

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

RE: BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA'S
KIDS DISCUSSION PAPER

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council endorse preparation of a submission on the '*Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids*' discussion paper which reflects the points outlined in Section 6.0 of the attached report.

2. **THAT** Council authorize staff to send the submission, along with copy of this report to:

Child Care Policy Branch
Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security
PO Box 9929 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9R2

3 **THAT** a copy of the report be forwarded to:

Ms. Joanne Marzitelli
Program Coordinator
Burnaby/ New Westminster Child Care Resource & Referral
33 - 250 Willingdon Avenue
Burnaby, BC V5C 5E9, Burnaby's MPs and MLAs and The Child Care Resources Group.

REPORT

The Community Issues and Social Planning Committee at its meeting held on 2000 January 26, received and adopted the attached report providing an assessment and recommendations concerning the Provincial discussion paper, Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor D. Johnston
Chair

Councillor N. Harris
Vice Chair

COPY: - CITY MANAGER
- DIRECTOR, PARKS, RECREATION &
CULTURAL SERVICES
- DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING

TO: CHAIR & MEMBERS 2000 January 19
COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL
PLANNING COMMITTEE

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING Our File: 17.811

**SUBJECT: BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA'S KIDS
DISCUSSION PAPER**

PURPOSE: To provide an assessment and recommendations concerning the Provincial discussion paper, *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids*.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT**, as the City of Burnaby's response to the *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids* discussion paper, Council be asked to:
 - a) endorse preparation of a submission on the paper which reflects the points outlined in Section 6.0 of this report, and
 - b) authorize staff to send the submission, along with a copy of this report, to

Child Care Policy Branch
Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security
PO Box 9929 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9R2.

2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to:
 - a) Ms. Joanne Marzitelli
Program Coordinator
Burnaby/ New Westminster Child Care Resource & Referral
33 - 250 Willingdon Avenue
Burnaby, BC V5C 5E9
 - b) Burnaby's MPs and MLAs
 - c) The Child Care Resources Group

REPORT

1.0 BACKGROUND

At its meeting of 2000 January 10, Council received a letter from Joanne Marzitelli, Program Coordinator for the Burnaby/ New Westminster Child Care Resource & Referral Program. The letter asked Council to review and respond to the Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security (MSDES) discussion paper, *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids*. Specifically, the letter asked that Council endorse the positions taken on the paper by the Child Care Advocacy Forum. Council referred the request to the Community Issues & Social Planning Committee (CISPC) for review.

To assist the Committee with its review, this report provides an overview and assessment of the *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids* discussion paper. It also presents a proposed City of Burnaby response to the paper, for consideration by the Committee and Council.

2.0 DISCUSSION PAPER OVERVIEW

MSDES released *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids* on 1999 October 21. The paper provides information on the current situation facing children, families and child care providers in BC. It also identifies several possible actions for strengthening the province's child care system.

The proposed actions are divided into two categories: 1) *immediate*, to be undertaken by the Province in the short term, and 2) *longer term*, to be undertaken by the Provincial and Federal Governments and other partners (e.g., school districts) over a longer period. In summary, the proposals involve the following:

Immediate

- a) Restructuring the Provincial Child Care Subsidy Program to reduce the direct cost of child care for low and modest income parents
- b) Increasing capital and operating funding to child care providers
- c) Extending Child Care Resource & Referral programs to cover the areas of the province not currently served by the programs
- d) Increasing the number of licensed child care spaces available on school sites through use of portables

- e) Increasing funding to Young Parent Programs operating in BC secondary schools, with the aim of keeping more young parents in school.

Long Term

- a) Encouraging business and labour to create family-friendly work places (e.g., through flexible hours, job sharing, workplace child care facilities)
- b) Encouraging the Federal Government to introduce necessary changes to the Employment Insurance Act to improve maternity and parental benefits
- c) Seeking cooperation from the Federal Government, school boards, municipalities, and other partners in creating school-based "one stop access" centres for children and family services throughout BC.

MSDES invited comments on the paper from parents, agencies, caregivers, agencies, parents, and other concerned citizens. The original deadline for submissions was 2000 January 31. On 2000 January 10, the Ministry announced that the deadline would be extended to 2000 February 29.

3.0 INTERIM RESPONSES

Earlier this month, MSDES released an interim report on the initial responses submitted on the discussion paper. As of 2000 January 4, the Ministry had received over 7,200 written responses. The majority (6,916) were form letters, which parents, caregivers, and others were able to sign as is or adapt. Other responses consisted of non-form letters (157), feedback forms (28), and petitions (122).

