municipal and provincial ELCC initiatives catering to the specific needs of the community, including Indigenous peoples, newcomers, individuals facing affordability and access challenges, and those requiring additional support. A preliminary examination of local governments across Canada suggests that collaborative efforts between municipalities and community partners lead to improved success in developing ELCC frameworks. Furthermore, these networks can identify, advocate for, and pursue private-public partnership opportunities through collaboration with developers or organizations interested in supporting ELCC initiatives.

An exemplary example of successful collaboration is the private-public partnership established to develop the Building Blocks on Balmoral ELCC in Winnipeg, which opened in

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2017. The Province contributed \$600,000 in a capital grant to the project in partnership with Great-West Life, which owns the building, and the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg. This innovative project not only enhanced child care options for Great-West Life employees and the local community by creating 100 child care spaces but also aligned seamlessly with the city's objectives of promoting walking, cycling, and using public transit – all while preserving a historic building. Working closely with a community committee provides municipalities with an external source of knowledge and advocacy, aiding in the cultivation of solutions that bring substantial benefits to children, families, and communities.

2. Drive efficiency and equity through a dedicated child care coordinator

If cities can benefit from employing economic coordinators and strategists to fuel investment, job creation, and equitable development, then why can't a strategist do the same for child care? Research findings suggest that investments in child care have significant economic benefits for communities, particularly for mothers.¹²² Improved access to child care has been shown to increase workforce participation and earnings, which can

positively impact the local economy and lead to increased tax revenues and improved gender equity.¹²³ Access to stable, quality early learning can increase long-term educational success and well-being, particularly for children in more vulnerable circumstances.¹²⁴ A

dedicated child care strategist could be the key to a community unlocking the full economic potential of families by increasing access to ELCC services supporting employment, promoting economic growth, and fostering community cohesion by promoting inclusivity.

Establishing a dedicated position specifically focused on supporting the coordination and planning of child care services is essential to enhance resource efficiency and facilitate effective policy implementation and advocacy at the municipal level. In cities like Richmond and Vancouver, employing a team of dedicated social planners has been instrumental in implementing child care strategies and partnerships. These social planners are responsible for developing and implementing policy measures and tools, such as securing child care spaces in new developments, coordinating and optimizing City partnerships with the child care sector and senior governments, and monitoring outcomes to enhance the availability of child care services.

This role may also include supporting data collection to identify service gaps in neighbourhoods or districts, working to eliminate the barriers to creating new child care sites, promoting best practices by evaluating the design and location of new sites, and developing synergies across city departments and with local school boards, the province, and external partners. Additionally, the role could foster relationships and communication with marginalized groups, including Indigenous communities, newcomers, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, and people living with disabilities. The scope of this position involves not only removing barriers to improve access to child care but also contributing to city policy and Council priorities aimed at promoting equity and economic prosperity.

3. Examine community challenges and opportunities through a child care needs assessment

To better understand the complex child care situation of a community, it is necessary to examine the unique challenges, barriers, and opportunities that exist by means of a child care needs assessment. This is a comprehensive study to evaluate and understand a community's child care-related

needs and demands within the specific geographic boundary, neighbourhood, or district. Considerations in the assessment should encompass social, economic, and demographic circumstances impacting families' access to high-quality child care services, along with analysis of anticipated

population projections related to future growth patterns and the development of new neighbourhoods. Preliminary community engagement, such as surveys or focus groups, may also help define barriers of access or quality for a particular group or within a geographic area. The needs assessment may also look at the availability of resources, city holdings, infrastructure, and existing funding mechanisms to develop a roadmap to outline the next steps.

The City of New Westminster provides a good example.¹²⁵ In 2008, it completed its first child care needs assessment, revealing a significant gap in quality child care services in the community. These findings served as a catalyst for the City Council to pursue the creation of a 21-action child care strategy aimed at improving access to high-quality child care services in the community. Over the next six years, the City witnessed an increase of nearly 42 percent in child care spaces due to the new policies and investments. This success highlights how conducting a needs assessment,

Establishing a dedicated position specifically focused on supporting the coordination and planning of child care services is essential to enhance resource efficiency and facilitate effective policy implementation and advocacy at the municipal level.

preferably on a cyclical basis, can lead to actionable solutions for addressing critical issues. In this particular case, it played a pivotal role in increasing access to ELCC services for the municipality’s residents. It also highlights the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that policies and programs are meeting the needs of families and improving outcomes for children in the community.

4. Create an innovative approach through a municipal child care strategy

Many municipalities across Canada have recognized the value of developing a municipal or regional child care strategy. Such an approach serves as an instruction manual for local government, outlining a roadmap for achieving actions and policies aimed at improving child care initiatives and creating new ones. The most successful strategies also include implementation plans that identify routes for funding and outline synergies across municipal departments, such as identifying potential city holdings for child care centres or anticipated development opportunities tailored to the community that can support city policy and Council objectives.

The Richmond Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy, which was adopted by Council in 2017, serves as a successful example of a multifaceted child care strategy. The strategy is updated every five years to ensure it is responsive to the evolving needs of the community with clear ties to the City’s policy objectives. Its purpose is to support the establishment of a resilient child care system within the community, providing a clear roadmap for the City’s actions. Emphasizing collaboration with key stakeholders, the strategy aims to collectively address the growing demand for accessible, high-quality, and affordable child care spaces. Notably, the strategy actions implemented between 2016 and 2022 led to a remarkable 44 percent increase in the availability of child care spaces in the city, encompassing various types of care. The Richmond strategy further highlights important emerging trends in ELCC services, such as the establishment of co-located Early Childhood Development Hubs offering both child care and family support services, along with emphasizing the significance of multilingual community engagement. It can serve as a valuable roadmap for other municipalities to consider in their own child care planning endeavours.¹²⁶

5. Establish design guidelines to champion quality spaces

High-quality ELCC programs focus on the healthy

development of physical and mental outcomes. A well-executed program incorporates policies and practices that promote positive interactions, responsive caregiving, and child engagement combined with well-designed, functional spaces. Although the responsibility for programming and licensing lies within provincial and territorial jurisdiction, establishing municipal design guidelines to direct the design and construction of child care spaces offers a tangible example of how a community can influence the development of purpose-built, high-quality care spaces.

Research emphasizes the substantial impact of a child care facility’s design on a child’s development and well-being.¹²⁷ Elements such as the layout, organization of spaces, and group and room sizes within the facility should promote age-appropriate learning, exploration, and social interaction while addressing environmental factors to prevent overstimulation for optimal child development. Essential components include

Research emphasizes the substantial impact of a child care facility’s design on a child’s development and well-being.

- safe outdoor play areas, which encourage physical activity through free play as well as promoting speech development, problem-solving, and gross motor skills;
- carefully selected colour schemes, textures, and materials that help to create sensory-friendly environments promoting calmness, security, and creativity;
- appropriate group (room) sizes for different age groups to maintain suitable care ratios, minimize stress for children and staff, and ensure adequate attention for each child; and
- access to adequate natural light indoors, which is linked to several developmental benefits, including impacts on cognitive skills, concentration, and learning outcomes.¹²⁸

Guidelines play a pivotal role in promoting high-quality facilities that reflect best practices for supporting the well-being and development needs of children. The absence of federal – and, often, provincial – direction makes it necessary for municipalities to develop their own guidelines for providers and builders in order to ensure a consistent level of quality across facilities regardless of location or building type.

The City of Vancouver’s Child Care Design Guidelines provide a good example, representing a multifaceted approach to quality child care that emphasizes the development of safe and nurturing environments.¹²⁹ These guidelines contribute to children’s well-being, with the long-term aims of enhancing the community’s overall health and socio-

economic stability by contributing to healthy development from an early age. Its key considerations include site selection, spatial programming needs (indoor and outdoor), building orientation, pedestrian and vehicle access, facility sizes, and shared spaces. Another helpful example is the Toronto Child Care Design & Technical Guideline, an evolving document designed to adapt as new concepts and research arise.¹³⁰

Such guidelines serve as a comprehensive framework for effective design and planning when constructing or renovating high-quality child care facilities. They provide detailed instructions and performance measures to aid spatial programming, furniture selection, wayfinding, materials selection, and safety measures and protocols. Effective guidelines also include best practices for optimal space utilization and instructions on enhancing building efficiency and sustainability.

The two examples mentioned above exemplify high standards, playing a significant role in setting benchmarks for child care environments

as more facilities are created annually.

Carefully researched municipal guidelines are crucial to ensuring that high-quality physical environments are standardized, especially in communities where provincial design guidelines do not exist, such as Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Developing and adhering to such guidelines not only contributes to children's well-being but also fosters community equity, ensuring that facilities serve all children equally, regardless of their socio-economic background.

6. Consider the implications of zoning

A municipality's zoning bylaw is a regulatory tool that directs how a city develops, covering a number of factors, including where new buildings should go, what types of structures can be built, and what activities can happen on a property. Zoning serves to manage land use and development in alignment with the city's overarching policy direction, typically outlined in documents like the Municipal Development Plan or Official Community Plan.

Generally speaking, the more complex the zoning bylaw, the more opportunities exist to create barriers that impact the uses and forms of development, requiring significant investment to remove or amend these regulations. To address the changing needs of a community, it's important for municipalities to review their statutory plans regularly. This process involves amending or removing outdated bylaws and

policies that no longer align with the municipality's policy direction or that hinder certain types of development or uses. For example, many Canadian cities are tackling a severe lack of affordable housing by revising their zoning bylaws to support a wider range of housing types in low-density residential zones in order to increase housing type options and support mixed-use developments.

A similar approach can be applied to child care. Often, residential zones impose restrictions that prohibit the operation of overnight home-based child care services, placing unnecessary barriers on parents who require child care during non-traditional hours, which may include health-care workers and shift workers. Additionally, these zones may limit or even preclude the ability of people to work as child care providers in a home where they do not reside, preventing home-based child care businesses from hiring staff and thus restricting the number of children that they can care for based on staffing ratios. In other instances, certain commercial or industrial zones list child care as a conditional or prohibited use,

resulting in unnecessary restrictions or requiring potential providers to undergo an often costly and lengthy rezoning process. When municipalities consider a child care perspective during comprehensive zoning review cycles, they have an opportunity to mitigate barriers around land use.

Burnaby serves as

one example of how a municipality has tackled zoning in its approach to address land use challenges to child care. Following a comprehensive review of its zoning bylaw, the city made amendments that allowed child care as a permitted use in commercial and business park districts.¹³¹ This change gives prospective providers more options that do not require rezoning, resulting in a significant reduction in the time and initial investment required to establish new ELCC facilities.

Broadening the scope of zoning considerations to include the needs of parents and operators is an example of how municipalities can effectively use their regulatory tools to improve access to child care.

