

City council moves forward on new childcare facility

The city of St. Thomas is stepping in the help fill the gap in child care by building a \$3.8 million facility that will have spots for 88 children.



Laura Broadley

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A rendering of a childcare facility that is to be built on St. Catharine Street. City council gave permission Monday to staff to move forward with the tendering process on the \$3.8-million project, which will include spots for 88 children. (Contributed photo)

The City of St. Thomas is stepping in to the help fill the local childcare gap by building a \$3.8-million facility that will boast spots for 88 children.

The city has received a number of grants to help offset the cost of the building, leaving a balance of \$233,000 in city funds needed to get it built.

The city will not operate the childcare facility but lease the building to an independent operator, city manager Wendell Graves said.

This lease will help recoup the city's investment in the building.

Graves presented renderings of what the childcare facility – set to be built on St. Catharine Street – could look like at Monday's reference committee meeting.

Graves stressed the price tag is just an estimate, saying the city won't know the exact cost until a tender is accepted.

Graves said the project is expected to be tendered at the end of January, with completion of construction by the end of 2020.

Architects have been working with Element 5, a timber company opening a \$45-million factory in St. Thomas, to use that company's products in the childcare facility.

The building's entrance will face St. Catharine Street while the parking lot will be placed at the north end.

Coun. Linda Stevenson expressed concerns at that set up, predicting some parents will stop in front of the doors instead of parking in the lot.

"I'm just wondering if there's a possibility of maybe a rethink on that front drop-off zone. There's one thing I do know is that parents are going to stop at the front door rather than get out in the rain and go from the parking lot to the front door," Stevenson said.

A childcare facility was supposed to be a part of Phase 2 of the 230 Talbot St. project, but there wasn't a good business case for it, Graves said at a meeting earlier this year.

lbroadley@postmedia.com (mailto:lbroadley@postmedia.com)