

August 23, 2023 Committee on Childcare in Minot

Committee on Childcare in Minot – August 23, 2023 AT 1:30 P.M.

Members Present:

Scott Burlingame, Heather Cymbaluk, Rianne Kuhn, Lisa Olson, Terry Schumalz, Keli Rosselli-Sullivan, Harold Stewart, John Van Dyke

Members Absent:

Amy Jenkins, Becca Oswill

Also Present:

Mikayla McWilliams (City Clerk)

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Scott Burlingame at 1:31 pm. The committee did brief introductions and Chairman Burlingame introduced Casey Sanders to the committee. Casey is the Economic Development Manager for the City of West Fargo.

Casey wanted to discuss how the City of West Fargo implemented a Childcare Facility Improvement Grant. She as the sole person in her department started this process by gathering research data. She noticed a major issue in the workforce was childcare. The City of West Fargo looked at the zoning codes and did an update on an out dated code. The city also implemented CPR/First Aid training program with the Fire Department. It became a big enough revenue source the program was able to offer certification training for childcare providers cost free.

The City of West Fargo surveyed the residents through the utility billing process. 36% of the results from the survey showed that families were on multiple waitlists trying to find full time childcare. 118 responses stated childcare affects at least one parent's career in the household. 37 responses left the workforce due to childcare issues and 58 responses would like to re-enter the workforce if they can find childcare.

The Childcare Facility Improvement Grant is offered to centers, group daycares, and in-home daycares. It was funded by the Economic Development Sales Tax fund. The City of Fargo allocated up to \$1 million to this grant. The grant was set up for the different daycares/centers to receive different levels of funding which include:

- Centers could receive funding up to \$20,000 and also can get an infant room rider of \$15,000 to create more room for infants in the center space.
- In-home daycares could receive funding up to \$7,500.
- Group home/space daycares could receive funding up to \$10,000.
- School age site could receive funding up to \$20,000.

She developed a list of specific eligible items with a maximum dollar amount per item. She researched the licensing requirements, ND Century Code, and ND Childcare Aware. The applicant must have the business located within the city limits of West Fargo, they have to provide a copy of the most up to date license, and understand they will be reimbursed after the improvement or purchase.

Casey had set up the program to have three rounds of applicant approvals. So far, she is managing 39 applications and has gone through two rounds of approvals with the council. The grant was set up with goals to accomplish which include:

- Growing capacity
- Opening of new centers/daycares
- Retaining the current centers/daycares
- Provide significant improvement of quality and safety within a center/daycare

The grant also set up funding priorities for the applications which include:

- Increasing infant capacity
- Increasing the ages of 1-4 capacity
- Meeting licensing requirements
- Increasing the ages of 5-12 capacity
- Best practice standards

Casey has had to complete onsite visits, evaluate the applications, and score the priorities. The City of West Fargo also has an Economic Development Advisory Committee who helps review the applications. The City of West Fargo used social media to get awareness of the grant and also obtained a list of providers from Childcare Aware and sent e-mails and did a mailing.

The process started in December of 2022, a steering committee was developed, and the grant program was approved in March of 2023. The biggest lift was educating the details on the application process and making sure the applicants understood the checks and balances necessary for the grant. Casey did not believe the three approval rounds would result in the full use of the allocated funds. She is looking into the idea of earmarking some funds for emergency applications and a new center opening up.

Casey mentioned the grant program could require a time commitment from the applicant if the funding was a large enough amount. If she were to do anything differently, she would have incentivized a new center/daycare separately and she would have been more specific on items being reimbursed. Another alternative the City of West Fargo is possibly looking into is reducing or not charging utilities to the childcare home or center.

The next meeting is Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at 4:30 pm. This meeting will be to have general discussion.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:33 pm.