7. Explore mechanisms for funding child care initiatives

Municipalities shoulder numerous financial obligations, such as infrastructure development, provision of public services, maintaining community amenities, and addressing the evolving needs and expectations of residents. While some responsibilities are mandated by provincial or territorial statute, others are discretionary. Through the powers granted by provincial and territorial legislation, municipalities

Broadening the scope of zoning considerations to include the needs of parents and operators is an example of how municipalities can effectively use their regulatory tools to improve access to child care.

adopt development charges to finance growth-related amenities and infrastructure costs. Development charges (also known as development contributions) are fees imposed by local governments during the rezoning process for new development projects and are often collected in the form of community amenity contributions (CACs) and development cost levies (DCLs).

Depending on the type of contributions, the collected fees may be allocated to hard infrastructure (such as roads, water, and sewer) and community amenities (like parks, libraries, and cultural or community assets). Municipal councils determine how funds are allocated through capital planning cycles or the annual budget. Due to the increasing demands on municipal finances, there are often a number of competing priorities for using limited funds. Furthermore, improved zoning has curtailed the number of projects that would have otherwise contributed to these funds through rezoning. However, as the development of child care strategies becomes more prevalent, municipalities have begun to direct money to reserves designated to supporting the development, expansion, and renovation of ELCC facilities and services. These reserves provide a funding source that can be used to support a various aspects of child care, such as education, physical infrastructure, and equipment.

A recent example of this approach is the City of Coquitlam's Child Care Partnership Reserve Fund (CCPRF) Bylaw and Policy, which was adopted by Council in 2022 to support the implementation of the City's Child Care Strategy. In an approach similar to the one Coquitlam used for its Housing Affordability Strategy, the CCPRF allocates development contributions to support the creation of child care spaces through an ongoing dedicated reserve fund. It is funded through three avenues: donations from the public, contributions from developers, and a dedicated portion of funds collected through community amenity contributions. It is used to fund various child care solutions, including contributions to city-owned spaces used for child care, contributions to non-profit or public-led child care projects, support for partnerships with other organizations involved in child care, and a contract position for a child care facilitator to identify developer and operator partners and assist applicants through City processes. The CCPRF is a notable example of how municipalities can utilize readily available tools to help implement child care initiatives and strategies.¹³²

Conclusion

To build more equitable cities for parents and families, local governments must not only focus externally but also look inward to identify opportunities to improve access to high-quality ELCC services within their communities. For real change to take place, it is vital for councils and administrations to take the lead and collaborate with external partners and other orders of government. As the old proverb states, it takes a village, and this sentiment holds true

starting in our planning departments. The evidence strongly indicates that ELCC initiatives yield clear benefits, yet the responsibility lies with local governments to acknowledge and prioritize the significance of child care within their communities. By collaborating with diverse stakeholders like community development experts, educators, and social-service and health-care providers, as well as internal departments, municipalities can build sustainable and equitable frameworks. These efforts contribute to the overall well-being and economic prosperity of communities. Now is the time for local governments to seize existing opportunities, craft their own unique approaches, and tackle the necessary actions to meet the increasing demands for this essential service.

Endnotes

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- ⁵ Martha Friendly, Rachel Vickerson, Sophia S. Mohamed, Laurel Rothman, and Ngoc Tho Nguyen, *Risky Business: Child Care Ownership in Canada Past, Present and Future* (Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2021), 113.
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- ¹³ City of Vancouver, *Making Strides: Vancouver’s Child Care Strategy, 2022* (June). Retrieved from <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/making-strides-vancouvers-child-care-strategy.pdf>
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- ²⁹ David Macdonald and Martha Friendly, *Not Done Yet: \$10-a-Day Child Care Requires Addressing Canada's Child Care Deserts* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2022). Retrieved from <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/not-done-yet>
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- ³¹ In this paper, the term “municipality” is used in a general way to mean a local geographical area in which the inhabitants share a common elected government. It may be rural, urban, or remote and may be composed of smaller regions. Depending on which province or country a municipality is in, it may have an administrative role, funding responsibility, or decision-making power with regard to child care.
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- ⁴⁵ Public services are defined here as “services operated directly by local or senior government agencies, such as school districts, municipalities, regional districts, or public health authorities. The public agency holds the operating licence and directly delivers the service to the community. Employees delivering the service are considered public employees. Public delivery contrasts with a non-profit delivery model, whereby the entity to hold the operating license and deliver a service is a non-profit organization. Employees delivering the service are considered employees of the non-profit operator.” M. Gautreaux, *Public Child Care Delivery: Learning from BC Local Government Agencies* (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2019), 9. Retrieved from https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2019-65_Public%20Child%20care%20Delivery%20Learning%20from%20local_%20Gautreaux.pdf
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- ⁴⁹ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care discusses the concept of government “steering” as a tool to ensure effective ELCC services as it relates both to direct public funding, which, “the evidence suggests, brings more effective government steering of services” (13), and to maintaining or improving quality standards (52). See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Starting Strong II*.

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⁸⁰ Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, *Ministry of Education: Spending Plan Review* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/2022-education-estimates>. See also Beata Caranci and Francis Fong, *The Space Between Us: The Availability of Child Care Will Define Canada's Workplace* (Toronto: TD Economics, 2023). These authors also estimate excess demand in Ontario, but somewhat less – between 110,000 and 165,000 spaces. See also Gordon Cleveland, “How big will the expansion of child care services need to be in Ontario?,” [childcarepolicy.net](https://childcarepolicy.net/blog/2021/05/25/how-big-will-the-expansion-of-child-care-services-need-to-be-in-ontario/), blog, May 25, 2021. Retrieved from <https://childcarepolicy.net/blog/2021/05/25/how-big-will-the-expansion-of-child-care-services-need-to-be-in-ontario/>. Cleveland’s figures are very similar to those of the Financial Accountability Office.

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⁸² The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) is the legislation that governs child care in Ontario.

⁸³ Jim Grieve, “Transforming Early Learning Vision into Action in Ontario, Canada,” *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy* 6 (2012): 44–54.

⁸⁴ For a detailed description of the municipal role in Ontario’s child care prior to the CWELCC Agreement, see chapter 3 of Cleveland, *Affordable for All*.

⁸⁵ Cleveland, *Affordable for All*, 85–90.

⁸⁶ In 2017, the federal government reached a Multilateral Framework Agreement for Early Learning and Child Care with the provinces and territories (except Quebec, which agreed in principle but was not a signatory) that provided \$7.5 billion over 11 years (or an average of about \$700 million per year) to support provincial/territorial expenditures on early learning and child care. However, the CWELCC program is orders of magnitude larger than this first initiative.

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¹⁰⁶ City of Toronto, *Review of Toronto Early Learning and Child Care Services: Their Unique Contribution to Toronto's Equity, Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Goals* (Toronto: City of Toronto, 2021), 114. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/97bf-tcs-budget-guidelines-centres-2023.pdf>

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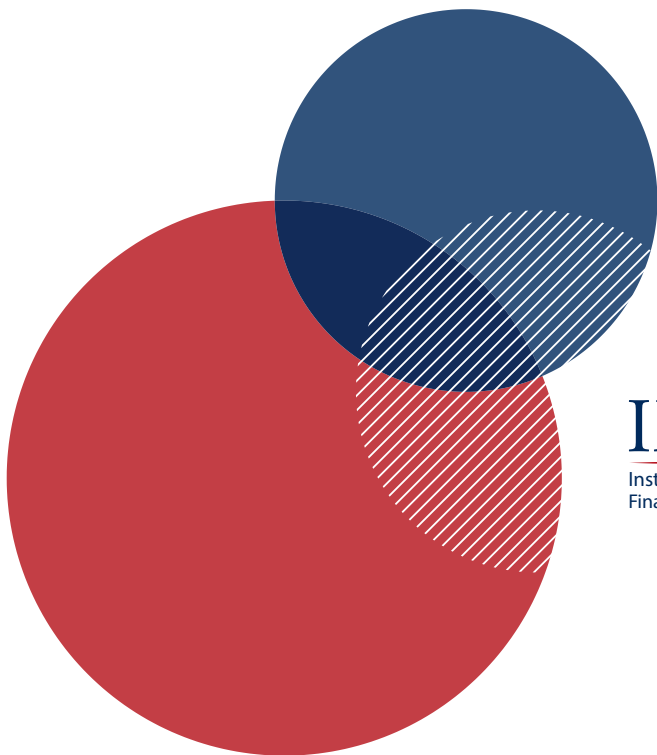
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Okotoks Child Care Facilities Survey

June 2024



**WHAT
WE
LEARNED**

Background

Evaluating child care needs in Okotoks

The Town of Okotoks conducted a survey to better understand the landscape of child care services in our community. The survey sought information on existing child care facilities, their capacities, and the variety of services they offer. This research is intended to help us identify any gaps in services and consider ways to support and enhance the child care options available to residents. Our goal is to work alongside local child care providers to ensure that all families in Okotoks have access to the services they need.

Challenge

To evaluate service levels and child care needs in the community to determine if the Town should continue child care services.

Our Goal

To support the child care business community and ensure that child care needs are being met in Okotoks.

2024

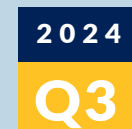
TIMELINE



Market research on provision of child care services in the community.



An online survey was sent directly to child care providers in Okotoks.



Present findings of market research and survey results to Town's strategic leadership team.



Community Engagement

We are committed (through the Town's Community Engagement Policy) to give the community an opportunity for input into decisions that will affect residents and businesses.

Who did we engage?

We engaged all 15 Okotoks facility-based child care providers who had opted into our Economic Development Business Newsletter. There are 18 total facility-based child care service providers in Okotoks. This does not include Dayhomes or non-licensed care.

LEVEL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This project falls within the **CONSULT** level.



15

Okotoks child care providers were contacted by the Town's Economic Development team.



9

Okotoks child care providers filled out the survey.



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
GOAL	To provide balance and objective information in a timely manner.	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions.	To work with public to make sure concerns and aspirations are considered and understood.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE	"We will keep you informed."	"We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns."	"We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the decisions made."	"We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible."	"We will implement what you decide."
	INPUT ZONE		ENGAGEMENT ZONE		

Overview & Key Insights

A look at child care in Okotoks

Here is an overview of what the local child care providers who took our survey are saying about the child care landscape in our community including, existing child care facilities, their capacities, and the variety of services they offer.

63% Survey participants said they are at **maximum capacity** for out-of-school care.



Respondents have the **largest care capacity** available for the out-of-school care (ages 4+ attending school).

75% Survey participants are currently offering both **before and after school** care.



Location was ranked highest among factors that families use in decision making for **choosing a child care centre**



When asked what **challenges** respondents see in expanding or growing their business, the top answer was **staffing**, followed by **funding**.



When asked what **support** local child care providers wanted from the Town, the highest ranked option was **involvement in community events or initiatives**.



