

Child Care in Our Communities

by David Foster

REDWOOD SHORES

Imagine the excitement involved in creating a master planned community twenty to thirty years ago when open space for such new development was easy to come by. The Redwood Shores neighborhood of Redwood City, California was developed at just such a time. It was the perfect opportunity to design a state of the art neighborhood for this growing community in the mid-peninsula area south of San Francisco.

As the planned community finally reached build out, however, planners realized that while they had helped create 5,000 new homes, plenty of park lands, easy freeway access, extensive office parks, and a shopping center, they had made absolutely no provision for child care facilities.

Redwood Shores was not an isolated example. In fact, until fairly recently it was the norm not to consider child care in local planning. Planners rarely contemplated the need for child care as a community issue. Few anticipated the dramatic change in work force composition that would trigger the need for increased (and enhanced) child care services.

This article takes a brief look at the child care industry from a planning perspective:

- Why has child care grown in importance in our society?
- What role does it play in the economic development and sustainability of our communities?
- How can planners better prepare for and encourage the development of appropriate child care facilities?

CHILD CARE NEEDS

The United States has experienced profound changes in work patterns,

family life, and women's roles since the early years of child care. In 1960, 30 percent of mothers worked outside the home. By 1999, that number had skyrocketed to 72 percent.¹ This change, in turn, has dramatically increased the number of children in need of child care services. Nationwide, 60 percent of working families with children under age five now pay for licensed child care.²

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In addition, the current focus on the advantage of universal preschool as a strategy to promote later school success points to further demand. Los Angeles County, for example, has committed \$100-million a year specifically for preschools. The county plans to serve 117,000 additional four year-olds in 5,000 new preschool classrooms within a decade. Many other regions and states are setting similar goals.

Child care is now being recognized as an important sector of the economy, producing its own significant gross receipts, while contributing to growth and stability within the overall economy.³

1 Mildred Warner, Rosaria Ribeiro, and Amy Erica Smith, "Addressing the Affordability Gap: Framing Child Care as Economic Development," *Journal of Affordable Housing* (12:3) Spring, 2003.

2 M. Cubed, *The National Impacts of the Child Care Sector* (National Child Care Association, 2002).

3 "Summary of Child Care Economic Impact Studies: Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project" (Cornell University, 2004); <<http://economic.development.cce.cornell.edu>>.

• In Minnesota, the licensed child care industry is 77 percent the size of the corn industry, for which Minnesota ranks third nationwide.⁴

• In Vermont, the total annual economic impact of the child care industry is over \$400 million, including direct and indirect expenditures; child care is a larger employer than the state's food processing or printing and publishing industries.⁵

• In Santa Cruz County, California, child care is a \$35.5 million industry with gross receipts comparable to the combined production of the county's top four vegetable crops.⁶

• Nationwide, licensed child care facilities employ 2.8 million people, more Americans than are employed by public secondary schools.⁷

The traditional "church basement" approach to child care facilities which many of us grew up with can no longer meet anywhere near the entire need. New programs, designed to provide high quality services, will require new facilities integrated into our existing communities. What is called for is creative thinking about how child care facilities can be designed and located to best contribute to our neighborhoods.

CHILD CARE FACILITIES

Child care facilities can serve as strong anchors to our communities. Small, walkable, community-based child care centers and family child care homes can be a key element in strengthening a neighborhood.

4 Suskia Trall and Jen Wohl, "The Economic Impact of the Child Care Industry in Minnesota" (National Economic Development and Law Center, 2003); <www.nedlc.org>.

5 "The Economic Impact of Vermont's Child Care Industry" (Windham Child Care Association, 2002).

6 "The Economic Impact of Child Care in Santa Cruz County" (National Economic Development and Law Center, 1997).

7 "National Economic Impacts of the Child Care Sector" (National Child Care Association, 2002).

Thoughtful placement of child care facilities can help neighborhoods cut traffic. A California report found that parents add five to six miles to their daily commute to drive children to child care or school.⁸

Locating child care near residential areas or high employment centers can contribute to reduced commutes, cross-town traffic reductions, and increased transit ridership. In fact, some communities now consider the development of child care centers as an acceptable mitigation measure for new developments with projected high traffic impacts.

Local businesses (including major institutions like medical centers, colleges, and even government offices) are coming to recognize child care services as an important benefit for their employees. Child care helps to attract and retain

quality workers, and increases employee productivity. In the 1984 edition of *Fortune Magazine's* "100 Best Companies" only one firm offered a child care program; in the 2000 edition that number had grown to 29.

