

Child Care Advisory Committee Submission to ReThink London

June 19, 2013

Child Care Advisory Committee Mandate: The Child Care Advisory Committee (CCAC) provides information, advice and recommendations to Municipal Council through the Community Service Committee on issues affecting early learning and child care of children 0 years up to and including 12 years of age such as, but not limited to, special needs funding, resource centres funding, wage subsidy, child care fee subsidy and health and safety issues, such as playgrounds.

Ministry of Education is responsible for child care, including licensing and quality assurance.

- Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) will be fully implemented in all schools, September 2014.
- Children as young as 3 years 8 months in September, qualify for FDK.
- *Schools- First Capital Retrofit Policy 2012* supports school based child care and provides funding for existing spaces to be retrofitted to serve younger children. The desired outcome is to make effective multi-purpose use of school space, to integrate and provide more seamless service and convenience for parents.
- Ontario Early Years Policy Framework 2013:
“Investments in the early years that improve life for Ontarians today and in the future, promote sustainability, and contribute to the growth of the economy.” Page 4

“Today and even more so in the future, our ability to improve system integration will depend on municipalities taking a lead role in working with partners, including school boards and community service providers, to initiate and sustain locally based planning and development under the shared vision of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework.”
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Ministry of Children and Youth is responsible for child and family resource centres however the government has announced these will be moved to also to the Ministry of Education as part the government’s initiative to improve service integration.

Licensed child care fosters a prosperous city

- Employs approximately 1,200 professionals
- Supports parents by providing licensed child care for over 12,000 children
- Enables about 20% of London families to work or continue their education
- Supporting the early years lays the foundation for the future health, education and social wellbeing of our citizens

Licensed child care actively supports the London Child and Youth Network (CYN)

Community based child care agencies are the lead agencies and community partners in the development of the new neighbourhood Family Centres. Family Centres support a family-centred service system by offering families a single door to the many opportunities and resources in their neighbourhood and city. The intent is to serve families in a more seamless, integrated and effective way. Family Centres collaborate with local residents and other programs in the neighbourhood to provide a mix of programs and services that best meet neighbourhood needs.

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Overall the CCAC is very pleased with the Vision and Directions and congratulates ReThink London on the successful community collaboration that has taken place. Licensed, community based early learning and child care in London has a history of strong community collaboration and supporting initiatives that benefit children and families.

A city plan that actively supports the wellbeing of children:

- supports all community members today and in the future
- positions the city as “age friendly” for all ages
- helps to attract and retain young families and young professionals which is vital in supporting a “complete, vibrant community” as the baby boomers age
- limits demands for gated or “adult only” communities and avoids a “retirement community only” image
- protects the environment and integration of nature and natural playscapes within the city

- plans for the future integration of multi-use sites in new developments that could include school, child care, natural and commercial playscapes, recreation, public libraries, community paths and public space both indoors and outside.

In responding to ReThink London Discussion Papers, CCAC is focusing on the broader perspective of:

- *“What are the key elements of a child friendly city, today and 10-20 years from now?”*
- *How can “children” be made visible in the city plan and be used as a reference point for planning and decision making?*

Discussion Paper #1 Fostering a Prosperous City

“Building the city that people want to live in.” page 17

Suggestion to page 17, 6th bullet

- “A city that is affordable, with access to quality housing, health care, **education and child care**”

Realtors tell us that young professionals looking to move to London ask specifically about neighbourhoods with access to good schools and child care.

Suggestion to page 17, 8th bullet

- “A city for everyone. . . an Age Friendly city is a city that is friendly for **all ages, from infancy to the elderly, including the pre-natal and end of life stages.**”

Suggestion to page 18

“A city that has strong neighbourhoods where people can choose to “age in place” makes reference to the Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

- *“A city that has strong neighbourhoods where **families and individuals of all abilities and ages, can choose to grow, learn and “age in place”.***

Discussion Paper #5 Building a Greener City

There is growing awareness that the separation of children from nature is an important educational as well as a physical and mental health concern. Children need playgrounds and splash parks but they also need easy access to safely experience and explore the biodiversity of the natural environment. Learning to relax and be soothed by nature is an anti-dote to stress. This is important for children’s wellbeing today but also, as they learn to enjoy and appreciate the natural environment, they are better prepared to be our future stewards of the environment.