Child Care Providers Survey Respondents

Q2

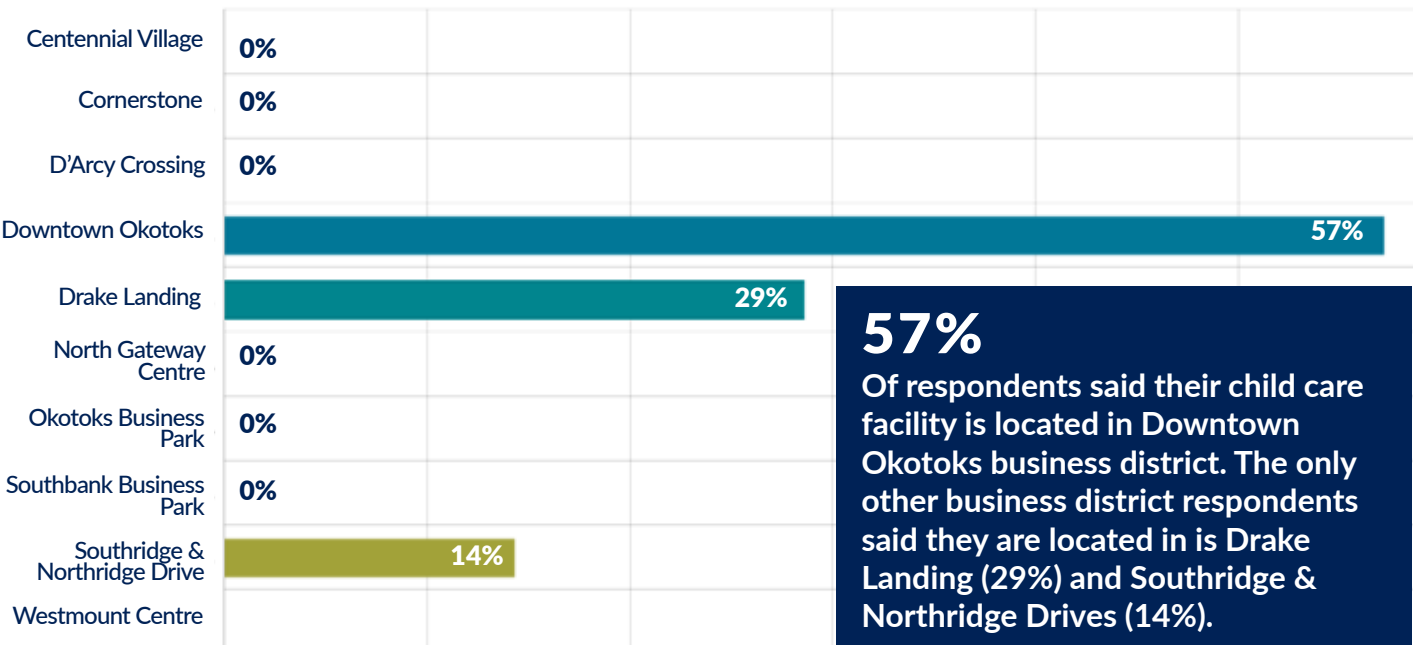
In what year was your facility-based child care centre established?

- Respondent 1: **2023**
- Respondent 2: **2008**
- Respondent 3: **2022**
- Respondent 4: **2006**
- Respondent 5: **2016**
- Respondent 6: **2022**
- Respondent 7: **2018**
- Respondent 8: **2024**
- Respondent 9: **N/A**

**Q1 asked survey respondents to provide the business name of their child care facility. Business names were gathered for internal use only and have been omitted in reporting.*

Q3

What business district are you located in?

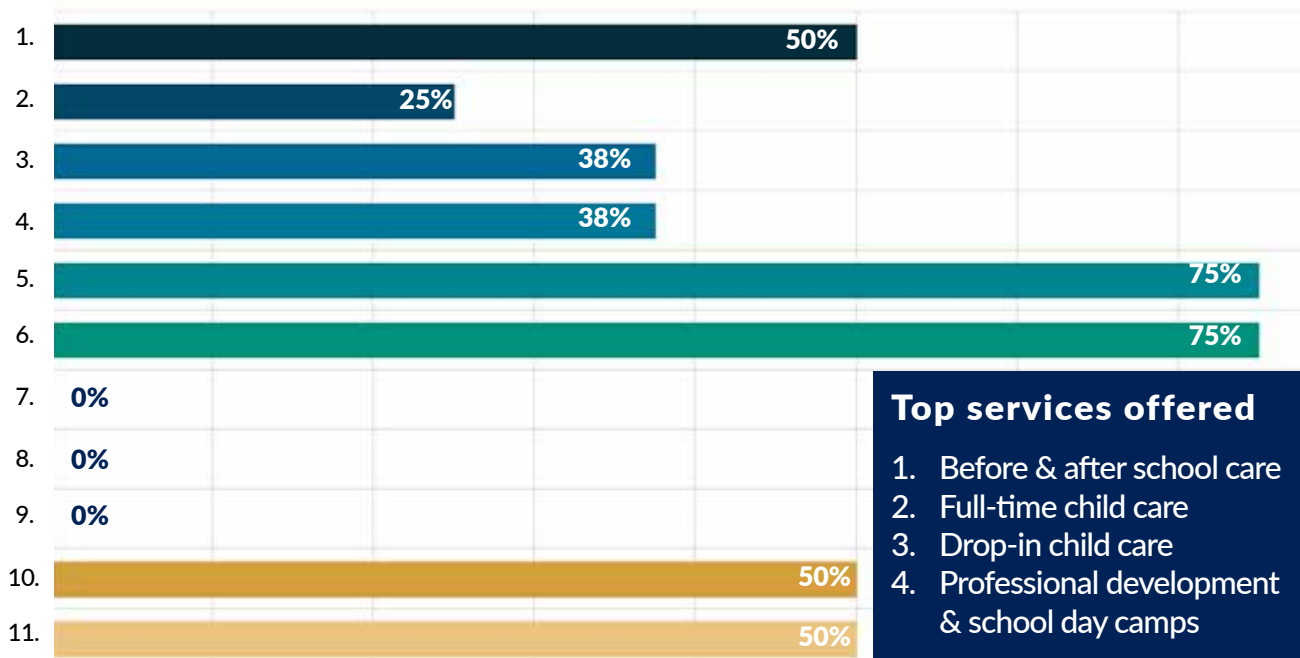


57%
Of respondents said their child care facility is located in Downtown Okotoks business district. The only other business district respondents said they are located in is Drake Landing (29%) and Southridge & Northridge Drives (14%).

Child Care Services

Q4

What types of child care services does your facility-based centre offer? Select all that apply



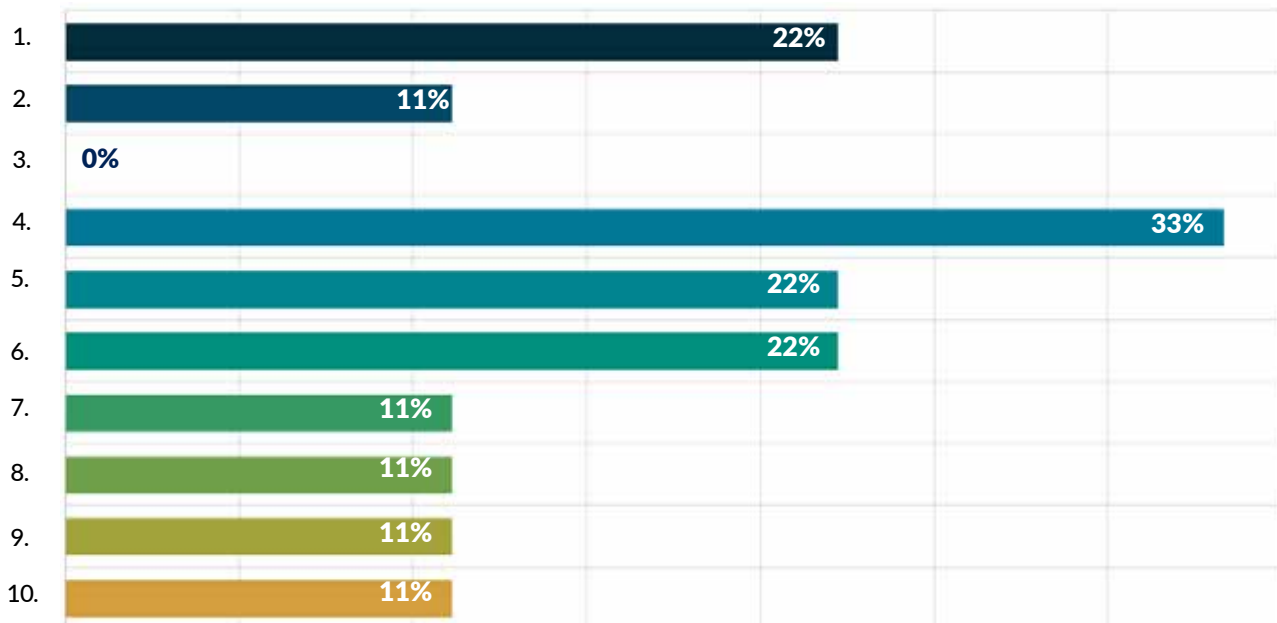
Answer options

1. Full-time: Child care offered for 6 hours or more per day and at least 5 days per week
2. Part-time: Child care offered for either 6 hours or more per day and less than 5 days per week or for less than 6 hours per day, for any number of days per week
3. Kindergarten: Child care offered for children attending full-time Kindergarten in the schools - during school hours on non-Kindergarten school days
4. Kindergarten: Child care offered to children who attend AM or PM Kindergarten in school
5. Before school
6. After school
7. Weekends
8. Evenings: child care offered after 6 p.m.
9. Overnight
10. Drop-in
11. Professional development and school break camps - Additional or alternative days of child care offered upon request for non-regular children.

Child Care Services Affiliate Schools

Q5

What schools do you service? Select all that apply



Answer options

1. St. Mary's School
2. Big Rock School
3. Westmount School
4. Ecole Percy Pegler School
5. Ecole Good Shepherd School
6. Dr. Morris Gibson School
7. Meadow Ridge School
8. Ecole Beausoleil
9. Not applicable
10. Other (please specify)

33%

Of respondents service Ecole Percy Pegler School. 22% of respondents also service St. Mary's school, Ecole Good Shepherd School and Dr. Morris Gibson School.