Employer-sponsored child care programs include a range of possible services: referrals, parental leave policies, voucher programs, and on-site child care centers. For smaller businesses, consortium programs (several businesses pooling together) can support a center that gives priority to employees' children.

Local planning commissions and departments can help encourage employer-sponsored child care programs by advocating the adoption of incentives such as zoning bonuses for business developments which include child care facilities.⁹

Including child care within mixed-use developments is also showing great promise. Affordable housing developers, in particular, have found that adding child care facilities to their residential developments adds to the stability of the households they serve. In the rural community of Watsonville, California, for example, the Via Del Mar Child Develop-

ment Center is being located adjacent to the community's transit center. It will include 21 units of affordable family housing and a child care center (which will be marketed to residents living in the downtown area and to downtown workers who use public transportation).

Senior housing projects or senior care centers can provide another excellent locational choice for some child care facilities. With careful design to allow for "kid free zones," seniors and children have a lot to offer each other. One child care program in Santa Cruz, California, has a rocking chair in the classroom reserved for several "grandmas" who come to visit and read stories during the week.

In Burlington, Vermont, the 14,000 square foot McClure Multi-Generational Center opened in 1999. It houses both the Champlain Senior Center (30 to 50 seniors per day) and Children's Space, a child care facility (60 children).

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⁸ The California Legislature has noted that: "In a 1990 study, the California Department of General Services found that working parents add five to six miles to their daily commute for transporting their children to child care and school, and that the effect of this commute is 1,352 extra miles driven each year and an additional 56 pounds of auto emissions per person per year." California Health and Safety Code, Sec. 1597.70 (part of Legislative findings on benefits of child care facilities).

⁹ California law specifically gives cities and counties the authority to grant zoning bonuses (such as increases in floor area ratios and maximum square footage) to developments in commercial and industrial areas that include on-site child care facilities. Gov. Code Section 65917.5.

Notes from the Author:

The Child Care Universe & A Few Words About Terminology

The range of child care services and facilities in the United States is extensive and varied. To help those of you not familiar with the child care universe, allow me to provide a broad-brush orientation.

While the child care industry is not typically a part of the public school system, we do have public sector child care through federal, state, and local funding. The majority of subsidized child care, including Head Start, is provided by local non-profit organizations. As more and more people see the link between child care programs and success in school, local governments and school districts are providing greater financial support to these programs.

For-profit child care centers typically operate on a parent fee basis, but will some-

times combine that with voucher program assistance for some of the children served.

Family child care homes are almost exclusively private proprietorships or private partnerships, since licensing laws require that the operator also be the resident. Family child care homes also use a combination of parent fees and voucher programs to cover their costs. One form of child care not mentioned in the article is often referred to as "kith and kin" care. It includes in-home (license-exempt) care by extended family members and friends. This category of informal child care accounts for at least 25 percent of all child care in the United States (though there are no firm numbers).

When someone says the words "child care" what first comes to mind to most is the care of children 2 to 5 years of age. But a growing number of people (and child care professionals) now include infant care and toddler care when speaking of child care services – and that's what I mean when I refer to

"child care" in this article.

But to make giving a clear definition even harder, "child care" typically includes the provision of after-school care for school age children. As a result, child care needs assessments will often include the after-school needs of children up to the age of 18.

Another point of confusion is that many people use the terms "day care" and "child care" interchangeably. I try to avoid using "day care" since it is sometimes used when referring to adult day care as well. Close readers of the article may also note that I often use the term "child care facilities" rather than "child care centers." The reason is that "facilities" is broader, and includes both child care centers and family child care homes.

Finally, when I refer to the "child care industry" I'm talking about the entire licensed care spectrum including for-profit and non-profit providers in both centers and family child care homes.

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As Syndi Zook, Executive Director of the Champlain Senior Center, notes, "When we decided to combine the senior and child care centers, we knew there would be some cost savings and programmatic advantages. What we didn't realize was how deep the bond between the children and the elders would eventually become."

Multi-generational activities include reading, chorus, movement classes, and much more. Zook notes that activities are informal, and seniors do not have to participate. But many do, some having

read to the same preschool child for several years now. One unexpected surprise, according to Zook, is that a number of parents of the preschoolers have become involved in helping out with the seniors.

Co-location of child care facilities on elementary school grounds can also work well (again, however, only with sensitive planning and design, and if year-round availability is provided). This can be especially useful as a way of stabilizing schools faced with declining enrollment and underutilized space. Since elementary schools are often neighborhood schools, they can provide day care in locations convenient to many families.