Example:

David Suzuki often refers to his early experiences exploring the marshy areas on Oxford Street west (near the existing Fleetway 40 Bowling) as having been critical to the development of his passion for science and the environment.

Comments

- Green Corridors: The green corridor and pathways along the Thames River and neighbouring creeks are an invaluable asset that need to be protected and enhanced for public access by active transportation, whenever possible. Example: bike and foot paths that connect neighbourhoods and neighbourhood parks, to the river corridor.
- Outdoor Education Centres: There is a need to protect the loss of school and public access to outdoor education centres and sites.
- Loss of school playgrounds: As schools are sold, the neighbourhood loses access to the public space that surrounded the school. This includes the playground, the recreational fields, the mature trees, large space to run freely and the public walking paths that connected neighbours.
- Urban agriculture: As the city expands, ensure some farmland is kept within the city for urban agriculture and farmer’s markets. Bike paths can be created to enable access to local grown food and “pick your own” small farm operations. Incentives would be needed to prevent the land from being sold to developers. Cornell’s and Versteegh’s are two examples prime farmland and orchards in southwest London that were easily accessed by city dwellers and have recently been sold.
- Urban forests: Creating a true forest within the city is much more than planting more trees. The urban forest could be sufficiently large to provide a retreat from the increasing

summer heat. If paths through the forest are strategically located to connect people with important public buildings, institutions or activities, then active travel through the forest is part of our daily routines, functional fitness and offers an environmental friendly option other than driving around the forest. Example: Zurich Switzerland has an urban forest on a large hill with busy foot and bike paths connecting residences to a university campus, the city zoo, outdoor education sites, etc.

- **Trees:** Increasing the tree canopy with new plantings but also by ensuring new residential developments keep a certain proportion of the existing mature, healthy trees. As climate change results in more extreme heat days, shade trees are required as protection from the sun. Today children in new subdivisions lack access to shade trees and are often unable to play outside on hot days.
- **Think long term:** It has been said that “The best time to plant a tree was 100 years ago”. Thus, when considering the re-development of abandoned space consider what lessons can be learned by considering the urban successes of today, that were seeds planted 100 years ago.
Example: The Hamilton Botanical Gardens. Sections of this used to be a gravel pit and a heavy industrial area.

Discussion Paper #7: Building Strong and Attractive Neighbourhoods

People live in a city but the children live and grow up in a neighbourhood.

The aging population of London is an important consideration in city planning however, an aging population also needs to attract the young in order to remain a vibrant and complete city. It is important in a city planning document to specify the key elements of an age friendly city that supports all ages from infancy/ early childhood to the elderly. It also supports the able bodied and the disabled.

Fortunately the key aspects to attracting and supporting the older and the younger populations are similar. Examples include:

- service integration, neighbourhood hubs
- access to community recreation areas and facilities
- walkable communities with safe walking/bike paths, sidewalks
- minimal stairs and curbs for strollers and little legs
- access to parks etc. without the need to cross major highways
- integration of natural areas with residential development
- shade or semi-protected areas for resting, playing, social gathering
- beautiful landscapes and urban design
- easy public transit
- public parks and public spaces designed with “eyes on the park”. Example: a neighbourhood park with homes facing the park

Young families are also looking for neighbourhoods with easy access to schools and school based child care.

Discussion Paper #8: Making Wise Planning Decisions, Careful Management

Suggestions;

- In planning new subdivisions and setting aside property for a possible future school, it is important to consider the indoor and outdoor land use needs for the future school based child care. This is especially important for elementary schools and is aligned with the direction of the Ministry of Education.
- Once the school board has decided to sell a school property, can the municipality plan for a community consultation or an assessment regarding the impact to the neighbourhood, due to the loss of access to the outdoor public space adjoining the school? Some of this space may be kept for continued public use in order to retain access to large shade trees, paths connecting neighbourhoods, playing fields, space for children to run and small natural areas for children to safely explore.

Thank you ReThink London for your excellent work and your commitment to community consultation.

