

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential Next Steps and Policy Options

Recommendation			
That the September 18, 2023, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00769, be received for information.			
Requested Action		Information Only	
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle		ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals	
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.		Healthy City	
City Plan Values	THRIVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and Compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Economic Growth
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The City Plan• Economic Action Plan• EndPovertyEdmonton		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• June 30, 2021, UPE00685, Early Learning and Care Steering Committee Report - Annual Report 2020• May 24, 2016, CR_3628, EndPovertyEdmonton Task Force for the Elimination of Poverty - EndPovertyEdmonton Road Map Approval		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the August 11, 2021, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, the following motion passed:

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

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That Administration provide a report on the recommendations provided by the Early Learning and Care Steering Committee, including potential next steps and policy options.

Executive Summary

- EndPovertyEdmonton identified affordable and quality child care as a game-changer for eliminating poverty in Edmonton.
- The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) was established to develop a road map for affordable and quality child care. It was formed by, is accountable to, and is funded by EndPovertyEdmonton.
- ECELC presented recommendations to the Government of Alberta, numerous Edmonton school boards and the City of Edmonton in 2021.
- Administration has reviewed the recommendations, identified work underway and outlined potential next steps as sanctioned within the municipal jurisdiction.
- Should Council direct Administration to take additional steps to address ECELC's recommended actions, Administration would bring forward an unfunded service package for consideration as part of the Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment process.

REPORT

The Ministries of Education and Children's Services are responsible for setting the policy direction and funding for early learning, child care and kindergarten in Alberta.

In the first "Road Map to Guide Our Journey 2016-2021" report, released in May 2016, EndPovertyEdmonton identified affordable and quality child care as a game-changer for eliminating poverty in Edmonton. City Council approved the recommendations in the first road map which included creating a committee to design and implement an integrated system of early learning and child care in the May 24, 2016, external report CR_3628, EndPovertyEdmonton Task Force for the Elimination of Poverty - EndPovertyEdmonton Road Map Approval.

The Early Learning and Care Steering Committee (subsequently Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care) was established in 2018 through a terms of reference that included the City of Edmonton, Ministry of Children's Services, Edmonton Catholic Schools, Edmonton Public Schools and the Greater North-Central Francophone Education Region 2. ECELC was formed by, is accountable to, and is funded by EndPovertyEdmonton.

Interjurisdictional Funding and Roles

In May 2021, ECELC developed recommendations for the province, numerous Edmonton School Boards and the City of Edmonton. ECELC made ten recommendations to the City (Attachment 1). Many of these recommendations fit into work already underway at the City whereas others fall under provincial or federal jurisdiction, as does the funding.

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential Next Steps and Policy Options

Since that time, the provincial and federal governments have negotiated an agreement that will see a total of \$3.8 billion invested in child care for children under one year of age to kindergarten age (in kindergarten and also attending child care during regular school hours), as follows:

- \$2.865 billion to lower child care fees for Alberta parents. By 2026 parents will pay an average of \$10 per day. Fees will be lowered through expanded subsidy and affordability grants.
- \$240.64 million to increase the number of child care spaces. The Space Creation Grant will help enable up to 68,700 total new licensed spaces to be created by 2026. This includes 42,500 non-profit and 26,200 private spaces.
- \$202.6 million to develop and fund child care options to support vulnerable and diverse populations as well as children with extra needs.
- \$306.16 million to support licensed programs and certified educators in offering high-quality support for families in their communities.¹

This funding will provide new opportunities for early learning and child care operators in Alberta. Many details regarding eligibility and parameters are still under discussion between the federal and provincial governments.

The fluid environment involving both the federal and provincial governments can lead to uncertainty for early learning and child care operators. Child care is under provincial jurisdiction and the City does not have the fiscal tools to support new responsibilities required to be involved in child care. It would require significant resources, both for operational funding and internal staffing to support this work.

Advocacy and Policy

There are established priorities in place to inform the City's relationships with both the federal and provincial governments, and the funding from other levels of government has a direct impact on child care in Edmonton. However, there are many ways that the City can and does play a supporting and enabling role, within its jurisdiction, which is demonstrated through various policies.

The City Plan and the Edmonton Economic Action Plan provide policy direction to promote affordable, accessible, high-quality and inclusive early learning and child care facilities in a variety of locations throughout the city. The direction in these policy documents guides the City's implementation of this work and is within the City's municipal jurisdiction.

An example of the City playing an enabling role is the Economic Action Plan Grant (EAPG), which supports the implementation of the Economic Action Plan. The EAPG has provided \$50,000 in funding to two projects that will create approximately 100 new child care spaces in Edmonton in support of Action 17: Promote affordable, accessible, high-quality, and inclusive early learning and child care. Additional efforts are described in Attachment 1.

A second example is the significant work currently underway on modernizing the Zoning Bylaw to simplify regulations that apply to child care and early learning provision (detailed under Action 3

¹ alberta.ca/federal-provincial-child-care-agreement.aspx

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential Next Steps and Policy Options

in Attachment 1). This is consistent with the direction set by The City Plan, with further draft policy language subject to public review through engagement in 2023 and the development of District Plans. In general, this policy work creates an environment where the provision of these services is recognized as an integral part of all neighbourhoods.

Administration has identified work that has been completed or is underway and provided potential next steps for each of the recommended actions, including those which are within provincial and federal jurisdictions. Administration proposes using existing frameworks, processes and resources to support the work of ECELC and EndPovertyEdmonton to implement the next steps outlined in Attachment 1.

Community Insight

Through working directly with groups such as the Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE), Administration has heard that affordable and quality child care can contribute to efforts to eliminate poverty in Edmonton. Insights from these organizations indicate that better access to affordable child care supports the development of stronger neighbourhoods and communities and, in particular, gives low-income families a pathway to help get out of poverty by enabling them to participate more effectively in the labour force and educational opportunities. Though jurisdictional responsibility tends to fall within the provincial or federal realms, the City, nonprofits and advisory groups play key supporting roles in the provision of these services at the municipal level.

As part of its original work, Administration has reviewed and responded to the recommendations from the ECELC. Public engagement was not undertaken given that the ECELC recommendations were specifically directed to areas of Administration's responsibility. Public engagement opportunities and insights will be sought going forward where relevant and impactful for areas of municipal jurisdiction.

GBA+

Affordable and quality child care is a game-changer in helping to eliminate poverty in Edmonton. Access to affordable child care allows low-income families to participate more effectively in the labour force and helps establish pathways out of poverty. While access to daycare and early learning is recognized as a key tool to support families in making a living, it also supports the development of stronger neighbourhoods, communities, and livelihoods for racialized and marginalized children - including Indigenous children or those with extra needs.

Access to affordable child care removes barriers to employment and participation in the labour force for low-income families, particularly single parents and women. This population may have limited resources to access child care or may be the primary caregivers at home and have to choose between working or providing care for their children. Affordable child care is key to establishing pathways out of poverty by enabling low-income families, especially women, to participate in the labour market or seek educational opportunities that help create financial security. In order to achieve this, the City reviewed the ECELC's recommendations and have

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential Next Steps and Policy Options

identified potential next steps for those that are within the City's jurisdiction, as identified in Attachment 1.

As the City works on these next steps, a GBA+ approach to implementation will be included where the City is lead, and will be advocated for in instances where the City is not the primary decision maker.

Attachments

1. Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Recommendations and Potential Next Steps