

Norwich Childcare Committee  
July 12, 2021  
Minutes

Persons present: Rebecca Holcombe, Mary Layton, Brian Loeb, Jamie Rosenfeld, Linda Cook, Madeleine Bothe. Brian and Madeleine attended via Zoom, all else met at Tracy Hall.

1. The Committee decided to move the Public Comments **agenda** item from number three to number four in order to hear comments from Madeleine Bothe who was late due to putting a child to bed.

Rosenfeld moved, seconded by Loeb to approve the agenda as amended.

Vote: unanimous yes

2. The Committee reviewed the **Minutes** of June 7, 2021. There were no amendments.

Rosenfeld moved, seconded by Loeb to approve the minutes. Vote: unanimous yes

3. The Committee discussed Correspondence including a memo from Roger Arnold, Select Board Chair regarding Federal Tax credits. Doug Britton shared an article from the Center for American Progress, "The True Cost of High Quality Childcare Across the United States," describing the level of subsidized care available as not enough to support high quality programs. Ann Marie Smith's recent letter to the Select Board posed questions about the necessity of and authority of the Town to research Childcare options, pointing out that she and her family worked together to provide childcare to their children in their home. Brian Loeb had invited her to this meeting. Mary Layton promised to give her a call to talk about her perspective. A memo from Rebecca Holcombe described a conversation with Dr. Taryn Morrissey, a childcare expert from American University. Dr. Morrissey stressed the essential support of parental leave for parents of infants. She also advocated against the practice of providing portable voucher childcare subsidies in Vermont, instead supporting a system of grants and contracts. The latter provides more stability in the market as the childcare centers accept the grants and have mandates to fill available slots with families that need subsidies.

4. Madeleine Bothe spoke during **Public Comments**. She had filled out the Parent Survey before Dartmouth College Childcare raised their fees by 20%, citing the need to raise teacher salaries to \$15/hour, and she wanted to share her perspective with the Committee. She and her husband both work fulltime, need fulltime childcare, and are being squeezed financially by being on an upper income level. Her husband commutes to Montpelier, she works at Dartmouth.
5. The Committee reviewed the **preliminary results of the Childcare Provider Survey**. We will include the results in the interim report to the Selectboard along with legislative updates and the Parent Survey. The survey was sent to 40 providers and 6 responded. The providers who responded were within a 25 mile radius of Norwich, and are in addition to 8 who were contacted earlier by phone. It seemed to the Committee that focusing on commuter paths and patterns between Norwich, Hartford, Hanover, and Lebanon would make sense. The survey shows clear patterns with no contradictory results. It is clear that slots for age 3 to 5 are much more available than newborn to 3. The childcare centers are competing for trained staff, are having trouble retaining staff, and in some cases are not expanding or will reduce the scope of their program due to staffing issues. Two providers were able to pay \$20 per hour, most struggle to pay \$15/hour. Centers offering infant care and private centers are most impacted by salary levels. Part time care is not seeing long wait lists. Fulltime care are seeing large and lengthy wait lists. The subsidy/market structure is geared towards care for toddlers, not infants. Four special needs students were identified. One is served in Norwich, 3 in NH. Behavioral challenges are more apt to be addressed in a private center. Subsidies range from 1% to 100% and are not evenly distributed among providers. There are different methods of delivering subsidies, including tiered income, federal or in house subsidies, in one case a Couch Foundation scholarship. How to care for children who are ill is a problem that seems best addressed through parental family leave. Overhead costs for centers challenge maintenance and prevent expansion. Levels of tuition for fulltime care range from \$740/month to \$2100/month. Providers have asked for copies of the Interim Report to the Selectboard.

6. Brian Loeb provided an update on results from the **Parent Survey**. He has received ten more responses since the June meeting, for a total of 62 parents and 82 children. There is evidence that the present day Norwich family childcare experience is characterized by a “feeling of scarcity regarding the ability to pay” that affects decisions about care. A clear pattern from the survey is that many families in Norwich have decided that one parent will give up working either full or part time to stay home with their child, thus reducing income tax revenue and affecting their future efforts to rejoin the labor market. The greatest need expressed by responses was for fulltime care, an aspect echoed by the provider survey responses. Brian Loeb commented that high housing costs were not mentioned in the survey but are a challenge for young families. Madeleine Bothe asked, “What about quality?” She would like to see more emphasis on nutrition, high quality teachers, and the availability of a fulltime schedule.
7. Neil Odell had communicated with Rebecca about S13, which mandates a change in the equalized pupil weighting formula. This **legislation** raises concerns about an impending education tax increase in Norwich due to decreasing enrollment at Marion Cross School.
8. Rebecca stated that in terms of stability and adequate funding **tax credits** are too late and unpredictable to be helpful to families. The American Recovery Act is a helpful subsidy, but only for one year. The best model for subsidies is the “contracting and grants” described above in Correspondence with Dr. Taryn Morrissey.
9. Brian will try to get a **few more responses to the Parent Survey** before we write up the Interim Report.
10. The Committee discussed the **process for completing the Interim Report** to the Selectboard. They reviewed a draft report and decided to reorder the chapters in order to start with a personal testimonial from Madeleine Bothe, then progress through the Provider and Parent survey results and analysis, and end with review of state legislation on education funding, federal tax credits, contract and grant funding vs. portable vouchers. There will be links and citations for articles. Rebecca will reorder the draft and Mary will write an Executive Summary.
11. **Emerging Themes** will be written into the Interim Report as an Executive Summary.

- 12. Upcoming work** for the August 2<sup>nd</sup> agenda will include a check in with our Work Plan, research on after school and vacation care in conjunction with Brie Swenson, new legislation and updates, and other steps for “Phase II.”
- 13.** Layton moved to Adjourn, seconded by Rosenfeld, vote: unanimous yes