

# Planners discuss steps to better local child care

Child care  
By MICHAEL DE GIVE

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Planners from three local governments met with child-care advocates Monday and agreed on the next steps to create more quality child care throughout the county.

The meeting was organized by ChildCare Ventures, a consortium working to improve the long-term health of local child-care providers and raise awareness about the industry's importance to the local economy.

Panelists urged government planners to recognize child care as a crucial component of community development and to give child care as much weight in their general plans as housing, transportation and economic development. And they had a receptive audience.

District 2 Supervisor Ellen Pirie said child care should be a high priority for the county.

"I know a few things about child care from a consumer's perspective," said Pirie, a mother of four. "I know that having high-quality, affordable child care is every parent's wish."

Representatives from the county and the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville attended the meeting.

Capitola and Scotts Valley — where demand for child care far outstrips supply, according to a 1999 report — did not send representatives, although they were invited.

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SUPERVISOR ELLEN PIRIE, A MOTHER OF FOUR

In group discussions after the panelist presentations, the 50 participants recommended:

- Mobilizing parents to contact local governments and be advocates to create more quality child care.

- Tying child care to the housing element and general plans of local communities.

- Bringing together child-care providers and government planners.

- Urging city councils and the county board of supervisors to support AB 2954, state legislation that requires cities and counties to address the need for child care in their planning process.

Watsonville is getting closer to opening a child-care center downtown, and city representatives said they had to break their own rules — including those governing parking, density and fire inspections — to make it happen.

"This project took an immense amount of politicking by many people," said Watsonville City Councilman Raphael Lopez, who has worked on the team pushing the project for eight years.

The child-care center will share two-thirds of an acre with 21 affordable apartments — five of them directly above the center.

It's also next to the downtown transit center and "one block from everything," said Lopez.

It's expected to serve the children of Cabrillo College students, downtown workers, neighbors and transit users. There will be room for 32 children.

Construction is expected to begin next spring. Its the kind of dense, mixed-use development the county will need to build more of to meet its housing and transportation challenges, said Lopez.

He urged child-care providers to ask parents to contact their councils to make it easier to create more quality child care.

"Ultimately the answer to changing the political wills of councils across the county ... is to have people who have not been traditionally involved be involved," he said.

Childcare Ventures is funded by a Packard Foundation grant, and is a joint project of the Child Development Resource Center, El Pajaro Community Development Corp., Santa Cruz Community Credit Union, the Central Coast Small Business Development Center and the Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency.

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