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Guidelines for Commercial Child Care Centers in Sunnyvale

The City supports establishing quality child care programs by appropriate regulations to protect health and safety and encouraging and involving industry in providing child care to their employees. Child care centers are desirable on sites that are able to adequately accommodate the requirements of parking, on-site circulation, setbacks and outdoor activity space. A successful child care center normally begins with early discussions with Planning, Building, the Department of Public Safety and the Sunnyvale Youth and Family Resources Office.

The following guidelines are intended as a reference point and designed to address citywide issues and should not be construed as the only requirements for each individual site. Proposals are reviewed on a case-by-case basis to account for the unique circumstances of each property and proposal. When a child care center is subject to California State licensing standards which are more restrictive than the guidelines listed below, the State licensing standards shall govern.

LOCATION GUIDELINES

The location of the child care center is critical to a child's safety, well-being and quality of care.

Residential Areas

Child care centers differ from family care facilities in that a child care facility is a commercial use where no one lives in the dwelling where the use occurs. An important factor to consider when locating within a residentially-zoned area is to ensure this commercial component is compatible with the surrounding residential uses. Operators must be attentive to not only the needs of the child care center, but also to the adjacent neighborhood.

1. New child care centers should be located on larger residential lots (9,000 sf or more) to adequately accommodate requirements for parking, site circulation and outdoor activity space.
2. Child care centers can be located in residential areas on major collector and arterial streets.
3. Child care centers should consider locating on corner lots at street intersections.
4. Child care centers should not be located on residential streets with limited accessibility, such as those that terminate in a cul-de-sac, in order to prevent traffic congestion within the neighborhood.

Commercial Areas

Commercially-zoned areas can include many different types of uses, some of which may not be compatible with the presence of many children. Examples include auto repair uses, businesses with high turnover of cars entering and leaving the facility, the use of chemicals or processes that could endanger children, and adult businesses. Also, finding appropriate locations for outdoor play areas that do not conflict with surrounding uses can be difficult.

DRAFT

El Camino Real Corridor (ECR/C-2 Zoning District)

Given the character of land uses along El Camino Real, and the fact that it is a major retail and mixed-use corridor, there are limited opportunities for child care center uses.

1. Child care centers should be located on stand-alone properties outside nodes, as defined in the Precise Plan for El Camino Real.
2. Child care centers should not be located within close proximity to adult businesses, auto repair uses and hazardous material sites.
3. Child care centers should not be located in shopping centers in order to avoid parking, circulation and outdoor activity space conflicts.

General Commercial (C-1, C-2, and C-4) and Administrative and Professional Office (O) Zoning Districts

Properties zoned C-1 are interspersed throughout the residentially zoned areas in the City and are typically located at the crossroads of a neighborhood. Given the neighborhood context of these sites, C-1 zoned properties may be more conducive to a child care center, provided these sites meet site safety, outdoor activity space, and parking and circulation requirements. There are a few C-2 zoned properties located in the area north of Central Expressway that are adjacent to residentially zoned properties. These C-2 sites may also be appropriate for a child care center use from a location and use compatibility standpoint.

1. Child care centers are not encouraged within strip malls and multi-tenant shopping centers in order to avoid parking, circulation and outdoor activity space conflicts. Satellite building or end-unit units that can isolate from other tenants are more appropriate.

Public Facility Areas

This district comprises the most compatible areas for child care, as it is reserved for the use and occupancy of educational buildings and facilities and other uses compatible with the public character of the district. New child care centers are highly encouraged on existing school sites in this district.

Industrial Areas

Child care centers are allowed in industrial areas only as business-sponsored facilities (where the facility is for the exclusive use of on-site employees.)

1. Business-sponsored child care centers should be located at least 50 feet from an adjacent property to lessen the potential for adjacent businesses affecting children on-site.
2. Child care centers are best located in corporate office areas where no on-site hazardous materials are used.
3. Child care centers should be located more than 500 feet from any automobile service stations.

DRAFT

4. Child care centers should not be located adjacent to a business that uses, sells or stores significant amounts of hazardous materials or creates high noise levels or fumes.

