

What We Heard Report One Year Review of Child Care Services

Zoning Bylaw Team
April 2025

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Edmonton

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Engagement Summary

In general, feedback about child care services development under the new Zoning Bylaw was mostly neutral or positive; however, there were some concerns and opportunities raised about development of child care services in residential neighbourhoods.

Good News Stories

Some participants shared experiences with faster processing times for child care service development permits on school sites in 2024.

Regulatory Barriers identified

Interviews with City staff identified that development permit applications for child care services in small scale residential zones see the highest proportion of refusals, variances and appeals, with the minimum on-site pick-up and drop-off requirement being the most frequently varied regulation.

Small-scale child care providers identified process challenges as the biggest challenge to development in the past, including navigating complex regulations, application steps and processing times.

Concerns Raised

Some participants listed increased traffic and parking as safety and nuisance concerns when child care services are introduced into residential areas.

Other participants raised concerns about the current locational requirements for child care services in residential zones which place purpose-built child care centres along busier streets where there is more traffic pollution.

Some participants raised concerns that there are places in the city that have fewer child care options than others, that wait times can be long to access child care spaces and that it can be especially difficult to find child care in the evenings and on weekends. Potentially more opportunities in residential areas could help alleviate the shortage of child care options.

Opportunities Identified

Some participants encouraged increasing opportunities for child care in residential areas to improve access, walkability and choice. Participants identified a desire for child care in residential areas because they are located away from traffic pollution and have a more “at home” feel.

Project Overview

Project Origin

At the October 16-23, 2023 City Council Public Hearing, the following motion was passed:

Allow child care services on all lots in the RS, RSF and RSM zones

That Administration, as part of the Zoning Bylaw (Charter Bylaw 20001) 1-year review report, include analysis on the Child Care Services provision since enactment of Charter Bylaw 20001 and provide options for amendments to further expand opportunities for Child Care Services, if required.

Project Purpose

The purpose of the one year review of child care services is to identify potential regulatory barriers to child care services in the Zoning Bylaw and explore amendments that would expand opportunities for child care service development in the future.

In addition to analysis of development permit data, the review included targeted engagement with child care experts, child care providers, child care interest groups and City staff who process development permits for child care services.

Key Terms

- **RS Zone:** Small Scale Residential Zone
- **RSF Zone:** Small Scale Flex Residential Zone
- **RSM Zone:** Small-Medium Scale Transition Residential Zone

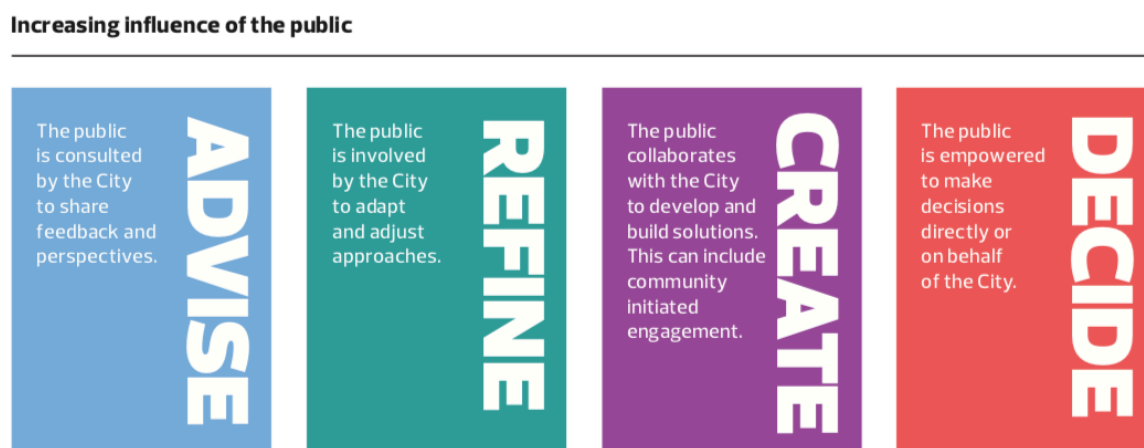
Engagement Approach

Engagement Goals

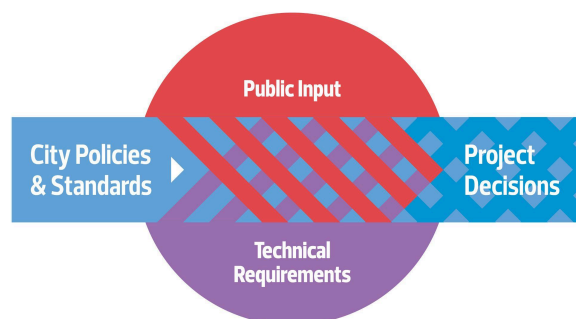
The [Public Engagement Spectrum](#) explains the four roles the public can have when they participate in City of Edmonton public engagement activities. As you move within the spectrum, there is an increasing level of public influence and commitment from the City and the public.

