

# north shore news

## City of North Vancouver cuts childcare red tape

### Proposed changes aim to boost home-based daycare spaces

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City of North Vancouver municipal hall. Photo file, North Shore News

Looking to spur the growth of childcare spaces, City of North Vancouver council is moving to cut some of the red tape home-based daycare businesses face.

Under the rules today, applicants seeking to open a childcare business that serves nine or more children must provide a traffic plan, inform and get feedback from every neighbour within 100 metres of the proposed facility and attend a public meeting before council votes on the matter.

Under the new "enhanced" regulations, prospective daycare operators will only have to notify neighbours within 40 metres and there is no requirement to solicit feedback. The traffic plan requirement will remain.

"I can tell you that finding quality, affordable daycare is a challenge for any municipality, especially here in the city where we have a higher concentration of younger people and we need to do as much as we can to encourage group daycares in the city and make them as accessible as possible for everyone," said Mayor Darrell Mussatto before throwing his support behind the changes.

Today, there are only six such businesses in the city - far too few according to Coun. Craig Keating. "When. .. we've only got six, according to staff, our challenge is not to find new ways to regulate. Our challenge is to find ways to encourage," he said.

While some may be irked by crying children in singlefamily neighbourhoods, it is far worse to have those neighbourhoods absent of children entirely, Keating added.

Daycare clients, under the proposed changes, would also be informed of the city's "good neighbour" policy and bylaw staff would keep an eye on the business to make

sure city regulations are obeyed.

Other than one daycare on Fourth Street that netted a series of complaints from neighbours, the city has on record only two complaints registered against the other group daycare facilities, one in 1989 that was resolved and another one in 1992 which was found to be without merit.

No other home-based business requires such a stringent approval process to operate in the city, Coun. Linda Buchanan noted.

Daycares must still be licensed and inspected by Vancouver Coastal Health before they can apply to the city for a business licence. Council can remove a business licence at its own discretion should there be numerous complaints.

Though there was no disagreement that more childcare spaces are needed in the city, the proposed changes went a little too far for some on council by cutting out neighbourhood feedback to council before a business's licence is granted.

"There's the rub as far as I'm concerned," said Coun. Rod Clark. "There's the information that I need to know: whether the neighbours in close proximity to a proposed daycare are indeed in favour, or against or neutral so I can't live with this proposed legislation with that requirement not there."

Clark found support in Coun. Pam Bookham.

"We can't assume the neighbouring houses are going to be empty during the bulk of the time when the daycare is busiest," she said, noting a childcare business could be disruptive for seniors, people doing shift work and people who are at home ill or disabled. "A daycare can have a significant impact on the immediate neighbours and I think there should be an opportunity for council to be made aware of those interests that have to be balanced."

Coun. Guy Heywood joined Clark and Bookham in voting against the motion.

The public is invited to comment on the proposed changes at a public meeting before council votes on making the changes final.

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