Child Care Providers

Legal Status & Facility Type

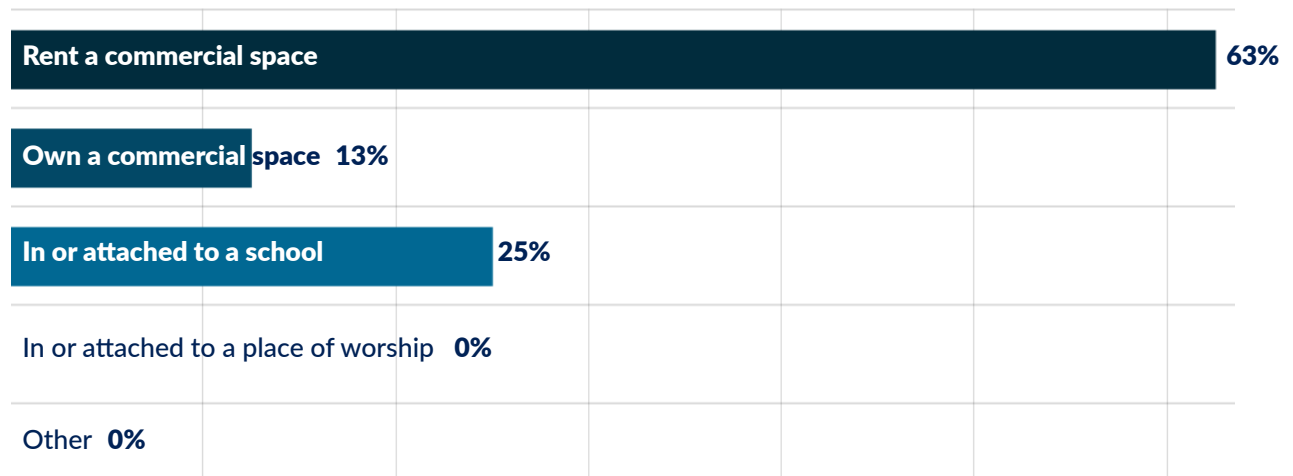
Q6

Is the legal status of your centre a not-for-profit?



Q7

Which of the following best describes the type of building in which your centre is currently located? Select all that apply



Respondents who said they were attached to schools were asked to specify which schools. Responses included Doctor Morris Gibson School, Big Rock School, and St. Mary's School.

Child Care Providers

Day Care Capacity

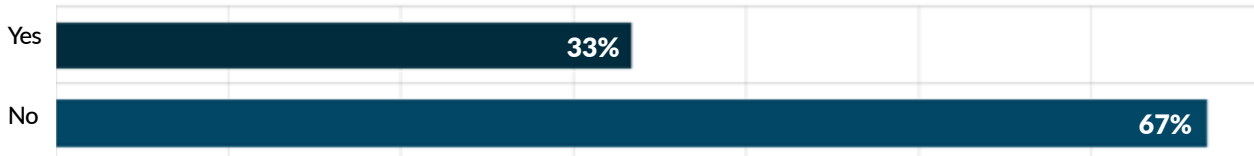
Q8

What is your centre's maximum day care capacity as per licensing regulations for infants to children aged 3 or younger?

Respondents answers varied between **0** and **125**.

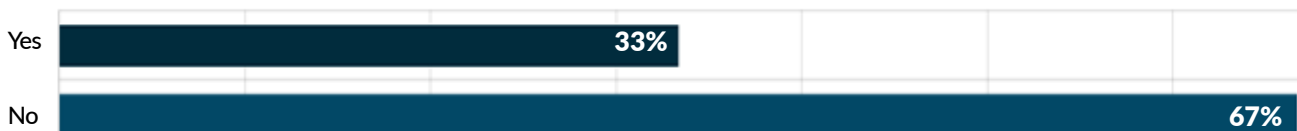
Q8 a.

Are you at maximum capacity for Day Care?



Q8 b.

Do you have a Day Care waitlist?



Child Care Providers

Pre-school Care Capacity

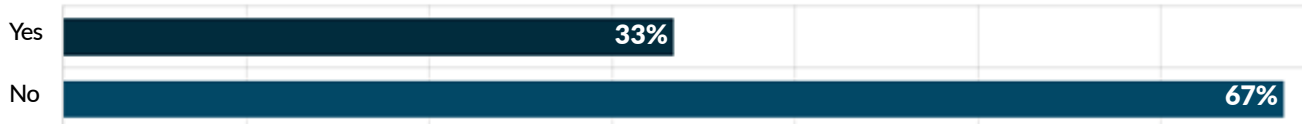
Q9

What is your centre's maximum pre-school capacity as per licensing regulations? (children 3-4 years or older who don't attend school.)

Respondents answers varied between **0** and **52**.

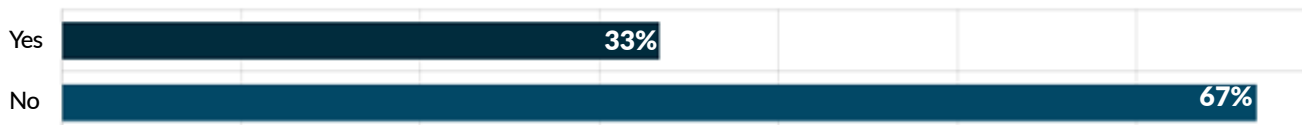
Q9 a.

Are you at maximum capacity for pre-school care?



Q9 b.

Do you have a pre-school care waitlist?



Child Care Providers

Out-of-school Care Capacity

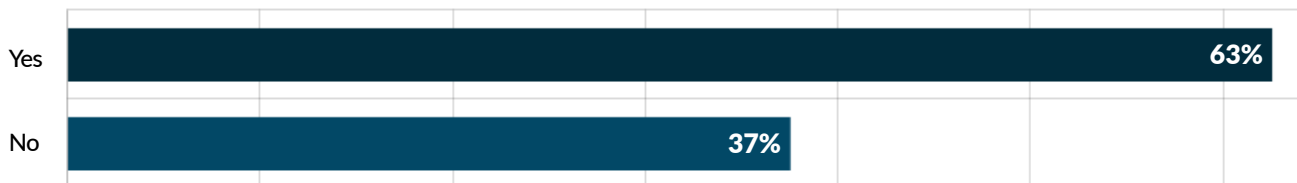
Q10

What is your centre's maximum capacity as per licensing regulations for children 4 years or older who attend school?

Respondents answers varied between **0** and **120**.

Q10 a.

Are you at maximum capacity for out-of-school care?



Q10 b.

Do you have a out-of-school care waitlist?



63%

Of respondents said they are at maximum capacity for out-of-school care compared to 33% of respondents who said they are at maximum capacity for both pre-school care and day care.



Largest care capacity

The out-of-school age group has the highest capacity for care compared to pre-school care and day care.

Driving Factors in Choosing Child Care

Q11

11. What do you believe are the driving factors that families use in decision making for choosing a child care centre? Please rank by priority from most important to least important.

Location	4.88
Specific age category capacity	2.63
Hours of operation	3.75
Child care philosophy	1.88
Additional services offered	1.75
Other	1.75

Top 3 factors for choosing child care, Ranked

1. Location
2. Hours of operation
3. Specific age category capacity

Additional Comments:

- Early learning
- High quality programming
- Amazing teachers
- Support for children with disabilities and learning needs

**Each option's corresponding number represent it's score, which is based on its ranked position multiplied by the response count and divided by the total number of contributions.*

*** Additional comments reflect short answer submissions that respondents could provide if they selected 'other' as an option.*

Child Care Services Transportation

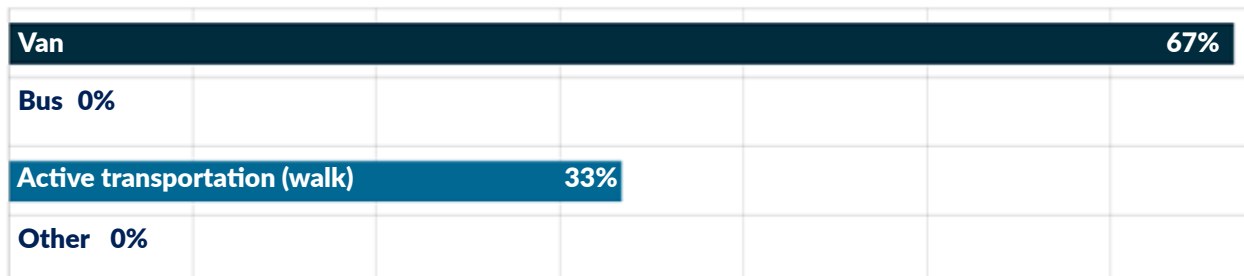
Q12

Do you offer transportation for school aged children?



Q12 a.

What method of transportation do you offer?



Child Care Services Future Expansion Plans

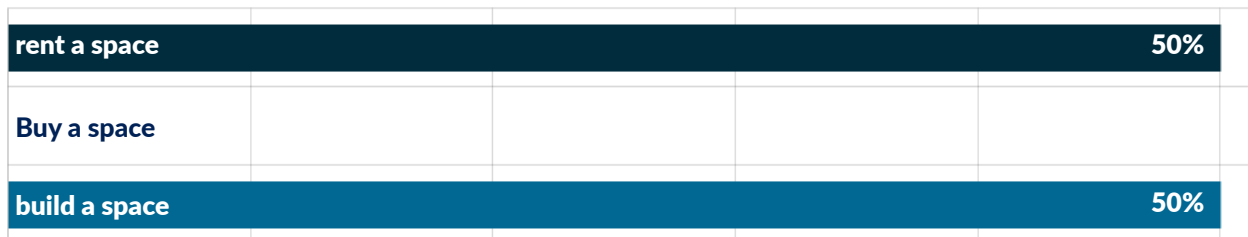
Q13

In the next 2-5 years, do you plan to expand your facility-based centre by increasing its physical space?



Q13 a.

What do your expansion plans include? Select all that apply.

