

north shore news

City of North Vancouver examines daycare rules

Changes would set less stringent regulations for residential areas

Chris Slater / North Shore News

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The City of North Vancouver is looking at making it easier for daycares to open in residential areas, despite reservations of some councillors.

Following a report by city staff, which looked at changing licensing rules for childcare facilities trying to start in residential areas, council discussed the pros and cons of adopting less strict rules.

The report found the city's current regulations, which have been in place since 2009, put up too many barriers for those trying to seek daycare licensing in the city.

Current rules for obtaining a childcare facility license in one of the city's residential areas require the applicant to prepare a traffic plan, speak with all neighbours within 100 metres of the site and gather their input and attend a public meeting before council for business licensing.

The revised bylaw would see the applicant instead prepare a transportation plan for parents picking up their kids so that their facility would have as little impact on area traffic as possible.

The amendments would also change the radius within which neighbours must be informed to 40 metres. The changes would also put an end to applicants having to attend a public licensing meeting before council.

Not all councillors were happy about proposed changes.

"A residential neighbourhood is first and foremost that, a residential neighbourhood," said Coun. Pam Bookham, who spoke against the changes. "If we don't have policies that are well balanced and considerate of all the people that are

going to be impacted and help them get along, we're going to have nothing but trouble."

Bookham also expressed her concerns that businesses from the surrounding District of North Vancouver might relocate to the city to start up daycares if less stringent regulations are put in place.

Coun. Rod Clark also took issue with the proposed bylaw amendments, however he said he also understood the need for childcare for city residents.

"I think a lot of what's proposed in the bylaw here and any hope of remediation of the problems is really closing the barn door after the horse has bolted," said Clark.

He said the city does need to address the lack of childcare in general but that facilities in commercial zones or closed school sites would be a better fit.

"I hear lots of complaints in the community that we don't have enough childcare and so we have to address the lack of childcare in general . . . I'm not convinced that we are going the right way."

Coun. Linda Buchanan spoke in support of the changes, noting the city has had relatively few complaints about existing daycares in residential areas.

She also attested to the difficulties many parents face trying to find local care for their child.

"I am the mother of four. I've had childcare and it is challenging to get. These families start looking sometimes before they even get pregnant, that's how difficult it is."

Buchanan dismissed Bookham's fears that those in the district looking to start similar facilities would flock to the city to set up once less stringent rules are put in place.

"I don't think we're going to see too many people taking up million- plus-dollar homes just to put in a daycare," said Buchanan.

She said the amendments are "the right balance," for those looking to start such facilities.

"They're asking people to engage with their community around them but we're not asking them to do anything more than other people who are doing home-based business are doing."

In the end, council voted unanimously to pass second reading and take the proposed amendments to a public hearing.