

REPORT

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

To: Mayor W. Wright and Members of Council in Committee of the Whole Date: January 14, 2008

From: Lisa Spitale File: 13.2630.06
Director of Development Services

Subject: Early Childhood Development (ECD) Hubs in New Westminster

RECOMMENDATION

THAT this report be received for information.

PURPOSE

This report is intended to provide information about the development of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Hubs in New Westminster. More specifically, it provides background information on the process and progress made to date; clarifies what is meant by an ECD Hub; describes some of the benefits associated with hub development; and outlines a preliminary short-term action plan for New Westminster.

SUMMARY

Early Childhood Development (ECD) Hubs are being developed around the Province and have been in existence for many years in parts of Europe and in the United States. They support the healthy development of young children aged 0 to 6 years and their families; and include at least two early childhood development or family strengthening services, one of which is a licensed child care program.

ECD Hubs act as focal points for their communities and enable families to obtain information and seamlessly access a continuum of services related to their needs. Hub development has been proven to enhance child outcomes, including school readiness and success. It also contributes to economic development, as it attracts new families to the community and retains existing ones. Additionally, it is an important consideration in business expansion and relocation decisions, as the provision of licensed child care and related services positively impacts worker productivity.

In New Westminster, four ECD hubs serving six neighbourhoods are envisioned (see Appendix #1). The Ministry of Children and Family Development is supporting hub development; the ECD Steering Committee and its Action Teams are coordinating planning and development; and the Public Partners ECD Committee is working to access funding, space and other resources.

BACKGROUND

Many communities have developed or are in the process of developing ECD Hubs. These hubs are seen as a way of enhancing access to information and services; improving child outcomes, including school readiness and success; and facilitating inter-sectoral collaboration and partnership building.

The New Westminster Early Childhood Development (ECD) Steering Committee is an inter-sectoral body that is collectively working to research, plan and implement projects that support families with young children in the community. In 2004, the committee developed a Five-Year Strategic Action Plan (2004/09), with a key strategic priority being hub development and partnership building.

The above plan envisions four hubs serving six neighbourhoods in New Westminster. The four hubs are as follows: the East Hub (Queen's Park and Sapperton); the Queensborough Hub; the Uptown/Downtown Hub; and the West Hub (i.e., Connaught Heights and Tweedsmuir).

With funding support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, planning for two of the four hubs is underway.

Regarding the Queensborough Hub, the community consultation phase has been completed and a Queensborough Action Team has been established. This body is currently working to identify existing and future programs that may form part of a Queensborough ECD Hub and to determine the feasibility of using municipal and school buildings as joint use facilities.

Regarding the Uptown/Downtown Hub, an Action Team has been established and community consultation will commence in January 2008. As part of this consultation, appropriate locations for hub development will be probed. Given the topography of the area in question and the types of development envisioned for the Downtown (e.g., multi-family, high rise development), determining an appropriate location or locations will be challenging.

In addition to the above ECD Steering Committee and its Action Teams, a Public Partners ECD Committee is also working to access funding, space and other resources in support of the four hubs. This body includes representation from the City of New Westminster (Development Services and Parks and Recreation), Fraser Health, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, School District #40 and the United Way of the Lower Mainland. On December 13, 2007, the five partner organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which established a framework for supporting the efforts of the ECD Steering Committee and working towards the development of the four hubs in New Westminster.

EXISTING POLICY/PRACTICE

The City of New Westminster does not have a policy regarding ECD Hubs; however, the Official Community Plan (OCP) is supportive of child care, which is an essential component of hub development. More specifically, the OCP states that the City should:

- encourage the provision of child care as an essential community-based service;
- promote child care within the City by facilitating partnerships with the community;
- continue to implement the Child Care Strategy (which is currently being revised);
- consider the provision of child care in the context of neighbourhood planning by evaluating the need for child care in proposed developments.

ANALYSIS

Definition

There is no common definition or model as to what constitutes an ECD Hub. In fact, a hub can look quite different from one community or neighbourhood to the next. This variability results from the nature of the community or neighbourhood in which it is located and the characteristics of its families and children.

As such, the best way to understand what constitutes a hub is to understand its constituent components:

- Hubs support the healthy development of young children aged 0 to 6 years and their families.
- Hubs include at least two early childhood development or family strengthening services; one of which is a licensed child care program.
- Hubs act as focal points for their communities; enabling families to easily obtain information and seamlessly access a continuum of services related to their needs.

- Hubs can include the following services: education and literacy programs for children and their parents; family support and parenting programs; pregnancy, birth and infancy programs and services; recreation and social programs; and specialized services related to health, hearing and speech.
- Hubs are typically located in or adjacent to facilities such as community centres, neighbourhood houses, public libraries and schools.
- Hubs are based on community research as to gaps, needs and opportunities and best practices with regard to early childhood development.
- Hubs contribute to community development by building capacity, empowering families, facilitating participation and supporting community-based initiatives.
- Hubs facilitate inter-sectoral collaboration and partnership building (and reduce incidences of service duplication and fragmentation).

Potential Benefits

Research shows that a child's brain development in the first six years of life sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health. It also shows that positive early childhood experiences increase school readiness and success.

Research cites a number of factors which influence early childhood development, including: parental education, parenting style, family income, neighbourhood socio-economic characteristics, and quality early childhood development and family strengthening services.

The development of hubs will enhance access to early childhood development, family strengthening and parenting programs in New Westminster, which will ensure that all children, regardless of their parental, family or socio-economic circumstances, will have an opportunity to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health.

Hubs also contribute to economic development: they attract new families to the community and retain existing ones and they are an important consideration in business expansion and relocation decisions, as they impact worker productivity. The child care component also enables parents of young children to participate in the labour force and is a key social service for reducing dependence on income assistance.

Short-Term Action Plan

The following preliminary short-term actions are being pursued:

1. To identify existing and future programs that may form part of a Queensborough ECD Hub and to determine the feasibility of using municipal and school buildings as joint use facilities.
2. To identify funding, space and other resources in support of the development of the Queensborough ECD Hub.
3. To complete the consultation in support of the Uptown/Downtown ECD Hub. This phase of development will take until April 2008. In the interim, efforts are underway to identify funding, space and other resources in support of this hub.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is supportive of ECD Hubs and is allocating funding towards their development. The City of New Westminster, Fraser Health, School District #40 and the United Way of Lower Mainland are working with MCFD to develop the four hubs in New Westminster.

The City of New Westminster (as represented through Development Services and Parks and Recreation) is currently exploring opportunities and partnership arrangements. These opportunities could include the provision of space within existing or new civic facilities and the use of developer contributions, as well as other appropriate measures.

Once developed, the hubs would be sustainable, as the ECD tenants would have service contracts with senior government agencies and would be supplemented by user fees. ECD tenants would also benefit by having joint administrative functions and shared space arrangements, which would reduce their operating costs, while improving service to families.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Development Services and Parks and Recreation are jointly represented on the Public Partners ECD Committee, which is working to access funding, space and other resources in support of the four hubs. Development Services and Parks and Recreation are also represented on the ECD Steering Committee and the Uptown/Downtown Hub Action Team.

CONCLUSION

The development of ECD Hubs will significantly improve access to and quality of services for young children aged 0 to 6 years and their families in New Westminster. It will also enhance the City's attractiveness to families and be an important consideration in the location and relocation of businesses, which will assist in facilitating economic development and growth.

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