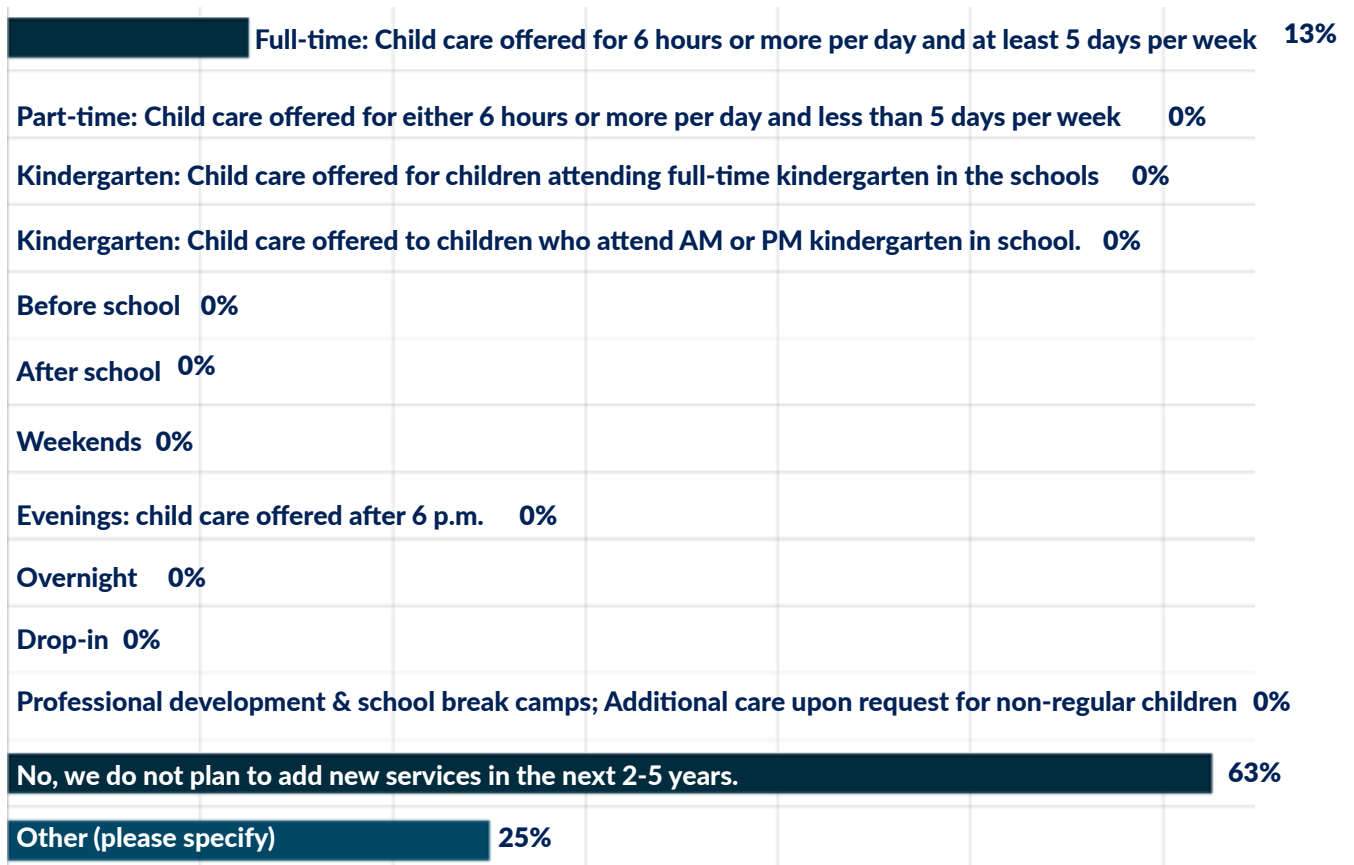


**Only respondents who answered 'yes' to Q13 had the opportunity to answer Q 13 a.*

Child Care Services Future Expansion Plans

Q14

Does your child care centre plan to expand or add new services in the next 2-5 years? Select all that apply.



Additional comments:

- French programming
- Kindergarten
- Before and after school services

**Additional comments reflect short answer submissions that respondents could provide if they selected 'other' as an option.*

Child Care Services Expansion Challenges

Q15

What challenges do you foresee in expanding or growing your facility? e.g., funding, space, staff, regulations, etc.

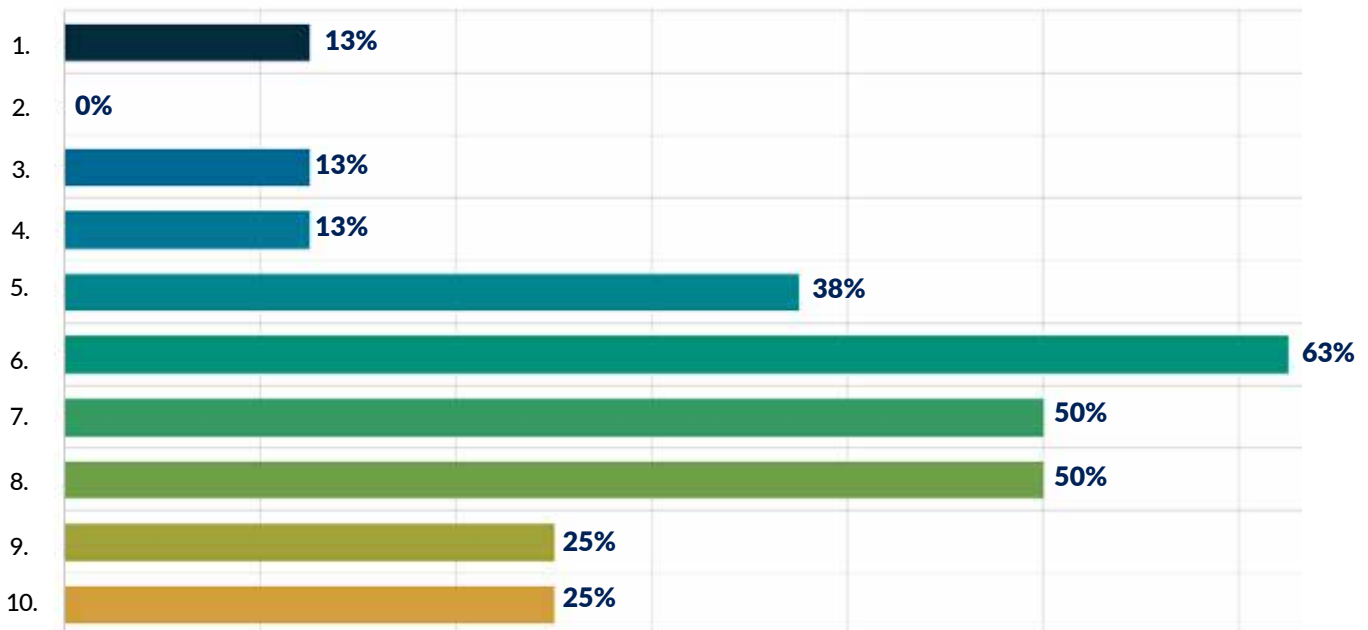


**This question was posed to respondents as a long answer submission. The above word cloud was generated based on the most common feedback from the respondents submissions.*

Child Care Services Town Support

Q16

16. How can the Town of Okotoks support your daycare business? Please select all that apply.



Answer options

1. Streamlined processes for obtaining permits and licenses
2. Clarifications or assistance with compliance issues
3. Information on available grants, subsidies, or other funding opportunities
4. Support with applications for financial assistance
5. Opportunities to connect with other daycare providers and local businesses
6. Involvement in community events or initiatives to raise awareness about child care services
7. Training or professional development programs for daycare staff
8. Assistance with promoting daycare services to the community
9. Inclusion in Town-sponsored events or marketing materials
10. Other (please specify)

Child Care Services Town Support

Q16

16. How can the Town of Okotoks support your daycare business? Please select all that apply.

Additional Comments

“Promoting early childhood education and local programs as a valuable field of work to attract more educators who live in town, but are working in Calgary.”

“Support us by advocating for these funds and subsidies to go to the parents directly so we can have a free market again and parents can make the choice based on their wants and needs for their families and not price and convenience.”

Top 3 ways Town can support needs of child care providers:

1. Involvement in community events or initiatives to raise awareness about child care services
2. Training or professional development programs for daycare staff
3. Assistance with promoting daycare services to the community

**Additional comments reflect short answer submissions that respondents could provide if they selected 'other' as an option.*

Recommendations

Based on findings from the child care facilities survey, the Town will:

- ✓ Continue to offer a quality child care option that meets the needs of the community.
- ✓ Increase participation in the business community to ensure the Town is offering complimentary services.
- ✓ Provide support to the business community, if requested, to maximize access to federal and provincial funding.
- ✓ Align facility use for child care services with Town's other offerings to diversify and maximize space allocation.
- ✓ Consider partnering with other child care services for training and development opportunities.



Next Steps

2024

Q3

Present engagement findings to Okotoks strategic leadership team.

2024

Q4

Continue to provide facility-based licensed before and after school care in the community.

2025

Continue to monitor and assess child care needs in community.





Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

DOG LICENSING SERVICE LEVEL REVIEW

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
A.2.1.1 Dog Licensing Purchase and Renewals	Services provided to residents related to purchase and renewal of dog licenses to help reunite dogs with their owners.	Remove service level, except Animal Fancier and Adoption License	-\$0.135M Revenue, licensing service no longer provided

Reason for the Change?

The original intent of dog licensing was to aid in the quick reunification of lost dogs with their owners and to promote responsible pet ownership. Despite the intent, the licensing process has proven to be both costly and ineffective, requiring significant administrative resources with limited impact on achieving its goals.

Why change now? What is the need?

Local social media platforms, such as Facebook, have provided an effective and efficient means of communicating lost dogs and other animals in and around the community and reuniting them with their owners. Eliminating the dog licensing requirement presents an opportunity to streamline services while maintaining public safety and reducing unnecessary administrative costs. Most responsible dog owners already ensure their pets are easily identifiable through microchips, tattoos, or identification tags. With the widespread use of these methods and the growing role of social media in reuniting lost pets with their owners, the traditional dog licensing process has become redundant.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

As of August 14, 2024, the year-to-date revenue from dog licensing is approximately \$130,000, with an additional approximately \$50,000 in invoicing that is unpaid, nearly 28%, as of August 9,



2024. The revenues are split 1/3 to Parks and 2/3 to Okotoks Municipal Enforcement (OME), comprising of 10% of Parks and 6% of OME’s total revenues.

Statistics from 2023 illustrate the limited effectiveness of dog licensing, with 41% of tickets issued for dogs at large involving unlicensed dogs. The current system imposes an administrative burden of approximately 1,500 staff hours annually, including processing fees, handling renewals, and managing data. By shifting to a straightforward dog identification requirement, where owners must display a tag with their current phone number, the Town can significantly reduce this burden and simplify the process.

This proposed change will impact over 3,000 households in the Municipality, with about one third of households currently using the dog licensing system. Importantly, the primary goal of reuniting lost dogs with their owners will be upheld, and no other aspects of the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw 18-08 are proposed. The proposed amendments focus solely on modernizing the service, reducing costs, and eliminating unnecessary red tape for residents. The removal of dog licensing will free up capacity of staff to redirect resources to focus on higher priority tasks such as moving to online payments, permits, and licensing.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

By discontinuing dog licensing, Administration would be able to re-focus administrative support to higher priority initiatives. To help offset the costs of lost revenue through the discontinuation of dog licensing, Administration would seek alternate revenues such as:

- sponsorships at the Okotoks Off Leash Park, and
- sponsorships of the dog bag dispenser program at large, and
- ramp up deliberate enforcement of the Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw 18-08.

Budget Change (M’s)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	-\$0.135	-0.135	-0.135	-0.135	-0.1350	-\$0.675

Revenue will be reduced for the Business Center.



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

LICENSED CHILD CARE SERVICES REVIEW

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
A.6.1.a Licensed Child Care	The direct provision of licensed child care for school aged children - kindergarten to grade six.	Net revenue/expenses = \$0.140	No change recommended

Reason for the Change?

