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Facilitating Child Care Projects in Our Community

Several different levels of government regulate child care, and the multi-jurisdictional approval process can often seem overwhelming to a prospective applicant. Local jurisdictions can assist applicants by developing a simple, streamlined process for project review.

To expedite project review, a jurisdiction can take the following actions:

- Advocate for a City or County Child Care Coordinator
- Develop Staff Experts
- Coordinate with State Licensing
- Create a Simplified Review Process
- Develop an Information Packet for Applicants
- Review the Fee Schedule

Advocate for a City or County Child Care Coordinator

Many California cities and counties employ a Child Care Coordinator. While the duties of this employee vary greatly from one jurisdiction to another, coordinators tend to share some common responsibilities.

Generally, the child care coordinator works out of the Office of the City Manager, County Administrator's Office, Human Resources Department, Human Services or Economic Development. The coordinator represents the city council/board of supervisors on matters related to child care, such as establishing and implementing the jurisdiction's child care policies. In addition, the coordinator often sponsors local conferences and events, and develops and reviews state and federal child care legislation. The child care coordinator may also consult with business operators, child care providers, and members of the community on a range of child care issues. Santa Barbara County has created the Office of Early Care and Education, which employs a full-time Child Care Coordinator (See Contacts section). The cities of Santa Maria and Lompoc also retain positions with child care coordination duties.



The coordinator frequently serves as a liaison between the child care community and the Planning Department, providing planners with the child care expertise and research necessary to process an application. The coordinator's specific child care knowledge enables him/her to be a valuable resource to planning staff.

Communities that do not employ a child care coordinator will want to take full advantage of the State Community Care Licensing Child Care Advocate. The Child Care Advocate can provide a regional and state wide perspective on zoning issues, and help clarify State law on child care related issues.

Develop Staff Experts

Every jurisdiction should designate a planner to review and coordinate all child care applications. This is particularly important in jurisdictions that do not employ a child care coordinator. A planner who understands the complex regulations that govern child care can expedite the review process and ensure that the jurisdiction's actions are in compliance with State law. This planner should be prepared to balance the community's need for child care with the legitimate concerns of individual neighbors.

Coordinate With State Licensing

All child care facilities must meet certain minimum standards to be licensed. Licensing requirements can affect a jurisdiction's review of a child care application. It is therefore critical that planners understand the State requirements.

Questions regarding licensing should be directed to the Child Care Advocate of the Licensing office. A licensing analyst is always on telephone duty to answer general child care questions. Questions that are specific to a particular home or center should be directed to the licensing analyst assigned to that applicant. Generally, analysts are assigned to a specific geographical area, so planners will work with the same individual when an application poses questions or concerns.

Create a Simplified Review Process

Each jurisdiction should examine its review process to ensure that the process is simple and streamlined. The typical steps involved in permitting child care centers and large family day care facilities are outlined below.

- **Child Care Planning Permit Process**

The first step in applying for a permit for a child care center is to call Community Care Licensing at 682-7647, to attend a licensing orientation. The second step is to obtain and review the jurisdiction's planning information packet, which should contain information



about zoning and typical standards and conditions that apply to child care facilities. Prior to meeting with the planner, the applicant should meet with the Early Care and Education Coordinator, for child care center projects, or with the Children's Resource and Referral, for family child care projects. Preliminary meetings with city/county planning staff and child care experts will assess the feasibility of the project and identify any potential problems and determine if the project is exempt from the permit process. The next step will be to develop a proposal and a site plan. If the project is exempt, the applicant can apply directly for building permits. If the proposed project requires a planning permit, the applicant then submits an application package and completes the permitting process.

The public notification and hearing (and appeal process) are standard procedures; and the degree of public involvement required will vary among jurisdictions. After the permit is granted, the applicant can then apply for building permits and a business license. The prospective child care service provider may submit an application for a State child care license at any time.

- **Large Family Day Care Planning Options**

As stated in Chapter 3 there are three options that communities typically take with regard to large family day care homes. Again, these are:

Option A: Cities/Counties can allow large family day care homes by right, with no zoning permit required. The applicant would apply directly for a State license without going through a permit process.

Option B: The non-discretionary (ministerial) permit allows planners to process applications "over-the-counter" without public notification or a public hearing.

Option C: If an administrative use permit (i.e., public notification process) is required, a hearing may be required if the neighbors request one. Still, a large family day care home may only be reviewed by the local land use agency for compliance with adopted parking, traffic, noise, and spacing/concentration standards.

Develop an Information Packet for Applicants

Easily understandable written information about a jurisdiction's requirements and review process should be available to prospective child care providers. A written document will ensure that the information given out by the Planning Department is consistent, while reducing the need for planning staff to respond to questions.



The information packet could contain the following items:

- A brochure and/or flow-chart detailing the development review process.
- An application for the required land use entitlement.
- A fee schedule.
- A list of local resources (e.g., library services, recreation programs) available to child care providers.

The Office of Early Care and Education has developed a guide to child care permitting for each jurisdiction, which covers some of these topics. The guides are available to the public at each planning counter, and can also be included in the packet.

A resource list of city or county personnel involved with the project review process should be provided. This could include the child care coordinator, the designated planner, building and fire inspectors, etc.

A resource list of county and State resources (i.e., the Licensing office, local Resource, and Referral Agency, Child Care Advocate) should also be provided.

Review the Fee Schedule

The fee to apply for a large family day care home land use permit within the jurisdictions in Santa Barbara County ranges from zero to \$1,400. The fee to apply for a child care center ranges between \$500 to \$2,600. In addition, applicants are often assessed additional fees for supplemental planning department permit processing time, environmental assessment, building permit, fire inspection and business license.

Processing applications incurs real and often substantial costs to the reviewing jurisdiction. However, the fees charged for permits can never exceed the costs incurred by the jurisdiction to process the permit.

Child care providers are typically small business operators and/or non-profit organizations, and high project review fees can discourage a potential applicant. Jurisdictions can encourage the development of child care by reducing or waiving fees charged to providers. For example, the City of Los Angeles allows all non-profit organizations to apply for fee waivers. Other fees, such as typical traffic fees, should also be reviewed for child care projects. The argument has been made that child care facilities are not destinations in and of themselves and that strategically placed child care centers can help reduce traffic. Eliminating or reducing the traffic fee might encourage applications for more child care centers.