PROMOTING CHILD CARE IN OUR PLANS

How can we plan locally to promote child care? In Santa Cruz County, California, building a coalition of supporters and initiating discussions between child care professionals and local planners helped provide the answer. 1997 saw the start of that dialogue in the founding of ChildCare Ventures ("CCV") – a collaborative program of five local agencies concerned with building a more sustainable child care industry.

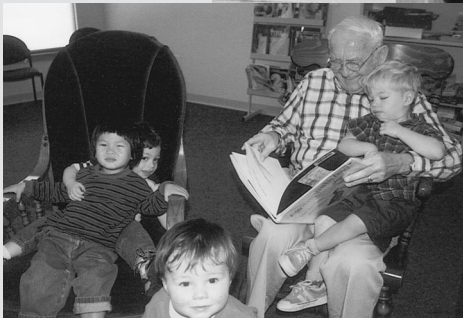
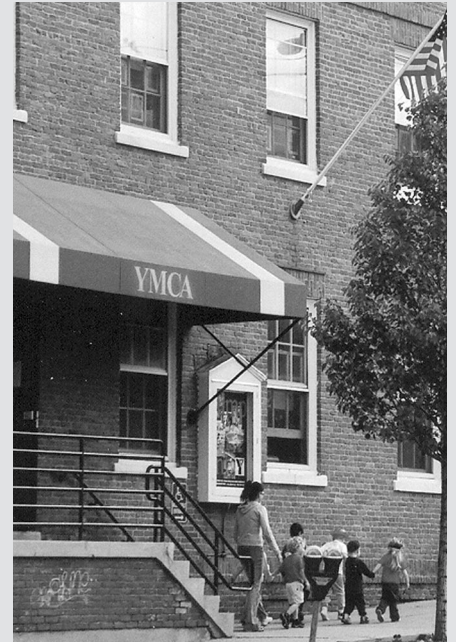
While CCV included the County's human resources agencies, it also engaged agencies not typically thought

Editor's Note:

A Diversity of Child Care

The growing diversity of child care facilities is evident in Burlington, Vermont (population, 40,000). While much child care is still provided in residential homes, day care facilities can also be found in converted industrial space close to a residential neighborhood (bottom left); in the downtown YMCA (top right); in a former residence serving the regional medical center's employees

(bottom right; and in a multi-generational facility housing both child care and a senior center (below).



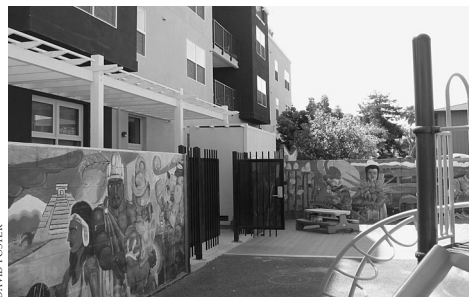
to be concerned about child care: a community development corporation, the local small business development center, and the local community development credit union. Inclusion of these more business-oriented agencies began a process of building awareness around child care issues.

CCV's primary focus has been on offering technical assistance to child care providers in areas of business skills and facilities development. However, its founding agencies recognized the importance local planning policies could have in helping promote the development of child care facilities.

As a result, CCV organized a half-day "Child Care Planner's Forum" offering planners, child care providers, and others "a chance to learn each other's languages and seek opportunities to work together." Attendees included elected representatives, planners, business and economic development specialists, social service providers, education and child care professionals, and specialists in community development, transportation planning, and affordable housing.

One of the outcomes of the forum was an effort to include policies in local planning documents supportive of the need for providing increased child care. This took the form of an intensive two-year campaign, spearheaded by CCV staff and volunteers. As a result, all five local jurisdictions in the county now have policies

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The recently completed Nuevo Dia Child Development Center is located in the Beach Flats neighborhood of Santa Cruz, California. The facility is a part of a 48 unit affordable housing project developed by Mercy Housing California. The new child care center is complemented by a new health clinic and a city run community center, all centrally located and within walking distance of neighborhood residents.



REGISTER-PARONIAN

Vista Verde Kids

Three-year-old neighbors participated in the ground-breaking ceremony for the Vista Verde Child Development Center in Watsonville, California. The center now serves 60 children and is operated by Head Start and Community Bridges, a local non-profit provider.

Vista Verde Child Development Center in Watsonville, California.



"The True Client in the Building of a Child Care Center

is the Child"¹⁰

If you have ever visited a child care center and found benches in use so that the children could reach the sink or see out of the window you will have witnessed the kind of design problems inherent in converting existing spaces to child care purposes. The physical environmental needs of young children are indisputable: tables, chairs, counters, sinks, toilets, play space, windows, and wall space for pictures – all commensurate with their 2 to 4 foot height. Equally important, they need plenty of indoor play space, rest space, along with easy access to a safe outdoor play area.

