

Norwich Childcare Committee
Draft Minutes
September 9, 2021

Persons present: Rebecca Holcombe, Neil Odell, Mary Layton at Tracy Hall, Brian Loeb, Jamie Rosenfeld, Linda Cook via Zoom teleconference.

1. The Committee decided by consensus to **approve the agenda**.
2. Odell moved to **approve** the revised July 12, 2021 **minutes** second by Loeb, Vote: Unanimous yes. Odell moved to approve the August 2, 2021 minutes as written, second by Layton, Vote: Unanimous yes.
3. **Public Comments:** there were none.
4. **Correspondence:** Two articles of correspondence were accepted by consensus. One from Doug Wilberding included a link to a report of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), an outgrowth of the Ford Foundation, which links public and nonprofit entities to build capacity for childcare facilities. The second piece of correspondence listed on the agenda was a “one pager for MCS/parents on part time options with capacity.” In preparing the minutes I could not locate this document, so perhaps the CCC needs to accept it at our next meeting in October.

5. Conversation with Sara Kobylenski:

Information from the Couch Foundation website regarding Sara Kobylenski:

communityslk@gmail.com

“Sara Kobylenski is a strategic consultant to the Couch Family Foundation, supporting efforts to foster greater cross-sector collaboration and coordination among community based organizations working with children and families in the Upper Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont.

Prior to working with the Foundation, Sara served as executive director of the Upper Valley Haven for almost 10 years. Sara went to the Haven from her 4 year role as a field services director for the Vermont Agency of Human Services. Before that she served for 20 years as the Vermont division director for Casey Family Services and 15 years as a supervisor and direct practice social worker with other child and family services organizations. Over the years Sara has worked in numerous collaborative initiatives for improved community outcomes.

Sara earned her BA from Simmons College, MSW from the University of Pennsylvania and certificate in leadership from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. “

Sara has reviewed the Childcare Committee's interim report to the Norwich Selectboard and is aware of outreach by Selectboard Chair Roger Arnold at the Vital Communities Municipal Leader's group regarding improving access to childcare in Norwich. She commended Norwich for the research and outreach that has been done so far and noted that the results of the parent and provider surveys are consistent with the situation in the Upper Valley region that includes Windsor, Orange, Grafton, and Sullivan counties. She shared that the Vital Communities Corporate Council considers the lack of childcare to be a critical threat to economic growth in the Upper Valley, along with housing and transportation. They will convene a two part symposium on this topic in October/November. Private Philanthropy is expected to be discussed as part of proposed actions.

Sara talked about the Early Care and Education Association, which provides support and representation to early childhood educators. They found that there exist in the Upper Valley 500 existing slots in childcare centers that are unable to be offered because of staffing shortages. Sara said, "They are deeply handicapped by the pay scale. Benefits are not offered." In addition it is difficult to find people willing to consider this career path. An "apprentice program" has been devised to bring potential students into classrooms so that they can decide if they would enjoy this type of work. They work with a coach who then connects prospects with appropriate college programs.

Sara mentioned the business model for early childhood education in which the expensive, intensive, individual care needed for infants has often been "subsidized" by the less expensive and more group oriented care for toddlers and pre-school students. Programs that strictly cater to preschool children but do not offer care for infants are changing the funding landscape for the industry, and forcing many home care providers out of business. The use of vouchers issued to families, funded by the State of Vermont, also affects the economic viability of the industry in that it creates volatility. Economic stability and a guarantee that programs provide the same standard of care could be better established via a grants and contracting model. In this system childcare centers are awarded grants and contracts in order to create "slots," then advertise to families as to availability. The current statutes support the voucher system rather than the grants and contracting system.

Discussion by the Committee focused on what actions might be recommended to the Select Board in the final report in light of information that has come up through research and outreach. In part this could take the form of advocacy, towards the state legislature, other advocates, local organizations such as the Vital Communities Corporate Council, etc. Odell cautioned that childcare supply and demand is a complex subject and we should be careful and thorough in our recommendations.

At this point in the meeting we decided there was not time for agenda items 6-10. The committee decided by consensus that brief written updates would be submitted for the next meeting that summarized research or actions taken:

6. Legislative update on weighting study and implications for Norwich (Odell).
7. Update on conversation with Vital Communities (Loeb).

8. Update from Brie Swenson on Recreation opportunities and limits for childcare (Loeb).
9. Update on Burlington and use of contracting to expand access to childcare (Layton)
10. Update on conversation with Norwich Public Library/Lucinda Walker on attendance by young patrons (Holcombe).

Next Action Steps:

1. Invite Taryn Morrissey of American University to discuss contracting and employer sponsored care. We will develop questions to ask her.
2. Draft a memo of measures the Selectboard could recommend to legislators.
3. Add to research the Teacher Perspective (Rosenfeld).
4. Research equity and accessibility via state documents/teacher data (Holcombe).

Layton moved to adjourn, second by Odell, vote: unanimous yes.