A review assessing the Town’s provision of licensed child care services has been completed and is presented to the Committee for consideration prior to 2025 budget planning. No change is recommended.

Why change now? What is the need?

No change is recommended as the service is fulfilling a need in the community.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

As a provincially licensed child care facility, the Okotoks School Age Care (OSAC) program is licensed for up to 62 children based on the square footage of the Early Child Centre (formerly known as the Okotoks Youth Centre) in the Okotoks Recreation Centre as this is the primary space that the OSAC program utilizes.

After-school programming also includes utilizing the gymnasium, pool and other multi-purpose spaces in the Recreation Centre, which maximizes opportunities for non prime time programming and provides an opportunity to involve children with recreation to promote healthy, active lifestyles.

The program is also licensed to enrol kindergarten students for full days when these students are not in school. The kindergarten program offers swimming and skating weekly as an opportunity to provide additional recreation opportunities for these children.



An additional unique feature of the OSAC program is the utilization of active transportation, walking children to and from the neighbouring schools including *École Percy Pegler*, *École Good Shepherd*, and *Dr. Morris Gibson School*. The proximity of the Recreation Centre to the neighbouring schools does remove the barrier of vehicle transportation, which can be a contributing factor for other centres in regards to their maximum capacity of children.

Additionally, the program has the luxury of utilizing the outdoor classroom and the ball diamonds and sports fields surrounding the centre. An additional benefit to the families and community is the OSAC program introduces the children to the centre, to additional programming opportunities and is very convenient for families that participate in other organized sport opportunities for example minor hockey or swim clubs.

For the 2023/2024 school year, the program had 63 children registered from 46 families. Children can be registered for full-time or part-time services. The program also had an additional 17 children from 13 families that joined the educators on school closure days, including professional development days, throughout the year. For the 2024/2025 school year, the program has 56 children from 40 families returning from last school year. The program is full with a waitlist of 37 children, which shows that the demand is much greater than what can be provided. 93% of the families are returning for the coming school year. As per the families not returning to the program, two (2) of them have children aging out of the program. Based on these numbers, it can be determined that quality child care is being provided that families and the children enjoy utilizing.

The OSAC program currently employs eight (8) permanent employees equivalent to 7.5 FTE plus four (4) casual educators who all hold provincially certified early childhood education certifications. Provincial licensing for child care outlines the ratios needed and certifications required for educators working in child care settings. Level one (1) through three (3) certified educators have extensive knowledge and training to ensure that programs are meeting children's social, emotional, physical and developmental requirements.

In June 2024, the Town of Okotoks conducted a survey to better understand the landscape of child care services in the community (see the attached What We Learned Report).

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

The underlining benefit in employing highly educated early childhood educators that are required for the OSAC program is that the staff can demonstrate their expertise in all programming including preschool programs, the drop-in KinderCare babysitting service, the Okotoks Youth Centre, child and youth sport programs, summer day camps, community events and more.

Families in the community can have peace of mind in the fact that they are leaving their children with trained and qualified professionals. An additional benefit is that the program receives wage



subsidies for all administrative and in-ratio hours worked in the licensed child care centre and educators have access to up to \$2,000.00 per employee per year in professional development funding. The funding can be applied to continuing education courses, training opportunities, and conference fees. Funding is also available to cover wages for time that the educator participates in training and development. For the 2023/2024 school year the Town received over \$25,000 in wage subsidy to off-set salaries and wages, \$8,000 in professional development funding and \$4,000 in subsidy payments to offset the cost of reporting to the province and administering the income and age based subsidies that are collected on behalf of families.

Overall, the OSAC program provides employees with meaningful, professional, consistent, and reliable child care positions in the community, in an industry that is historically plagued by low retention rates due to traditionally lower wages and the lack of access to benefits.

In 2023, the OSAC program generated approximately 39% of the Programs total annual revenue equal to roughly \$243,000 and the salaries and wages expense accounts for just under 25% of the total Programs salaries and wages budget. A simple representation of the OSAC programs financial impact is outlined here:

<u>Revenue</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>Q1 & 2, 2024</u>
OSAC Registration	\$243,000	\$147,000
Grants	\$25,600	\$24,400
Total Revenue	\$268,600	\$171,400
<u>Expenses</u>		
Salaries and wages	\$118,500	\$94,294
Equipment and Material	\$10,000	\$2,000
Total Expenses	\$128,500	\$96,284
Net	\$140,100	\$75,105

In regards to facility utilization at the Okotoks Recreation Centre, the OSAC program provides the Town an opportunity to diversify and maximize space allocation and services to the community. Particularly in the early mornings, when demand for space and community programming is less. The program also helps to offset expenses associated with furniture, fixture, equipment and supplies that are required for other preschool and child and youth programming.



Budget Change

	2025	2026	Total
Annual Estimated Change	0	0	0

Attachment(s)

1. Child Care What We Learned Report
2. The Municipal Role in Childcare



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA STRUCTURE PLAN SERVICE LEVEL – NORTH POINT

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Statutory Plan Development – Neighbourhood Area Structure Plan (NASP)	The review and processing of applications for changes to or the Town-led development of Statutory Plans including Area Structure Plans and Neighbourhood Area Structure Plans, and the Municipal Development Plan.	NASP planning level allows landowners or developers for non-residential uses to commence land development.	Operating funds to facilitate the development of the North Point NASP.

Why change now? What is the need?

Administration has been approached by several business developers with an interest in locating in the North Point Area. Given the fragmented landownership within a large portion of the planning area, taking a comprehensive approach led by the Town will ensure that growth into this area will occur in a coordinated fashion.

The Town-led development of the Neighbourhood Area Structure Plan, (NASP) will take a comprehensive approach to ensuring that utility and infrastructure services will be designed and extended logically into the planning area.

The outcome of completing the NASP will be the creation of the detailed planning level that allows landowners or developers for non-residential uses to commence land development by moving forward with land use developments, based on sequencing and phasing included in the NASP.

It creates the opportunity for Economic Development to attract businesses to the Town given the increased certainty of intent and direction that an NASP demonstrates; it creates opportunities for employment growth and by doing so support a strong local economy and

diversify the Town's tax base, particularly during a time where there is considerable business investment in the wider area.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

There will be no adverse impact on the community arising from the completion of the planning work that leads to the adoption of an NASP. In fact, with the pending adoption of the overarching Area Structure Plan (ASP), the development of the NASP will create a more detailed expectation of how development can or should progress within the plan area.

Community engagement is required as part of the planning process, including landowner engagement to create further opportunities for the community to participate and lead to greater certainty for the vision for this area.

The completion of an ASP or NASP does not mean that there would be pressure on landowners to develop, in fact development timing is left to the landowner. However, where a landowner considers land use amendments or is considering development, it would provide a targeted approach in alignment with the plan vision.

The completion of the NASP will allow the Town's economic development team to work with landowners and business investors to create or facilitate employment opportunities within the plan area. The NASP is an important step in progressing tax base diversification for the Town and in supporting a strong local economy.

While the development of this NASP is considered a strategic step to enable development of non-residential or employment lands, cost recovery methods for the development of NASPs have been included previously in the Town Fees, Rates and Charges Bylaw, comprising of the NASP fee (the greater of \$5000 or \$500/ha) plus \$1125/ha. It is proposed to add an additional provision to the amended 2025 Fees, Rates and Charges Bylaw that will seek the proportionate recovery of costs from landowners at the time of their application for land use amendment. Where there is specific interest by landowners in shaping the NASP, Administration is recommending cost sharing agreements based on the proportionate land area impacted by that landowner within this NASP. This combined approach allows for early and continuous recoveries from benefitting landowners.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

Developing the NASP will require management of the consulting team by Administration. This will take up staff capacity within the team, however Administration believes that this is achievable with current resources. Some of the required NASP inputs are already in progress, while needing refinement.

The development of an NASP is an important step in progressing tax base diversification for the Town, and in supporting a strong local economy.



Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.300	0	0	0	0	\$0.300

The recovery from Developers will occur as part of the normal course of business.



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

OKOTOKS FIRE & RESCUE - RADIOS

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Fire and Rescue Response	Response to all types of emergency events including fire, rescue, medical first response, service calls, dangerous goods releases, motor vehicle accidents and ice/water rescue.	Activities to prevent loss of life or additional injury and /or prevent or mitigate loss of value to property.	Radios used by Okotoks Fire & Rescue for communication between firefighters and other agencies require replacement.

Why change now? What is the need?

The radios used by Okotoks Fire & Rescue (OFR) for communication during emergency events and during training are approximately 12 years old. These radios have an expected operational lifespan of 7-10 years. The age and repair requirements of existing radios create a safety issue for OFR crews. The radios are now built into the long term asset management plan of the department.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

Enhancing the reliability of communication between OFR crews and other agencies will have a positive impact to the community during emergency events.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

Replacing radios enhances firefighter safety during emergency responses and training activities while strengthening their response. Additionally, replacing OFR radios will reduce the escalating cost of radio maintenance and repair. Further, OFR has changed the way in which radios are assigned – now to apparatus as opposed to each firefighter, reducing the replacement cost by 100K.



Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.100	0.100	0.100	0.000	0.000	\$0.300



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

PRIORITY 3 INCREASED SNOW AND ICE CONTROL PILOT

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Snow Clearing and Ice Control	Snow clearing and ice control of Town parking lots, roads, pathways, sidewalks and priority one pedestrian crossings as identified in the Okotoks Integrated and Accessible Transportation Policy.	Access to a public road to move people, goods and services.	\$0.1M for a pilot to improve snow and ice control for Priority 3 (P3) roadways.

Why change now? What is the need?

The 2025 budget survey indicated that 36% of respondents desired an increase to road and sidewalk service levels. This category represented the highest desired service level increase in the survey with 58% of respondents indicating the rationale for increasing road and sidewalk services levels was a desire to provide a higher level of snow clearing and ice control. Reading through the detailed responses, a majority of concerns were related to snow control and removal of snow on Priority 3 (P3) roadways.

In Southern Alberta municipalities do not typically provide full removals on local roadways as communities rely on lower snowfalls and periodic warming throughout winter to melt snow water. The Integrated and Accessible Transportation Policy PS-A-2.4 states that levels for P3 roadways includes, "snow removal and / or snow storage operations may be implemented when the road is rendered impassable, poses significant safety concerns, drainage is impacted, other extenuating circumstances as determined, or when compacted snow exceeds 25cm."