Young children are also very sensitive to the environment surrounding them. Indoor air quality, acoustics, and natural lighting are of particular concern and have a measurable influence on the quality of interaction among children and between child and adult care-giver.

In spite of this, "found space" is the rule for many of the more than 100,000



REGISTER-PARONIAN

child care centers in the United States. Church basements, used elementary school modular classrooms, and old "made-over" houses have often been adapted with little thought to the design implications for young children.

This is a major challenge with wide-ranging educational implications. The Vista Verde Child Development Center in Watsonville, California, is one project that has met this challenge. Designed by the Paul Davis Partnership, the facility includes four classrooms, all of which open directly onto play yards. Two of the rooms include an accordion wall to provide for flexible room sizes. An entry/transition area helps the children ready themselves before entering the classroom and ample administrative, staff and kitchen areas are designed to serve as a buffer from the noises of the street. A radiant floor heating system ensures improved air quality as well as reduced operating costs.

10 Anita Rui Olds, *Child Care Design Guide* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001)

Child Care & the States

Collaborative state-wide programs can be very effective in bringing about change. For example, the State of Colorado has established a Child Care Commission, while in Alabama, a state-sponsored organization, the Alabama Partnership for Children, supports local efforts to provide child care.

In California, the Local Investment in Child Care (LINCC) project, funded in part by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, operates to strengthen the infrastructure of the community child care industry. Over the past eight years, in nine California counties, the LINCC project has promoted child care as a critical driver of local economic growth and development – and has helped local planners focus attention on child care as a key community planning concern.

Family Child Care Services: A Regulatory Perspective

by John Lewis

Good child care in a residential setting is truly a win-win situation. Parents who find a convenient child care home are ecstatic, the children are happy in a home environment, and the proprietor becomes part of the extended family. In my hometown of Loveland, Colorado (a small city of 55,000 people), we have approximately 170 private home child care businesses – and there is a need for more.

Generally, child care regulations are contained in zoning codes, with additional information in the health and building code regulations. Not all jurisdictions require that the Uniform Building Code (UBC) or the International Building Code (IBC) apply to child care businesses in homes (as long as the homes themselves comply with residential standards and are inspected by the local fire department and the state licensing authority). Typically zoning code regulations consider parking, square footage of space devoted to the business, outdoor play area and facilities, hours of operation, number of children, and licensing requirements.

The process of receiving approval varies greatly.¹¹ Some jurisdictions divide

child care homes into categories depending on the intensity of use. For example, in Lenexa, Kansas, a “limited child care” permit for 6 children (including the provider’s) can be obtained administratively. In contrast, a “general child care” permit for 7 to 12 children requires a public hearing before the planning commission and city council.

Loveland, Colorado, requires all child care applicants to submit floor and site plans, show a state license, conduct a neighborhood meeting, and appear before the city council. In contrast, Longmont, Colorado, a community 17 miles away, treats a child care home with six or fewer children as a permitted use in residential zoning districts with no special review required.

Planning commissions should consider how well suited their community’s zoning is for assuring that child care needs are being met. Talk to representatives from local child care associations and the state licensing authority for a clearer idea of your community’s child care needs. Find out whether your local regulations call for new developments to provide for (or allow) child care.

With a growing amount of new housing being governed by private homeowners’ associations, the impact of a development’s “Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions” is also increasingly important – especially if they prohibit residential child care. Speak with your city or county attorney to see if this is an area potentially subject to local regulation.

John Lewis is a real estate broker who serves on the Loveland, Colorado, Open Lands Advisory Committee. He previously was a five year member of the Loveland Planning Commission. Lewis is currently writing a practical guide to land use controls for realtors, scheduled for publication later this year.

¹¹ A 2002 survey done by The Children’s Foundation found that 16 states have enacted laws that require family child care homes to be considered as a permitted use in residential zones. “2003 Family Child Care Licensing Study” (The Children’s Foundation, 2003); <www.childrensfoundation.net>.

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incorporated into their local plans to help encourage the development of child care facilities.

This effort in Santa Cruz County reflects a growing trend. In California, some 86 cities and counties have adopted policies in various elements of their general plans supportive of meeting the



Two years ago, Electronic Arts Corporation, a leading developer and publisher of interactive entertainment software (EA Sports and EA Games), built an employee child care center in the ground floor of an office building on its Redwood Shores headquarters campus. The center serves 62 children from six weeks to five years of age.

demand for child care services. Indeed, six jurisdictions have created detailed “Child Care” elements within their general plans. *Editor’s Note:* “general plan” is the term used in California for what may be called the “comprehensive plan” or “municipal plan” in your state.

