



Planning For Child Care In Santa Barbara County

A Guide for Planners

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Acknowledgements



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Contributing Advisors:

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Maria Valencia - Child Care Advocate,
Community Care Licensing

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Debbie Bergevin, Ventura County Human Resources Agency
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Patty McWaters, Ventura County Human Resources Agency
Office of Work/Family

Dave Tabor, Planning Consultant

Lynn Rodriguez, Consultant

Child Care Law Center

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**For additional copies of this guide,
please contact:**

Santa Barbara County Office of Early Care & Education
105 East Anapamu Street, Suite 5 218 W. Carmen Lane, Suite 111
Santa Barbara, CA 93101 Santa Maria, Ca 93455
Tel: (805) 560-1039 Tel: (805) 349-7553
Fax: (805) 560-1041 Fax (805) 349-7552
earlycare@co.santa-barbara.ca.us
www.sbcece.org

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Note: In referring to the care of young children outside the home, California Community Care Licensing uses the term “Child Day Care,” to distinguish this type of care from “Adult Day Care.” The term “child care,” long used by both the Early Childhood field and community members, has been replaced locally by “Early Care and Education,” to reflect the broader picture, and to emphasize the critical learning that takes place in the first 5 years of a child’s life.

For this document, we will use the term “child care” for efficiency and familiarity, except in reference to licensing regulations.

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Preface

This guide, “**Planning for Child Care in Santa Barbara County,**” is intended for city and county planners, planning commissioners, policy makers and child care advocates trying to make sense of local child care issues and the child care permitting process. It is especially intended for those individuals, departments or communities working to improve these processes in an effort to pave the way for increased child care.

The Community or City Planning process is an important tool in assessing all the growth needs of a community. It is important, while planning for roads and housing, to also give consideration to child care, as it is a fundamental supporting structure for our community. It has been said that child care is like roads – parents need both to get to work.

As planning processes are created and amended, roadblocks and barriers can unintentionally be put in place that can severely hinder the growth of child care. It is only through understanding how child care works; the day-to-day operations, the state regulations, and the industry’s tremendous impact on the community, that regulations and ordinances can be written to positively impact child care availability. With this understanding, not only can processes be simplified, but new policies can be put into place that will actually encourage child care development, strengthen our child care system, and thus, strengthen our community.

The Office of Early Care and Education serves as a resource for both planners and child care providers. Staff have been working with planning directors and planners from throughout the county in tackling child care land use issues and the concerns raised in each community. Child care permitting brochures, detailing the process and regulations for each jurisdiction, will be available at planning counters. And, this planning guide was developed as a tool for planners, and for those interested in the issue. We hope it serves to inform those who read it and stimulate dialogue and action.

Our thanks again to the Children and Families Commission for their support of this project, and to the planners in each of the city and county departments who have not only given their time, but have been, and remain, open and willing to think of creative ways to help make our communities better for children and their families.

Eileen Monahan

Early Care and Education Coordinator

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Child Care Regulation

A SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICES

One of the goals of the Office of Early Care and Education is to work with the jurisdictions within Santa Barbara County to develop land use practices that will promote the creation and expansion of child care programs. While regulations are needed to safeguard both the children and neighborhood concerns, and to ensure that adequate facilities are developed, they have also been identified as potential barriers to child care development. We have listed the following “best practices” to begin the discussion on what can be done to utilize land use policies to facilitate, rather than hinder, child care capacity-building.

Utilize County Child Care Coordinator

Functioning as a liaison between child care providers, Community Care Licensing, and local Planning Departments, the County’s Child Care Coordinator can be a valuable source of information to local agencies.

Develop Staff Experts

Having one planner on staff who understands the complexities of the child care issue can provide benefits in a number of ways. It can be easier to train a single staff person in all facets of child care regulations. And, having a child care expert on staff can give providers the guidance they need, while expediting the process by reducing preliminary research time for each project.

Coordinate with State Licensing:

State Licensing can affect a jurisdiction’s review of a child care application. In addition, there are certain standards that must be met in order to be licensed, so it is critical that planners understand the State requirements.

Create a Simplified Review Process

The review process should be examined to ensure the process is as streamlined as possible.

Develop a Comprehensive Information Packet for Applicants

A well written handout will ensure that information is given out in a consistent manner, reducing the amount of staff time spent on each case. The packet could contain the following:

- City/County permit process and flow chart
- Any application forms
- Permit and business license fee schedules
- Reference to State licensing procedures/requirements
- List of local resources available to child care providers
- List of City/County personnel involved with project review (Planning, Building, Fire, etc.)

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 may also be included in the packet.

Review the Fee Schedule

Fees vary widely between the jurisdictions in the County. When multiple fees are involved, they can add up quickly. While it is reasonable to have fees that cover the costs of the services provided, simplifying the process should reduce the applicable fees. The relevance of mitigation impact fees for child care should also be considered. For example, transportation fees may be adjusted for well-placed child care programs that reduce traffic.

Update Regulations to be Consistent with State Law

Contradictory documents confuse potential applicants and the public. Ensuring local zoning codes are consistent with State Law is part of streamlining the process.

Child Care in the General Plan

This is a chance to educate decision makers and the public about the importance of child care, and planning affirmatively for it. Planning for child care is as important as planning for other services. It also provides the legal basis for zoning ordinances, and for considering child care needs when land use decisions are made.

Some cities have developed child care policies separate from their general plans that carry nearly equal weight.