According to MSDES, the key themes to emerge from the responses were as follows:

- Virtually all respondents saw child care as an urgent issue and supported the Ministry's commitment to improving child care in BC.
- The majority of respondents called on the Provincial and Federal Governments to create a publicly funded child care system that ensures all families, regardless of economic or employment status, have access to good quality affordable child care.
- Most believed the Provincial Child Care Subsidy rates should be raised to reflect the real costs of child care. Others offered alternative suggestions for revising the subsidy system (e.g., only allowing subsidies to be claimed by families using licensed services). Still others proposed that subsidies be directed to child care providers, rather than parents.

- Several respondents indicated the need to expand the mandates and improve support for Child Care Resource & Referral programs.
- Some respondents stressed the need for increased salaries for child care workers; others called for enhanced equipment and supply grants for child care providers; and others called for increased funding for Young Parent Programs at secondary schools.
- Reactions to the idea of using surplus school portables to expand school-based child care services were mixed; some respondents favoured the idea, while others expressed concerns.
- While acknowledging the importance of child care, several respondents stressed that it must not be viewed in isolation; rather it should be put in the context of a broader family policy.

4.0 CHILD CARE RESOURCES GROUP “THINK TANK” SESSION

In 1999 November, the City of Vancouver retained Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre to facilitate a series of “think tank” sessions to generate public discussion, feedback, and a final report concerning the discussion paper. The “think tank” sessions took place over a one month period in November and December. They obtained views from various groups concerned with child care matters from Vancouver and neighbouring municipalities. Burnaby’s Child Care Resources Group (CCRG) was one of the groups consulted in the process.

At the Burnaby “think tank” session, the CCRG was asked three questions: 1) what are the useful or positive aspects of the paper?, 2) what concerns exist regarding the paper?, and 3) what should the Provincial Government do about child care? A summary of the group’s comments is included in Appendix 1, *attached*.

Vancouver staff will present a report on the “think tank” sessions, accompanied by the consultants’ report, to Vancouver City Council in February. The reports are expected to form the basis for that city’s formal response to the MSDES discussion paper.

5.0 CHILD CARE ADVOCACY FORUM POSITION

The letter to Council from Joanne Marzitelli, which prompted this report, specifically asked that the City endorse the Provincial Child Care Advocacy Forum’s position concerning the MSDES discussion paper. The Child Care Advocacy Forum is an alliance of six BC child care organizations. It produced the document, *Child Care Services in BC: A Common Agenda and Vision*, which Council endorsed at its meeting of 1999 December 13.

The Advocacy Forum's position on the MSDES discussion paper can be summarized as follows:

- a) The discussion paper proposes some positive short term steps to addressing problems facing the child care sector. While heading in the right direction, however, these measures are seen as "stop gap" only.
- b) The Provincial and Federal Governments need to make a commitment to a publicly funded system that entitles all children to affordable, quality early childhood services; specific actions that are required are as follows:
 - *Federal Government:* make the next budget a "children's budget," with a first year allocation of \$2 billion for the development of provincial and territorial systems of early childhood development services;
 - *Provincial Government:* develop a comprehensive child care system for BC similar to the one introduced in Quebec, whereby every child is entitled to quality child care, regardless of the economic or employment status of parents.

6.0 DISCUSSION

The thrust of the Child Care Advocacy Forum's position is similar to that contained in the document endorsed by Council on 1999 December 13: *Child Care Services in BC: A Common Agenda and Vision*. The position is also consistent with the spirit of the Burnaby Child Care Policy. Further, it reflects comments made at the CCRG "think tank" session, as well as the interim responses received on the paper by MSDES.

Admittedly, the public costs of enhancing the child care system, as proposed by the Advocacy Forum, CCRG, and others, would be substantial. Also, such spending would be controversial - particularly in light of public pressures to reduce taxation and bolster funding for other essential services, such as health and education. That said, there are at least two solid reasons for advocating for enhanced public spending on child care:

- a) Research indicates that the social and financial benefits of good quality early childhood development programs are significant. On the social side, children who are exposed to quality early childhood programs experience lower school dropout rates, reduced use of the health care system, and earlier detection of mental health problems than their counterparts without such opportunities. On the financial side,

a cost-benefit assessment by Toronto researchers, Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky, concluded that there is a \$2 return on every \$1 invested in programs for children from birth to six years of age.¹

- b) The current child care system is fragile - particularly for licensed group day care centres providing infant/ toddler care. The system is also fragmented, sustained through parent fees and a seeming hodge podge of government programs. While some improvements have been made to individual parts of the system over the years, the underlying fragility and fragmented nature have remained. Quality centres continue to face financial difficulty, with some being forced to close. The impacts are significant for parents, children, staff, and the broader community.

