

Town of Norwich Childcare Committee
Draft Minutes
April 5, 2021 Meeting

Persons present: Rebecca Holcombe, Mary Layton, Brian Loeb, Jamie Rosenfeld, Neil Odell, Bob Haynes, Brenda Metzler, Reeva Murphy, Brie Swenson

1. Layton moved to **approve the agenda**, second by Haynes, 5 yes. (Rosenfeld arrived 30 minutes into the meeting).
2. The **minutes** of the March 8th meeting were amended to correct the spelling of Brenda Metzler’s last name. Haynes moved, second by Odell, 5 yes.
3. **Public comments:** The Committee heard from Brenda S. Metzler, Community and Program Support Specialist for Let’s Grow Kids, a nonprofit organization whose mission is “To insure affordable access to high-quality child care for all Vermont families by 2025”; and Reeva Murphy, representing Heart of a Child Early Care and Learning Consultation. The Committee heard about Brenda and Reeva’s general work and experience in projects to improve child care access and also in regard to specific projects in Randolph, Alburgh, and Craftsbury, Vermont.

Metzler described *Lets Grow Kids* role as a support for Windsor, Orange and Rutland counties to start, increase capacity and quality of child care programs, and to be a means to connect communities to resources. She knows and can recommend consultants with specific knowledge. She introduced Reeva Murphy to the Town of Randolph when they were considering how to increase access to childcare. Brenda has 30 years as an Early Childhood Educator, helped found the Family Place, and has colleagues in business and research.

Murphy has 40 years as an Early Childhood Educator. She has been a public school educator and worked for the State of Vermont in Early Childhood systems. She is working now as a consultant to help communities shape plans to improve access to childcare.

Haynes asked about the needs of the community. Metzler described how different providers such as the Family Place, Dartmouth College Child Care, and Toddlers

Morning Out serve different family needs. Murphy noted that childcare is different from other educational venues and presents a very challenging business model because of the intensive requirements of quality care, the need to pay teachers a living wage, and expense to families. It is important to start with the needs, look for funding, and create a sustainable business plan.

Odell asked if there is a standard analysis for a business plan. Murphy replied that plans are idiosyncratic, depending on economy of scale, full enrollment, overhead costs, tuition levels, availability of space. Typically 70% to 80% of operating costs are for staffing. Water and sewer are often factors.

Loeb noted that access to property to build a center in Norwich seems prohibitively expensive. Would it make sense to try to increase capacity at existing venues? Metzler said there are many scenarios for space, and there is funding available. The existing providers in or near Norwich might be able to have a “shared services” agreement to share costs. Murphy said that property costs are significant. Craftsbury was given as an example similar to Norwich. Twenty five locations were scouted, narrowed down to six. Partnerships between providers and other entities can help. The Town of Alburgh preferred to have no pressure on their budget in contrast to Craftsbury which did want to contribute directly to childcare programs.

4. Layton moved, second by Loeb to **accept correspondence** from Margaret Lukovits regarding the move of *Toddlers Morning Out* to 166 Palmer Court, Hartford. Vote Unanimous Yes.
5. Holcombe and Layton updated the Committee about the **presentation to the Selectboard** of interim progress. The Power Point presentation was well received and the timeline was extended to January 12, 2022. Holcombe noted concern about costs from the public. A future SWOT analysis may provide valuable insight.
6. Loeb asked for insight from the Committee and Metzler and Murphy regarding the questions presented in the **Provider Survey**, and also questioned its utility in terms of necessity, productive types of information, and research that is valuable to providers and investors. Odell wondered if the cost of childcare was revealed enough by the

survey questions to be useful for what we are trying to do? Murphy mentioned the biyearly market rate survey put out by the State of Vermont which gives a regional “snapshot.” In developing this survey the state uses a template that influences the information presented. Murphy also mentioned that providers are deluged by surveys, and that **focused interviews** might be a better approach with providers. Metzler said that tuition structure questions are helpful because of differing factors in determining tuition. A common problem for any business is **determining true costs**. Metzler thought the **survey questions regarding barriers** were very pertinent.

Holcombe suggested we have a motion to **“Use structured interviews based on the provider survey with existing providers in or near Norwich.”** This motion was moved by Haynes, second by Loeb. Vote: Unanimous Yes. Loeb and Rosenfeld will take on this task.

7. Loeb presented the draft of the **Parent Survey**. Layton stated that there is value in encouraging public input in sending out this survey. Loeb noted that there was a listening session on this topic during the development of the Town Plan. Suggested edits include the need for English as a Second Language, that “Barriers” should include a response for “other”, and there should be more space for anecdotes and explanations. Metzler noted that most families choose to think about child care with a mindset of “an environment of constraint” in which most use multiple strategies to cob together a workable and affordable plan. **Committee members to send additional feedback to Loeb by April 23.**
8. The **cover letter** will be on file as a draft for now.
9. Odell did not have detailed data on **MCS investments in child care** but will email members a spreadsheet with a toggle so that they can see the effect on the tax rate of adding or subtracting pupils.
10. The **list of providers** was comprehensive. Commuter patterns affect which are more heavily used by Norwich residents.
11. **Next Action Steps** include:
Send feedback to Loeb about the Parent Survey, review feedback at next meeting

Hear results of structured interviews by Loeb and Rosenfeld

What are costs of pre-K? What is the existing or potential MCS capacity? Odell

Requests for case studies from Haynes, Murphy, Metzler

Time lines needed for Planning Grants

12. Motion to adjourn by Haynes, second by Rosenfeld. Unanimous Yes.