



The City is conducting this public meeting using a hybrid model. The public is welcome to attend tonight’s meeting in-person at Sumner City Hall Council Chambers (1104 Maple Street) or virtually by using the meeting access link below:

<https://sumnerwa-gov.zoom.us/j/88655116217>

Or by phone: 253 215 8782 (Tacoma)

Webinar ID: 886 5511 6217

## **CALL TO ORDER**

Roll Call: Sharon Fochtman, Amy Huo, Rob Healy, Mark Isaacs, Kelly Locke, Mark Malcolm and Bill Moody

## **FLAG SALUTE**

## **ROLL CALL**

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. Planning Commission meeting minutes — 01/8/2026

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

*The public may comment on topics that are not on the meeting agenda, virtually or in person. The public is strongly encouraged to submit comments via email to [chrissandaw@sumnerwa.gov](mailto:chrissandaw@sumnerwa.gov) no later than 5pm on the day prior to the meeting. Your comments will be read into the record and limited to 3-minutes.*

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

## **NEW BUSINESS**

1. Child Care Centers Zoning Code Text Amendment — DISCUSSION

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

## **COMMISSION COMMENTS**

**STAFF COMMENTS**

**ADJOURNMENT**

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**SUBJECT:** Planning Commission meeting minutes — 01/8/2026

**CATEGORY:** Motion

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**BUDGET IMPACT:**

Expenditure Required: None

Within Budget Allocation: N/A

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. 20260108-PC-Meeting Minutes-DRAFT
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**STAFF CONTACT:**

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**SUMMARY BACKGROUND:**

Summary minutes for the Planning Commission meeting held on January 8, 2026.

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**COUNCIL COMMITTEE/STUDY SESSION:**

**MEETING/STUDY SESSION DATE:**

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

**STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS/MOTION:**

Move to approve the minutes for the January 8, 2026 meeting.



## MEETING MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 pm by Chair

### ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Moody, Isaacs, Healy, Malcolm, Fochtman, Huo

Locke had log in issues, joined online at 6:07 pm

Excused Absences: None

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. *Planning Commission meeting minutes- December 4, 2025*

Move to approve Huo, Second Healy; **passed unanimously**

**PUBLIC COMMENT** (The public may provide comments on topics onto tonight's agenda please note. Chair will move onto any public comments on new or unfinished business items, each speaker is limited to 3 minutes)

**None**

### PUBLIC HEARING

1. Chair opens the Public Hearing on the Zoning Code Text Amendment- Co-living Housing

**Opens: 6:10 pm**

Staff presentation: Ryan Windish- Zoning Code Text Amendment- Co-living Housing

Commissioners inquired: Questions on parking, kitchen per unit requirement, and size of population served by co-living housing.

Public Comments:

1. Name/address Nick Bierman 5802 Parker Rd E Sumner

Spoke on Zoning Code Text Amendment- Co-living Housing.

Public Hearing on Zoning Code Text Amendment-Co-living Housing **Close: 6:38 pm**

Follow up questions from Commission: Questions on square footage, parking, bathroom requirements, potential rent price for units, sizing of units, demographics served, housing and structural requirements, location and developer interest.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Zoning Code Text Amendment- Co-living Housing – ACTION

The Commission recommended a traffic study to the City Council with the zoning amendment.

Move to approve Malcolm, Second Healy; **passed unanimously.**

2. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) 2.0- DISCUSSION

Staff presentation: Ryan Windish- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) 2.0

Commissioners inquired: Questions on data centers, sizing of facilities, state standards, fire risk, review process, potential revenue or tax benefits, utility usage, and potential locations.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**CORRESPONDENCE**

None

**COMMISSION COMMENTS**

Commissioners made comments about Commissioner Huo’s birthday. Commissioner Fochtman asked about making streets one-way to increase safety and parking opportunities during busy driving hours. Commissioner Isaacs advised he had spoken with Councilmember Elfers, who advised that the change could be expensive. Staff advised that the City Council would have to approve any changes. Commissioner Moody spoke on permitted parking.

**STAFF COMMENTS**

Reminder: On February 9, at 6:00 p.m., the City Council will hold a training session with Jurassic Parliament. The session will provide an overview of the public meeting process, and compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act. The City Administrator has requested that the Planning Commissioners attend this training.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Move to adjourn Fochtman, Second Huo; all in favor; meeting adjourned at 7:42 pm.

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**SUBJECT:** Child Care Centers Zoning Code Text Amendment — DISCUSSION

**CATEGORY:** Information Only

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**BUDGET IMPACT:**

Expenditure Required: None

Within Budget Allocation: N/A

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Staff memo
2. A. Summary of Draft Code Amendments
3. B. 2025 Child Care Report -Pierce County
4. PC presentation-Child Care Centers

**STAFF CONTACT:** Chrissanda Walker, Associate Planner

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**SUMMARY BACKGROUND:** In 2025, the Washington State Legislature adopted Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 5509 requiring cities and towns to allow child care centers, and the conversion of existing buildings for the use of child care centers, as an outright permitted use in all zones except industrial zones. Local regulations must be amended within two years of the effective date, no later than December 31, 2027.

The intent of ESSB 5509 is to expand access to care facilities, remove zoning and permit barriers for licensed providers, and to help the workforce by encouraging the development of more childcare centers. The Sumner Municipal Code already allows "family childcare homes" and "day care facilities" as either accessory, principal or conditional permitted uses.

The proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment would align with the state legislation through:

1. Amending the definition of "day care facility"; and
2. Allowing child care centers as an outright permitted use in all zones, except industrial zones where a conditional use permit will remain required;

The purpose of this meeting is to provide clarification of amendments needed, prior to holding a public hearing with the Planning Commission.

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**COUNCIL COMMITTEE/STUDY SESSION:**

**MEETING/STUDY SESSION DATE:**

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

**STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS/MOTION:**

Review and provide discussion on the proposed amendments



**DATE:** March 5, 2026  
**TO:** Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Chrissanda Walker, Associate Planner  
**CC:** Ryan Windish, Community & Economic Development Director  
**RE:** **Proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment – Child Care Centers (ESSB 5509 Implementation) - CTA-2026-0001**

**I. BACKGROUND / WHY THE AMENDMENTS ARE BEING PROPOSED**

In 2025, the Washington State Legislature adopted Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 5509. In 2025, the Washington State Legislature adopted Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 5509, requiring cities and towns to allow childcare centers as an outright permitted use in all zones except industrial zones. In industrial and light industrial zones, childcare centers must be allowed as conditional uses, except in or around high-hazard facilities. Local development regulations must be amended no later than December 31, 2027.

The intent of ESSB 5509 is to expand access to childcare by removing local zoning barriers that limit where childcare centers may operate. Statewide and regional data demonstrate that permitting complexity, zoning restrictions, and facility costs are significant obstacles to childcare expansion. The 2025 Pierce County Child Care Report found that permitting ranked as the highest obstacle (5.0 average score), followed by zoning (4.3) and the cost of locating and renovating commercial space (4.8), see attached report Exhibit B. Additionally, 60% of providers reported capital project needs, with more than half attributable to regulatory requirements.

Sumner already allows family child care homes and day care centers as either accessory, principal or conditional permitted uses in various zones. Under the current Sumner Municipal Code (SMC 18.04.0320), “day care facility” includes several subcategories. In practice, these subcategories fall into two primary operational models: child care centers and family child care homes.

**Family Child Care Home**

A family child care home is a state-licensed child care operation located within the provider’s primary residence. Care is provided in the family living quarters for 12 or fewer children, including the provider’s own children, for periods of less than 24 hours. This model is residential in character and typically operates as an accessory use within a neighborhood setting.

**Child Care Center**

A child care center is a state-licensed facility that provides regularly scheduled care for a group of children (generally one month through 12 years of age) for periods of less than 24 hours. Unlike family child care homes, centers operate in commercial, institutional, or purpose-built facilities and are not limited to 12 children. They are considered principal uses rather than accessory residential uses.

The proposed zoning code text amendment simplifies the current definitions by formally distinguishing only these two categories, consistent with state licensing classifications and operational scale. The purpose of this meeting is to provide clarification of the amendments needed, prior to holding a public hearing with the Planning Commission.

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL**

The proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment would amend several sections of the Sumner Municipal Code (SMC) under Title 18, including chapters 18.04, 18.12, 18.14, 18.16, 18.29 and 18.42, to implement state law on childcare centers. Specifically, the proposal would:

1. Simplify the definition of day care facility by consolidating subcategories into two classifications:
  - a. Family Child Care Home
  - b. Child Care Center
2. Permit child care centers as an outright use in all residential and commercial zones, consistent with ESSB 5509.
3. Retain conditional use permit requirements in industrial zones, except where prohibited due to high-hazard proximity.
4. Clarify performance standards to distinguish between:
  - a. Accessory residential family child care homes
  - b. Principal-use child care centers

These amendments reduce redundancy, align with state licensing categories, and respond to documented barriers identified by child care operators.

## **III. EXHIBITS**

- A. Summary of Draft Code Changes
- B. Pierce County 2025 Child Care Report

## CHILD CARE CENTERS RELATED CODE CHANGES

Draft 02/24/26

### 1. Definitions (Title 18.04)

- Amend definition SMC 18.04.0320:

**"Day care facility"**

means an establishment regularly providing care for a group of children for periods of less than 24 hours. Separate requirements are adopted for the following subcategories of day care facilities:

**A. ~~"Family child care home"~~**

~~means a facility in the family residence of the licensee providing regularly scheduled care for 12 or fewer children, within a birth through 11 years of age range exclusively, for periods less than 24 hours.~~

**B. "Family child day care home"**

means the same as "family child care home" and a child day care facility licensed by the state, located in the family abode of the person or persons under whose direct care and supervision the child is placed, for the care of 12 or fewer children, including children who reside at the home. Children not residing at the home are cared for during periods less than 24 hours.

**C. ~~"Family day care provider"~~**

~~means a licensed day care provider who regularly provides day care for not more than 12 children in the provider's home in the family living quarters.~~

**D. "Child day care center"**

means a facility providing regularly scheduled care for a group of children one month of age through 12 years of age for periods less than 24 hours; except a program meeting the definition of a family childcare home shall not be licensed as a day care center without meeting the requirements of WAC 388-150-020(5)(a)

NOTE: AMEND THE DEFINITION FOR "DAY CARE FACILITY" AND "FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME" TO ALIGN WITH STATE DEFINITIONS, REMOVE REDUNDANT DEFINITONS. WAC 388-150-020(5)(a) WAS REPEALED AND REPLACED WITH A NEW CHAPTER 388-295 CONCERNING MINIMUM LICENSING REQUIEMENTS

### 2. