

## AGENDA

### Norwich Childcare Committee

Sept. 9, 2021 8 to 9:30 p.m.

**Meet in person in the upstairs conference room at Tracy Hall, Norwich VT** For people who are unable to join in person, use the link below to join by Zoom <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86296036972>

877 853 5257 US Toll-free Meeting ID: 862 9603 6972

**If any problems, contact Mary Layton at: 802-738-2033**

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Review revised minutes for July and draft minutes for August, amend if needed, approve (attached)
3. Public comments
4. Accept correspondence, share correspondence (1 pager for MCS/parents on part time options with capacity) (attached)
5. Conversation with Sara Kobylenski: how do Norwich findings align with regional findings? How is Norwich part of a regional challenge? How does the current state approach affect supply/access?
6. Legislature update on weighting study and implications for Norwich (Odell)
7. Update on conversation with Vital Communities regarding employer support of childcare. (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 Library/Lucinda Walker on attendance by young patrons. (Holcombe)
11. Review next action steps and plan next agenda
  - a. Invite Taryn Morrissey of American U. to discuss contracting and employer sponsored care?
  - b. Draft memo of measures the select board could recommend to legislators?
  - c. Other strategies for researching informal options?
12. Adjourn

Norwich Childcare Committee  
July 12, 2021  
Draft 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

Norwich Childcare Committee  
Draft 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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

**Document provided to the Marion Cross School to assist families seeking part-day care:**

**Preschool providers who offer part day programs or options and which may have availability for Norwich children**

**Hampshire Cooperative Nursery School** (had 5 open spots at time of survey)  
<https://www.hampshirecooperative.org>

Contact for 3-5 year olds: Meg O'Leary (HCNS)

May have a new VT number, but this one worked: (603) 643-4640 Reopening at new spot at 166 Palmer Court, Hartford, VT 05001

**Norwich Nursery School** (had 5 on the waitlist at time of TON Childcare Committee survey, but some of these may be families who were unable to secure full day slots.)  
<http://www.norwichnurseryschool.org>

Director: Hillary Campfield

802-649-1804

312 Main Street, Norwich, 05055

**Little Feet**

Contact: Christine Tullgren

(802) 333-4100

2596 VT-113, Thetford, VT 05074

(openings will depend on whether she was able to recruit an additional staff person)