Previously administration calculated the cost to remove snow from P3 roadways, but the financial cost of these options was significant and viewed as cost prohibitive

Administration is proposing a pilot to increase the amount of snow control efforts on P3 roadways



What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

During the pilot, this will increase the amount of snow control effort expended on some P3 roadways.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

The intent of the pilot is to increase the level of snow and ice control service on some P3 roadways and evaluate whether this additional snow control helps alleviate resident concerns. After a pilot we hope to be in a better position to evaluate the cost/benefit of potential increases to the level of service for P3 roadways. This pilot is expected to provide a marginal increase to snow and ice control on some P3 roadways but is not expected to provide a comparable level of service to full snow removal. Conflicts with parking, windrows, private snow removals and rutting are still expected to exist to some extent throughout this pilot.

Post completion of priority 1 and 2 roads, this pilot includes:

- Increased straight blading of P3 roadways. Potentially utilizing smaller equipment.
- Increased chemical treatment and sanding of P3 roadways
- Piloting of piling snow in cul-de-sacs, bays landings and coves in some locations.

This additional funding will be used to cover up to \$100,000 of additional fuel, sand, chemical and additional street sweeping costs for P3 operations.

Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.100	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	\$0.100

Depending on the pilot outcomes there could be additional budget requests in the future.





Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

SALARY AND WAGE ADJUSTMENTS

Service and Adjustment Summary

This report outlines the need for additional budget allocation to create new positions that are essential for the effective implementation of our strategic plan and the delivery of core services. These positions are designed to enhance our organizational capacity, drive strategic initiatives, and ensure successful execution of our goals.

The Strategic Leadership team reviewed a total of 27 positions that were requested, and 3 positions have come forward for approval. Risks considered were operational service delivery, strategic service delivery and organizational skill gaps. The business support technician aligns with our 'open for business' philosophy and targets a resource to support business in the building and development permit process. The legislative affairs officer is required to support ongoing and increased legislative requirements to support the election process especially the establishment and maintenance of a voters list and the IT security analyst is to support the risk facing the organization from cyber and security threats.

Position Title	FTE	Type	Annual Cost
Business Support Technician	1	Permanent	\$ 122,000.00
Legislative Affairs Officer	1	Permanent	\$ 122,000.00
IT Security Analyst	1	Permanent	\$ 160,000.00
Total			\$ 404,000.00

Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Total
	\$0.404	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	\$0.404

Once the 2025 staff addition is approved it will part of the normal corporate salary cycle process.



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

STORMWATER MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Stormwater Drainage	Stormwater Drainage manages the flow of rainfall, snowfall and surface water runoff from properties and roadways through the Town of Okotoks	Mitigate the possibility of flooding, erosion, property damage and other unintended impacts.	Increased maintenance of key stormwater infrastructure including storm-oil and grit separators, storm main lines and storm pond monitoring. This would be utility funded.

Why change now? What is the need?

A recent internal gap analysis of the current stormwater maintenance practices identified key areas of improvement and highlighted the need for increased levels of maintenance, including storm oil and grit separator maintenance, storm main inspections and flushing, and storm pond monitoring programs. Addressing these gaps requires an increase in funding to ensure that the stormwater infrastructure functions effectively and continues to protect property and the environment.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

Increased stormwater maintenance will have a significant positive impact on the entire community by reducing the risk of property damage and public safety hazards from flooding. Increased maintenance will also improve stormwater quality by preventing pollutants from entering the Sheep River, benefiting both the environment and public health.



What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

Increased stormwater maintenance will lead to more efficient and cost-effective operations by reducing frequency of emergency repairs and minimizing the need for expensive, large-scale infrastructure replacements. Proactive maintenance will extend the lifespan of existing stormwater systems, leading to long-term savings and improved resource allocation. Overall, these efforts will strengthen the organization’s reputation for environmental stewardship, improve service delivery to the community, and build resilience against future climate-related challenges.

Budget Change (M’s)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	\$0.500



Budget Service Change Request

Service Change Type

- New Service
- Service Update
- End of Service

TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN

Service and Adjustment Summary

Service	Service Description	Service Value and/or Level	2025 Budget Adjustment
Non-Statutory Plans - Transportation Master Plan	Development, management and implementation of medium and long-range plans such as master plans, technical service plans, strategies, frameworks and Business Centre Plans. This includes development of studies as needed.	Alignment of transportation services that provides a framework for future growth.	Development of a Transportation Master Plan

Why change now? What is the need?

The Transportation Master Plan (TMP) was last updated in 2020. Since then, there have been significant changes to growth parameters that are not reflected in the study (e.g.: land development sequencing, growth rate, population density). There have also been significant traffic studies for key arterial corridors (e.g.: functional studies/designs for Highway 2 Interchange, 338 Ave and 32 Street) and new development areas (e.g.: ASPs/NASPs in Tillotson, Trilogy Plains, North Okotoks, North Point) that need to be incorporated into the study. Traffic counts and budget estimates also require updating to reflect current conditions.

What is the expected impact/benefit for the community? How much of the community will be impacted and/or benefit by the change?

This study will identify the required transportation infrastructure upgrades to maintain an acceptable level of service for road users and enable the transportation networks in new development areas to be best integrated with existing arterial roadways. Many of these upgrades will also provide significant benefits to active transportation users in areas where there may be little to no existing pedestrian infrastructure.



What is the expected impact/benefit for the organization?

This project will provide updated project timings and budgetary estimates to optimize infrastructure investments and allocation of the capital budget to transportation infrastructure. An updated TMP will ensure that future land development planning and other studies are based on a current and accurate understanding of the Town's overall transportation network.

Budget Change (M's)

Annual Estimated Change	2025B	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	Total
	\$0.150	0.00	0	0	0	\$0.150



SERVICE LEVEL REVIEW FOR WASTE SERVICES

Council / Governance Issue

To review and provide recommendations for the Town's waste management program, focusing on the service level adjustments, and enhancements to existing waste collection and management systems.

Recommendation

That Administration prepares and amend the Waste Bylaw (18-16), the 2025 Rates and Fees Bylaw to reflect a service level change to every other week garbage pickup, cart size adjustments, fee reductions and other operational changes as outlined within this report by December 31st 2024 for a Q2 2025 roll-out.

Background and Considerations

Administration has explored waste service level changes in alignment with Council's affordability concerns and Utility Policy PS-A-2.0 objective to consider cost-effective and efficient delivery of public utility systems.

During the June 17, 2024 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting the following motion was made:

"That Administration be directed to bring back a report to the Governance and Priorities Committee regarding the financial implications and implementation plan for bi-weekly garbage pick-up, changes to standard cart sizes, and alternate day collection by the end of September 2024."

Utility Rates

Administration conducts an annual review of utility rates to ensure the continued viability of the waste management program. To guide the setting of these rates, an external service provider has updated the utility rate model. Draft rates, detailing the expected financial impacts of the recommended changes, are presented in the attached PowerPoint.

Refinements to these rates may occur as more information on Extended Production Responsibility (EPR) funding becomes available. Although the final rates will be presented within the 2025 Rates and Fees Bylaw, the draft rates were prepared using the best available current information. This ongoing review process ensures that utility rates remain fair, sustainable, and reflective of the actual costs of providing waste management services

If Governance and Priorities Committee and Council approves the recommended service level changes, it is projected that residents would see a 28-35% rate reduction in May of 2025 from anticipated inflated 2025 rates. The 35% reduction is outlined within the attached PowerPoint.

A 28% rate reduction will be seen by residents who currently receive a bundled rate for waste services.

Every other week garbage collection

In 2016, the Town Waste Solutions piloted an every other week garbage collection program in the Mountainview and Woodhaven neighborhoods to explore future opportunities for socially acceptable, economical, and environmentally friendly waste management practices. During the pilot, garbage carts were audited and it was found that there was minimal contamination in the blue (recycling) and green (organics) carts, even on weeks when garbage was not collected. Residents adapted quickly to the new schedule, complied with all requirements, and experienced minimal disruption.

Key Findings from the Pilot

- **Waste Reduction:** Garbage disposal rates were significantly lower in the piloted neighborhoods, recorded at 20 kg/HH/month compared to 28 kg/HH/month for the rest of the town.
- **Resident Support:** A post-pilot survey indicated that 63% of respondents supported bi-weekly garbage collection, provided they could select an adequate cart size.

Benefits of every other week Collection

The pilot demonstrated several benefits, which can be realized town-wide if bi-weekly garbage collection is implemented:

- **Cost Savings:** Reduced collection frequency lowers operational costs.
- **Environmental Impact:** Decreased garbage disposal and increased diversion of recyclables and organics. Reduction in greenhouse gases.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Streamlined waste management processes.

Administration is now recommending a program change to realize the benefits outlined above. Table 1 below shows the proposed changes in the number of pickup weeks.

Stream	Current service	New proposed service
Garbage	52	26
Organics	40	40
Recycling	52	52

EPR Impact

Council previously endorsed through joint municipal letter to the province support for Extended Production Responsibility (EPR) provincial regulation. EPR regulation places the financial responsibility for single use products, packaging and paper on manufacturers.

Administration is currently in discussion with the Producer Responsible Organization (PRO) for single use products, packaging and paper. Administration anticipates that after deliberation the

cost for cart recycling program will transfer to the PRO reducing the recycling bin costs to zero dollars in alignment with Council's affordability objectives.

Cart sizes and Operational Efficiencies:

The current 120L carts have either reached or are nearing the end of their operational life leading to increased damage, higher maintenance demands, and frequent complaints from residents. Collection crews also face operational inefficiencies due to materials often being left stuck in these smaller carts. To address these issues and enhance overall operational efficiency, it is recommended to standardize cart sizes, focusing on both capacity and collection frequency.

Recommendations for Operational Efficiency

Increase and Standardize Cart Size:

- Garbage Carts: Transition from 120L to a 240L standard size. This change will:
 - Maintain Capacity: Ensure that existing users have the same total capacity with every other week collection as they had with weekly collection, thereby maintaining service volume.
 - Operational Efficiency: Reduce the frequency of collection, which lowers operational costs and decreases the wear and tear on collection vehicles.
- Organics Carts:
 - Increase the standard size to 240L. This will:
 - Seasonal Capacity: Better manage seasonal surges in yard waste, especially during spring and fall when leaf and yard waste can constitute up to 64% of organic material.
 - Efficiency: Reduce the frequency of overflow issues, minimizing the risk of alternate cart contamination, or the need for additional collections/manual drop-off.
 - This change is proposed to be phased-in, over time recognizing limitations of waste operational reserves.
- Review and Optimize Cart Options:
 - 180L and 360L Carts: Given their low utilization (<10% over 12 years) and limited manufacturing options, these sizes will be phased out. This decision aligns with best practices and recommendations from the Continuous Improvement Fund, which advises against offering cart sizes with less than 10% household adoption.
- Recycling Carts:
 - Maintain the 240L size as the standard. This size is consistent with automated collection best practices and provides sufficient capacity for residents to manage their recyclables effectively.

Table 2 summarizes the current standard cart size and the recommended standard cart size based on the evaluation completed.