Specific Plans

Regulations and guidelines for child care centers in the following areas are addressed in the specific plan document for that area:

Downtown

A Special Development Permit (SDP) is required for a commercial child care center in the area designated as the Downtown Specific Plan Area. Refer to the use tables in the Zoning Code to determine which downtown blocks allow child care centers.

Lakeside

An SDP or MPP is required for a child care center in the Lakeside Specific Plan Area. Refer to the Lakeside Specific Plan for additional information.

Lawrence Station

The specific plan for the Lawrence Station Area is pending. These guidelines will be updated when those regulations are adopted.

Moffett Park

Only business-sponsored child care centers are allowed within the Moffett Park subdistricts. Refer to the use table in the Zoning Code for additional information.

Peery Park

The specific plan for Peery Park is pending. These guidelines will be updated when those regulations are adopted.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Site Considerations

a. Parking

1. All new child care centers are required to provide parking in accordance with Chapter 19.46 of the Sunnyvale Zoning Code, which requires 1 parking space per employee during maximum shift and 1 parking space for every 4 children.
2. Child care centers should provide adequate short-term parking to accommodate pick-up and drop-off areas which are not located in the public right-of-way.
3. The location of parking for the child care center should be easily identifiable and separated from any parking required for other uses in the surrounding area in order to reduce parking conflicts.
4. Separate lanes designated for ingress and egress of vehicular traffic should be considered in parking areas to minimize negative impacts on parking lot flow.
5. Parking areas should, to the extent possible, provide accommodation for the disabled.

DRAFT

6. Residential sites should provide designated long-term parking areas for employees and short-term parking areas for pick-up and drop-off.

b. Pick-up/Drop-off Areas and Circulation

1. A pick-up/drop-off area should be established in close proximity to the entrance to the child care center to ensure that children are not placed at risk.
2. To the extent possible, there should be accommodation for the disabled to park in this area.
3. Adequate area for pick-up/drop-off should be provided so that off-site traffic flow is not negatively impacted by on-street stacking or stopping. Sufficient turn-around areas should be provided so that traffic associated with the child care center does not back up onto public roadways.
4. Access to pick-up/drop-off areas should be easily identifiable and located so as not to negatively impact or interfere with on-site traffic circulation. Adequate area should be provided to absorb on-site queuing requirements during peak hour traffic to minimize any negative impacts to on-site circulation.
5. For multi-tenant sites, pick-up/drop-off areas should be separated from other tenant parking to reduce parking conflicts.

c. Site Design

1. All new child care centers are required to conform to the setback requirements of the zoning district designated for the site.
2. The site of the child care center should allow for the safe arrival and departure of children.
3. The site should be a defensible space with a secure perimeter and controlled access.

d. Outdoor Activity Space

1. Outdoor activity space for a child care center is regulated by and subject to the California State Licensing requirements and should meet the standards established by Title 22 of the California Code Regulations.
2. The outdoor activity space should be secured and designed in a way that minimizes noise impacts on adjoining and surrounding properties.
3. The outdoor activity space should be located in an area with ease of access from inside the child care center.
4. The outdoor activity space should be secured and enclosed with a minimum 6 foot fence for child security. A 6-foot wood or masonry fence is required along the boundaries with residential uses.
5. In residential areas, the outdoor activity space should be located to maintain the residential character (typically behind the building).
6. In commercial areas, the location of the outdoor activity space in the front of the building may be considered, provided the area is secure, and the use is compatible with the commercial character of the neighborhood.

DRAFT

2. Environmental and Operational Considerations

- a. Child care center providers are strongly encouraged to review and practice the “Good Neighbor Tips for Child Care Providers Operating in Residential Neighborhoods” in all locations. These tips can be found at ChildCare.inSunnyvale.com. The child care center should not be located near noise sources such as major highways, busy street intersections, railroad lines or airport flight paths without mitigation. If proximity to high levels of noise is unavoidable, an acoustical analysis may be required and acoustical measures may be necessary.
- b. As a general rule, the child care center should be located in areas where the noise or sound level does not exceed sixty dBA during daytime.
- c. Child care centers at locations adjacent to residential developments should be designed to minimize noise impacts on residents.
- d. Child care centers located adjacent to residential uses may be conditioned to typically operate from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Proposals for operations outside of these hours may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- e. An air quality analysis may be required for proposals adjacent to major highways, busy street intersections and industrial areas.