The one year review of Child Care Services project falls within the **Advise** level of the spectrum: *The public is consulted by the City to share feedback and perspectives that are considered for policies, programs, projects or services.*

The visual below illustrates the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum:



A combination of City policies and programs, safety and technical requirements and public and stakeholder input will help to ensure that the decisions we make are fiscally responsible, align with best practices and result in the best outcomes for our city.



Who We Engaged and How We Listened

Engagement was focused on understanding what regulatory barriers exist for child care service development, particularly in small-scale residential zones. Engagement efforts targeted groups that have experience with the development permit process for child care and groups that could provide insight into child care needs in Edmonton. The following groups were engaged on this topic:

- Small-scale child care providers
- Early Learning and Care Steering Committee
- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL)
- Women's Advisory Voice of Edmonton (WAVE) Policy Subcommittee

City of Edmonton staff who review development permits for child care services were also involved.

In addition, feedback about child care services provided by various community and industry members engaged as part of the broader Zoning Bylaw One Year Review are included in this report.

Three virtual engagement tactics were used for this project:

- Targeted online survey
 - Small-scale child care providers were emailed a link to an online survey. The email and the survey landing page described the purpose of the research and how feedback would be used.
- Presentations to specific organizations followed by discussions
 - A presentation was given to participants explaining the background of the project, high-level information about what the Zoning Bylaw does and does not do in relation to child care services and information about what child care development currently looks like in Edmonton. Participants had an opportunity to ask questions prior to the presenter asking participants a prepared set of questions.
- Interviews
 - As part of the broader Zoning Bylaw One Year Review, interviewees were given a verbal overview of the one year review of child care services and asked a prepared set of questions.

Child Care Provider Online Survey

- November 4 - 25, 2024
- 4 out of 10 survey recipients responded

In November 2024, a survey was sent directly to 10 small-scale child care service operators to gather input on their experiences obtaining development permits and meeting Zoning Bylaw regulations. All 10 child care centres were located in either the RS or RSF Zone. Four responses were received and the results are included as part of the feedback summarized in this What We Heard report.

Meeting with Early Learning and Care Steering Committee

- December 2, 2024
- 7 Attendees

The Early Learning and Care Steering Committee was invited to a virtual meeting in December 2024 to attend a presentation on the project and share their first impressions and experiences with the new Zoning Bylaw. Seven committee members attended, representing diverse perspectives including the Edmonton Region Child Care Association, YMCA, End Poverty Edmonton, Edmonton Public School Board, Edmonton Catholic School Board and Child Development Dayhomes.

One Year Review Interview with Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL)

- December 10, 2024
- 2 Interviewees

EFCL was interviewed as part of the broader Zoning Bylaw One Year Review. During the interview, they were asked if they have heard concerns or positive news stories from community members regarding development of child care services in neighbourhoods.

One Year Review External Stakeholder Interviews

- November - December 2024
- 3 interviewees mentioned child care services

While these interviews did not contain questions specific to child care services, the topic of child care services was brought up organically in some conversations and are summarized in the engagement findings in the next section. Representatives who mentioned child care included NAIOP (Commercial Real Estate Development Association), the North Edge Business Improvement Area and a community member.

Meeting with Women's Advisory Voice of Edmonton Committee (WAVE) Policy Subcommittee

- February 6, 2025
- 10 committee members in attendance

The City met with the WAVE policy subcommittee in February to present information about the project and ask for their perspectives on access to child care services and where the City should be allowing more child care development in Edmonton.

One Year Review Internal City of Edmonton Interviews

- December 11, 2024 and January 15, 2025
- 6 City staff interviewed

Internal staff from Development Approvals at the City of Edmonton were interviewed to gain an understanding of their experiences reviewing child care services development permit applications since the adoption of the new Zoning Bylaw.

What We Heard

Feedback Summary

The questions and themes below summarize feedback from external participants.

Q: What are your overall first impressions with the new Zoning Bylaw?

Shorter Processing Timelines

The Edmonton Region Child Care Association and the Edmonton Public School Board shared that development permit processing timelines have been significantly shorter – currently 2 weeks, an improvement of the 2 months it took in the past – for a new out of school care program in an existing elementary school.

A YMCA representative mentioned that they have had a few applications for expansions of existing child care facilities this year and that the development permit process has been timely so far.

Q: What are the regulatory barriers to development of Child Care Services that you've encountered recently or in the past?

Process Challenges

Respondents from the online survey of child care providers in the RS and RSF Zones indicated that the permitting process has been challenging in the past. All child care provider survey respondents reported that they have been in operation for 6-10 years and that their experience applying for a development permit for their child care centre was either somewhat or very difficult. They indicated that difficulties include changing regulations, lots of paperwork, many application steps, long processing times, inspections and a lack of information.

Pick-up and Drop-off Requirement

One NAIOP representative mentioned that the pick-up and drop-off requirement can be onerous for applicants to meet, especially for larger child care facilities.

A member of the Early Learning and Care Committee noted that the pick-up and drop-off requirement was difficult to meet in the past, but that their application timelines had improved since the new Zoning Bylaw removed the pick-up and drop-off requirement for child care services on school sites.

Other Challenges

A member of the Early Learning and Care Committee felt that zoning is not the biggest issue facing child care services. Larger issues include finding locations that provide quality indoor and outdoor play spaces. Another committee member suggested that it should be easier to establish child care

services in community league buildings through bi-lateral agreements. Other committee members felt that Edmonton would benefit from municipal or provincial child care facility design guidelines and a city-wide Child Care Strategy and Needs Assessment.

Q: What are your thoughts on development of small scale child care services in residential areas?

Concerns with Locational Requirements

One community member was concerned that new purpose-built child care centres in small-scale residential zones could only be built on corner sites along collector or arterial roads, noting that air quality and traffic safety are negatively affected along busier streets. This participant felt that an increase of on-street parking in their neighbourhood would be acceptable if it allows child care to locate away from busy roads.

Accessibility and Proximity to Schools and Playgrounds

One member of the Early Learning and Care Committee mentioned that development of child care in residential areas can make child care more accessible for families by providing options closer to where they live.

An online survey of small-scale child care providers in the RS and RSF Zones indicated that proximity to schools, followed by proximity to playgrounds were the most important factors in choosing a location for their child care centre in a residential area.

Compatibility Concerns

One community member shared concerns about noise and traffic created by child care facilities in residential neighbourhoods and that they believe the number of children they're seeing in child care facilities in their neighbourhood is too high. In addition, the community member noted that there is a general lack of awareness amongst Edmontonians that a child care service could be developed next door to their house without notice.

WAVE Policy Subcommittee Feedback Summary

Q: Do you feel that Edmontonians have a variety of child care options available to them? If not, where in the city would you like to see more child care opportunities?

Overall, the subcommittee suggested that residential settings were preferred locations for child care and more child care within residential neighbourhoods could help address some of the current challenges with access.

In terms of preferences, one participant noted that child care facilities located in a residential setting provide an "at home" feeling. Another participant noted that it is convenient to have child care facilities located in neighbourhoods, close to schools.

In terms of challenges, one participant noted that child care waitlists can be long and there is pressure to secure spots when they become available, even if the spot is not immediately needed. Another participant noted that it is difficult to find child care in the evening and on weekends. Potentially, more options for child care in neighbourhoods could help lessen these challenges.

Q: What are your thoughts on making it easier for child care services to develop in more areas within residential neighbourhoods?

In general, the WAVE subcommittee was supportive of allowing child care services to develop in more areas within residential neighbourhoods. One participant felt that allowing more opportunities for child care in residential areas could help provide better access to child care as the city grows and the demand for child care increases. Another participant noted that more child care opportunities in residential areas would result in more people walking and less people driving to drop off their children. Another participant noted that it would be safer to have child care services in residential areas than along main streets. Reuse of existing buildings was suggested by one participant as a way of introducing child care more seamlessly into residential areas.

Some participants brought up concerns with having more child care facilities in residential areas. One participant noted that child care services in residential neighbourhoods can create traffic and parking conflicts between parents or guardians picking-up and dropping-off their children and local residents. Another participant noted that people dropping off their children may block other people's driveways where on-street parking is limited. Some suggested strategies were to limit how many child care facilities can open on a block and allow child care services on sites with large frontages.

Q: What are potential benefits and challenges with reducing the on-site pick up and drop off space requirement for child care services in residential neighbourhoods?

Overall, the WAVE subcommittee was supportive of reducing the on-site pick-up and drop-off requirement for child care services. One participant noted that this would align with City policies that are pushing for more walkable neighbourhoods. Another participant felt that the lack of access to child care opportunities is a bigger issue than parking in residential areas. Another participant was concerned that the pick up and drop off requirement assumes that everyone is dropping off their children with a vehicle, when some people are taking transit, biking or walking. Lastly, a participant noted that less on-site parking would allow more trees and outdoor playspace for the children.

Next Steps

This project falls within the Advise level of the engagement spectrum: *The public is consulted by the City to share feedback and perspectives that are considered for policies, programs, projects or services.*

Input on this project will be summarized and included in a report advancing to Urban Planning Committee on June 3, 2025 and may lead to future Zoning Bylaw amendments.

Thank you to all who participated! The input has been essential to the one year review of child care services and will help guide future improvements to Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw.

For more information, contact the Zoning Bylaw team at zoningbylaw@edmonton.ca.