Material & Service Provider	Current Cart Sizes Available	Service Level	Recommended Standard Cart Size	Recommended Service Level
Garbage Collection	120L, 180L, 240L	Weekly collection (52/yr)	240L	Every other week (26/yr.)
Recycling Collection	240 L (240 L & 360 L)	Weekly collection (52/yr)	240L	Weekly (52/yr.)
Organics Collection	120L, 240L, 360L	Variable (40/yr.- weekly and every other week)	240L	Variable (40/yr.- weekly and every other week)

Operational Changes

This section is provided for informational purposes to help understand and reflect on community operational impacts. It should be noted that the implementation details and specific operational decisions are primarily an administrative responsibility. Several changes are anticipated to be rolled-out concurrently with the service level recommendation outlined above and discussed below:

- Alternate day collection
- Collection route changes

Alternate day collection

Alternate day collection schedules different collection days for different waste carts. This approach, utilized by multiple municipalities, addresses issues such as road congestion by reducing the number of trucks on the road compared to same-day collection for all waste streams. It also provides more space for parking and appropriate cart spacing, mitigating cart conflicts and congestion, especially in higher density neighborhoods.

Various models of alternate day collection were considered. One option selected is to collect blue and green carts on the same day, with black carts collected every other week. This method establishes a "diversion" day, emphasizing recycling and organics.

Collection route changes

The proposed changes in this report are designed to optimize collection routes. These changes aim to ensure adequate resources while enhancing service delivery. The following changes are recommended to achieve these outcomes:

- a) Update the collection areas to recognize growth and efficiencies

b) Adjust the collection days to align with the updated areas mentioned in point 'a'.

Implementation timing of these recommendations will be dependent on staff resources and priorities. It is expected that the implementation of any service level and operational changes will be a first priority.

Timeline

Table 3 outlines the proposed timeline set for the recommendations outlined above

Activity	Date	Roll-out
SLT	May 2024	
GPC	September 2024	
Cart purchase - (240L) garbage	Q4 2024	Q1 2025
Bylaw update	Q1 2025	
Community engagement	Q4 2024 to Q2 2025	April 1, 2025

Financial

The proposed recommended changes will require approximately \$0.6M for the purchase of garbage carts in 2025. An additional \$0.6M will be needed to fund the purchase of 240L organics carts at a future date. Purchasing of cart will be done through the waste reserves and if the service level changes are supported by GPC an 2024 budget amendment will be brought forward to council.

Extended Producer Responsibility and reduction of operating costs are expected to offset revue reduction in 2025 resulting in a balanced budget.

Current Policy or Bylaw Analysis

The Waste Bylaw (18-16) and Rates and Fees Bylaw will require an update if Governance and Priorities Committee endorses the recommended service level changes.

Municipal Comparisons

Municipal Comparisons are included in the attached PowerPoint.

CAO Comments

Committee direction is required. The EPR implementation has been fluid and changing and further refined information is expected shortly. Waste collection moving to bi weekly and the resultant cost savings to users will help with overall community affordability which was a key piece of feedback received in the budget.

Attachment(s)

1. Waste Services PowerPoint Presentation

Prepared by:
Paul Lyons
Waste Solutions Manager
September 4, 2024

Waste Service Level Changes



Drivers

1. Regular Waste Program Service Review
2. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulation
3. Value for money - (affordability)
4. Environmental Master Plan #6 - Further waste diversion practices
5. Environmental outcome

Proposal Recommended Summary

1. Issue 240L garbage to residents (move to every second week collection)
2. Eliminate blue cart charges to residents
3. Phase in 240L organics carts (2026)
4. Alternative day collection
 - *garbage - day one*
 - *organics & recycling - next day*
5. Collection routes redesign (to facilitate growth)

Funding Impacts - Reserves

- 2025 need for ~9k new carts (operating \$0.6M)
- Reserves (on ramp 2025)
- Blue cart loss in revenue to covered by EPR

Projected Budget impacts

- None identified

Draft Proposed Bi-monthly Residential Billing Rates - Effective May 1, 2025

Cart Size	Stream	2024 Rate	2025 With inflation (\$)	2025 proposed (\$)	Difference (proposed vs inflated)
120L - Weekly	Garbage	\$16.75	\$17.60		
240L - Every other week	Garbage			\$13.20	-25%
120L	Organics	\$16.75	\$17.60	\$17.60	0%
240L	Recycling	\$12.00	\$12.60	\$0	-100%
Eco Centre	Drop-off	\$11.60	\$12.20	\$8.00	-11%
	Total Cost	\$57.10	\$60.00 (120L Weekly Garbage)	\$38.80 (240L every second week Garbage)	-35%

Municipal Comparisons of Bi-monthly Waste Services Rates for garbage, recycling, organics and and Eco-Centers/Drop off's

Location	2024 Bi-monthly Fee
Cochrane	\$63.30
Chestermere	\$64.00
City of Calgary	\$51.40
Diamond Valley	\$51.62
Airdrie	\$51.76

Focus Areas

Service Level

- Collection frequency and size,
- Rates and incentive

Operational

- Alternate day collection
- Collection route changes

Cart Challenges

- Age - (120l)
- Damage
- Capacity (organics)
- Efficiency,
- lower utilization (180l, 360l)
- Limited Supplier Availability (180l)

Every other week Garbage collection

Proposed potential benefits

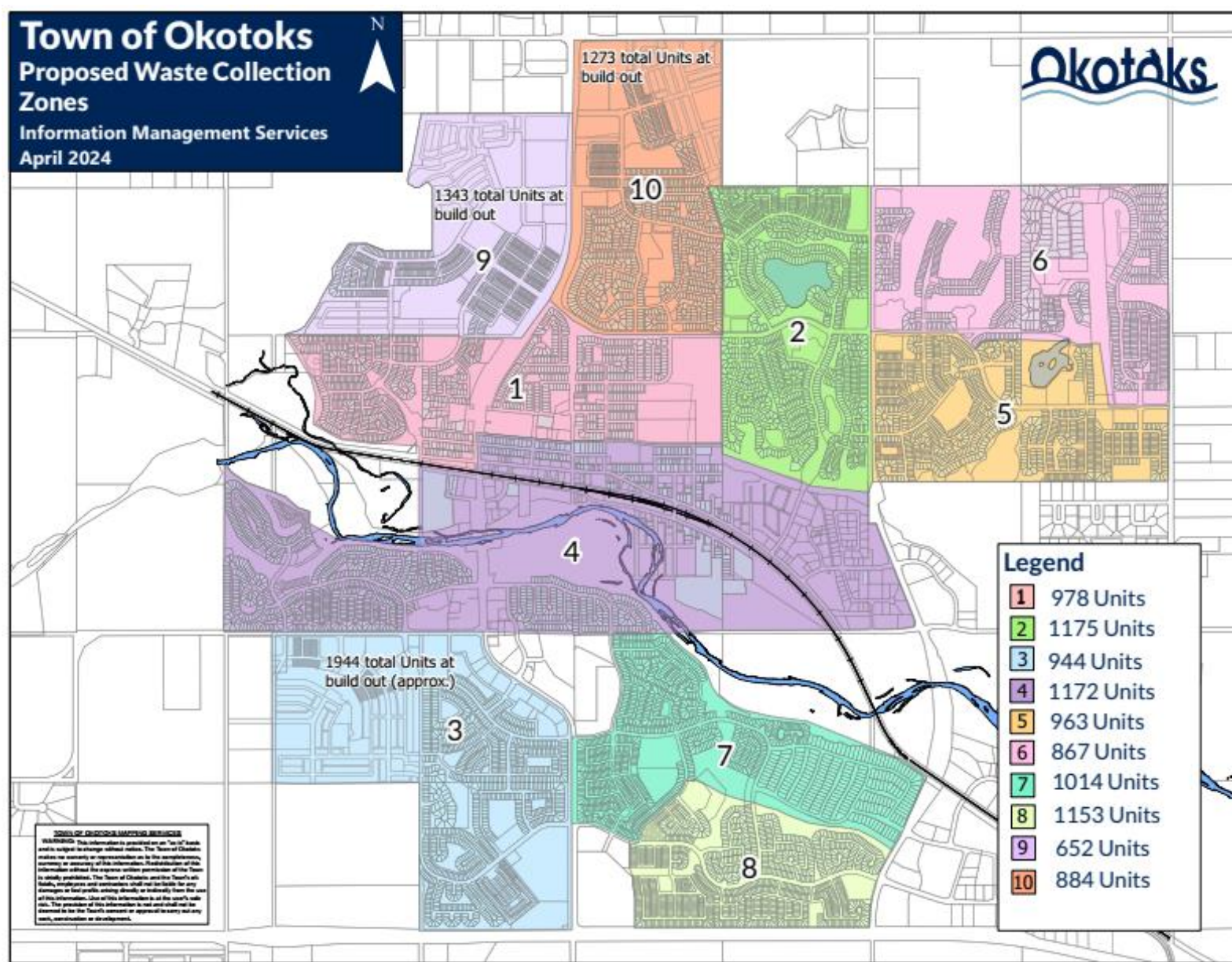
- Significant cost savings by moving to every second week - aligns with affordability objectives
- environmental outcome - GHG reduction, encourage diversion
- Positive Operational impact
- Performance information (by areas)

Collection/Cart Size Recommendation

Material & Service Provider	Current Cart Sizes Available (L)	Current Service Level	Recommended Standard Cart Size (L)	Recommended Service Level
Garbage	120, 180, 240	Weekly (52/yr.)	240*	Every other week (26/yr.)
Organics	120, 240, 360	Variable (40/yr.-weekly and every second week)	240* (2026+ implementation)	Variable (40/yr.-weekly in warm weather and every second week)
Recycling	240, 360	Weekly (52/yr.)	240	Weekly (52/yr.)

*120L available by request

New Proposed Collection Areas



Alternate Collection Day - Route 2 Example



- Tuesday - Garbage
- Wednesday - Organics & Recycling

Why Alternate Day Collection

- growth, UPA, efficiency,
- Blue and Green on the same day, create a “diversion” day
- Keep black on separate days
- Manage growth over next 5-7 years
- Increase efficiency

Operations:

- Prevent congestion between trucks
- Reduces street congestion
- Allows for appropriate cart spacing

Proposal Recommended Summary -

1. Issue 240L garbage to residents (move to bi-monthly collection)
2. Eliminate Blue Cart Charges to residents
3. Phase in 240L organics carts (2026)
4. Alternative day collection
 - *garbage - day one*
 - *organics & recycling - next day*
5. Collection routes redesign (to facilitate growth)

Timeline

Activity	Date
SLT	May 2024
GPC	September 2024
Council budget amendment	Q4 2024
Cart purchase	Q4 2024
Bylaw update	Q1 2025
Community Engagement	Q4 2024 - Q2 2025
Operational Target Date	April 1, 2025

QUESTIONS?