Among the kinds of child care policies adopted by various communities in their plans:

- Amend local zoning ordinances to remove obstacles to child care facilities in all zone districts that are appropriate and safe for children.
- Consider a project’s impact on child care as part of any required “environmental review” of the project.
- Require direct mitigation or in-lieu fees to address the increased child care needs created by new developments.
- Encourage development agreements that allow for bonus densities or other incentives in exchange for inclusion of a child care facility.
- Expand homeownership and affordable rental opportunities for family child care providers.

- Encourage the inclusion of child care centers in new transit facilities.

The next step is to translate these plan policies into action language in municipal codes. The City of San Diego Municipal Code, for example, now includes clear wording that allows child care centers within non-residential zones through a simple administrative process and within residential zones approvable by a "Hearing Officer."

BACK TO REDWOOD SHORES

This article opened by pointing to the early history of Redwood Shores, and its failure – typical of most communities – to plan for child care. But Redwood Shores has changed. Five years ago the Redwood Shores Child Care Task Force was formed and began intensive advocacy work. One result: a local company, Electronic Arts, has helped develop a child care center to serve its employees. In addition, a small morning preschool program has opened. But perhaps most impressive is the Shores Child Care Center, which serves over 150 children. Redwood Shores is now well on its way to becoming a community that truly provides for its child care needs.

SUMMING UP:

Planners are increasingly realizing the importance of child care – not just to individual families, but to the community as a whole. Child care facilities, when incorporated into residential neighborhoods and employment centers, can yield benefits ranging from reduced traffic to a stronger local economy. Planners, working with human service agencies and the business community, can help lead the way. ♦

David Foster is a Program Manager for ChildCare Ventures, a collaborative child care facilities development program of the Santa Cruz (California) Community Credit Union. He is also a Planning Commissioner for the City of Santa Cruz. Foster has 25 years' experience working with nonprofit affordable housing and community facilities development projects. He holds a Masters in Community Development from the University of California, Davis.



Use a Deft Touch in Regulating Home-Based Day Care

by Wayne A. Lemmon

Careful thought must be given to the impact of seemingly benign local regulations affecting home-based day care. There is often an unquestioned assumption that stricter regulations will increase the level of safety provided at home-based day care operations, and adopting such regulations will help eliminate substandard, poorly run, or potentially unsafe operations.

Examples of proposed regulations of this nature include requirements that homes be equipped with sprinkler systems in the rooms in which the day care service operated; that smoke detectors be "hard-wired" into the home's electrical system; and that sliding glass doors to the outside be replaced with hinge-type doors.

While one can understand the motives in proposing such regulations, it must also be understood that home-based day care providers serve a small number of children, and do not have the budgets of commercial day care operations. Requiring renovations such as these is often too onerous for an individual to make, given the modest income that home day care operations produce.

Strict, overly demanding regulations like these don't eliminate substandard operations, they simply drive them underground. Most home-based day care providers prefer to operate legally and will try to abide by local regulations. But if compliance with requirements becomes too costly, troublesome, or protracted, many will still try to operate, illegally if need be. Instead of being periodically inspected by the local officials, and reviewed for license renewal, they will

simply operate "below the radar."

For home-based day care, regulation needs to be applied with a deft touch.

Wayne Lemmon is a real estate economist working with a large homebuilder and developer in the New York metropolitan area. He authored "The New 'Active Adult' Housing," in *PCJ* #51 (Summer 2003).

Editor's Note:

Child Care in My Backyard

Locating just about anything that's not a detached single-family-only residence can be a challenge in many residential neighborhoods. It's not just group homes and shelters that can set off a hornets' nest, but even uses such as family day care. Neighbors' legitimate concerns about traffic, noise, and parking, can rapidly escalate if the applicant fails to act proactively to inform the neighborhood about its plans and, just as importantly, respond with facts (and sometimes modifications) to address valid concerns.

It's certainly helpful, as David Foster argues, for a community to have in place strong policies that underscore the benefits of providing adequate child care. And, as Foster points out, neighborhood child care can actually reduce commuting time and vehicle use.

As Chris Robbins aptly observed in "A Nose for NIMBYs" (*PCJ* #51, Summer 2003) "As a planning commissioner you need to keep your cool when confronted by angry neighbors, and recognize the difference between legitimate concerns and irrational fears. Your job is to look out for the whole community. ... Ask questions or have staff find the information you need to evaluate [neighbors'] concerns. Is the traffic going to be greater than the standards for the street? Is the proposed land use so noxious that it would reduce property values, or is it simply something different from what's there?"

Thanks!

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