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended that Council be asked to authorize preparation of a response to the MSDES discussion paper which covers the following points:

- a) Indicate the City's appreciation to the Ministry for preparing the discussion paper and seeking public comment on the important issue of child care;
- b) Indicate strong support for the vision for child care, enunciated in the "What Needs to Be Done" section of the paper;
- c) Acknowledge that while the recommendations are generally headed in the right direction, if implemented, they would still leave a fragmented and fragile system - particularly for infant and toddler care;
- d) Echo the calls of the Child Care Advocacy Forum, CCRG, and the majority of other respondents to the paper in recommending joint Federal and Provincial Government action towards establishing, and making appropriate funding commitments for, a comprehensive, coordinated, quality child care system for BC.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This report has provided an overview and assessment of the MSDES discussion paper, *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids*. It revealed that the paper has generated substantial interest to date: yielding over 7,200 formal responses as of January 4th and prompting the City of Vancouver to launch a series of "think tank" sessions regarding its proposals.

¹ A useful summary of the social and economic research to support arguments for increased spending on child care programs is provided in the document, *Task Force on Early Child Development and Child Care: Investing in Our Children is Good Public Policy*, Vancouver Board of Trade. July, 1999.

The letter from Joanne Marzitelli that prompted this report asked that Council endorse the the Child Care Advocacy Forum's position on the discussion paper. While acknowledging the substantial costs involved, the report concluded that the position was consistent with the *Child Care Services in BC: A Common Agenda and Vision* document, previously endorsed by Council. Further, it is consistent with the spirit of the Burnaby Child Care Policy. It also reflects comments made at the CCRG "think tank" session, as well as the interim responses received on the paper by MSDES.

Given the foregoing, it is recommended that, as the City of Burnaby's response to the *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids* discussion paper, Council be asked to:

- a) endorse preparation of a submission on the paper which reflects the points outlined in Section 6.0 of this report, and
- b) authorize staff to send the submission, along with a copy of this report, to the Child Care Policy Branch of the Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security.

It is further recommended that a copy of this report be sent to Ms. Joanne Marzitelli, Burnaby's MPs and MLAs, and the Child Care Resources Group.


D.G. Stenson, Director
PLANNING & BUILDING

JF/sa

Attachment

cc: City Manager
Director Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services

Appendix 1

Comments of Child Care Resources Group on *Building a Better Future For B.C.'s Kids* Discussion Paper¹

Question 1: What are the useful or positive aspects of the paper?

- The paper has indicated the true costs and contributions to child care — stating directly that the overwhelming majority of costs are borne by parent fees.
- The paper presents the status of child care in the province very well.
- The vision is excellent.
- The boxes containing statistics and information are useful.
- It was refreshing to have the paper explicitly address the issue of poverty.
- The paper accurately recognizes what child care providers do.

Question 2: What concerns exist regarding the paper?

- It was surprising that the paper did not mention that BC is alone amongst provinces in financially supporting ‘license not required’ and various unregulated forms of child care.
- The paper seems to end abruptly; having read it, it is unclear what the government intends to do and what the reader is being asked to do.
- The paper’s strategies do not correspond with its vision statement.
- Raising the subsidy rate will not stabilize the existing system (i.e., subsidy rate increases will not enhance child care quality or supply and may only result in corresponding increases in parent fees).
- A reduction in income tax rates could help parents to pay for child care (however, a tax cut could hinder efforts to establish a sustainable, quality child care system).
- A fundamental question is not asked in the paper: are parents alone responsible for the costs of child care, or are others (government, society as a whole) also responsible?
- The paper seems to hinge the Province’s increased commitment to child care to additional Federal spending; it avoids the bold “go it alone” stance that has been taken by Quebec.
- The proposals do not represent a comprehensive new vision of child care in BC; rather, they continue the piecemeal approach to child care that currently exists.
- The paper does not address the thorny issue of the sustainability of infant/toddler group care.

Question 3: What should the Provincial Government do about child care?

- The Provincial Government should move forward with a comprehensive vision for child care.
- Despite the high costs involved, child care needs to become a priority for which the necessary dollars are found.
- A broader ‘family policy’ that can be implemented incrementally, as has been done in Quebec, might gain more support than a policy focusing exclusively on child care.

¹Note: These comments were generated from a “Think Tank” session on the discussion paper that was facilitated by Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre on 1999 November 30.

