

Norwich Childcare Committee
Minutes
August 2, 2021

Persons present: Rebecca Holcombe, Neil Odell, Mary Layton at Tracy Hall; Jamie Rosenfeld (entered approximately 9pm) , Brian Loeb, Linda Cook via Zoom meeting

1. Layton moved, seconded by Odell to **approve the agenda**. Vote: Holcombe, Odell, Layton, Loeb, Yes
2. Odell moved, seconded by Layton, to **approve the minutes** as written. Holcombe, Odell, Layton, Loeb, Yes
3. **Public Comment:** Odell related input from a recent school board meeting in which three families each represented by a parent commented on the Marion Cross School pre-K program that will be offered this fall. The program will change from part time to fulltime. The families spoke in favor of a part day option. There was also concern that the staffing ratio of 9 students to 1 teacher was too high, although the state mandates a 10 to 1 ratio. The families learned of the program change without having enough time to enroll their children in another program. The Childcare Committee discussed what could be done to help this situation. It was decided that Holcombe would create a flyer that showed providers of part time options such as Toddlers Morning Out, and that there is an opportunity for families to switch programs to meet their needs if they are aware of options. Rosenfeld and Holcombe were interviewed by Vermont Public Radio for a segment on childcare needs.
4. **Correspondence:** Layton spoke about her memo which related a conversation with Anne Marie Smith regarding neighborhood networks and resources that can help families with childcare needs. The Committee had observed via the Parent Survey that many families rely in whole or part on this type of support, which also builds community resilience. The Committee is open to hearing about practical solutions from all sectors of the community, and appreciates the input from Anne Marie.
5. **Update on Interim Report:** Holcombe and Layton reported on the presentation of the Interim Report at the July 28th Selectboard Meeting. The breadth and depth of

information was appreciated, and the report was also used to inform a Valley News article about childcare issues in the Upper Valley. Claudette Brochu requested information about different types of family profiles in Norwich. Roger Arnold requested more information about the system of contracts and grants espoused by Taryn Morrissey. Mary Layton wondered about what actions are available and appropriate for the Selectboard to consider to help with childcare needs. The Committee will study and report on all of these requests.

6. **The Committee reviewed the Work Plan** and found that we are meeting our time frame and are starting to develop recommendations and to describe trade-offs that the Selectboard can use in deciding what actions to take. In the present meeting, Brian Loeb wants to know if private companies, nonprofits, and colleges could be more involved in providing childcare for their employees. The Committee will follow up on this idea. In the area of contracts and grants we will use case studies and think about models that might work for providers and the Town. We will be looking at models that do not involve great expense. The Committee discussed the difficulty of doing anything to increase teacher salaries beyond communicating with state representatives. The Selectboard might write and issue a statement to the state legislature in this regard. It was noted that parents have to pay for housing as well as childcare, that the childcare shortage and the housing shortage are linked to the same “fungible wallet.” The upcoming changes in the pupil weighting formula that will cause tax increases in Norwich are also tied to housing and childcare. Creative solutions that address all three needs seem essential. The Committee agreed that creating stability in the market by the use of contracting and grants seems like a promising direction. Layton thinks that development could be proposed that could incorporate different elements such as housing for seniors and young families combined with a new childcare center, or even an immigrant resettlement center, but that the public would have to understand the need in order to feel comfortable supporting it. Odell and Holcombe stressed the need in general to educate the Selectboard and the public about the pros and cons of acting to solve these interrelated problems versus doing nothing.

7. **Review of Vacation Care and Municipal Programs:** The Committee will work with Recreation Director Brie Swenson. Loeb will be the liaison for that conversation. The focus will be on ages 5-8, perhaps up to age 12. The design and regulation of recreation programs is different from childcare programs and these differences will be expressed. Loeb will cross tabulate Recreation offerings data with existing data from the Parent Survey. Opportunities but also limits of the Norwich Public Library to host young patrons will be touched upon. Holcombe will contact Executive Director Lucinda Walker to discuss this.
8. **Legislative updates:** Odell will monitor and report on pertinent legislative updates, which are likely to happen in late fall or into December. Loeb stressed the need to connect legislative action to what can be accomplished locally.
9. **Review Next Action Steps and Agenda:** The Committee assigned tasks for the next month as follows:

Layton will draft a Selectboard statement to the legislature for consideration by the whole board. This could be part of a more regional response. She also will research and summarize efforts by the city of Burlington, Vermont to support childcare through contract and grants. Rebecca provided the link below to facilitate that effort:

o. Burlington: 2 prong approach: a) subsidies to support scholarships and b) grants to providers to expand slots
<https://vermontbiz.com/news/2020/february/20/burlington-double-enrollment-early-learning-initiative>

Odell will track and report on legislative updates.

Loeb will check with Vital Communities regarding employer support of childcare. He also will work with Brie Swenson to research Recreation opportunities and limits for childcare.

Holcombe will contact Sara Koblensky of the Couch Foundation to speak at our next meeting regarding employer based childcare offerings. She will contact Lucinda Walker of the Norwich Public Library about attendance by young patrons. She will create and distribute a one page handout for Marion Cross School and other parents of preschoolers who need information about part time and full time childcare. A request was made by Claudette Brochu for profiles of different types of family need. It is not clear who will address this but it was agreed that we would do so.

Rosenfeld received correspondence from the Director of the Cradle and Crayon Childcare Center that expressed concerns about working with the Norwich Developmental Review Board. The Committee felt it would be appropriate for her to forward this letter to the Selectboard.

10. **Motion to Adjourn:** Loeb moved, seconded by Odell to adjourn. Vote: Holcombe, Odell, Layton, Loeb, Rosenfeld, Yes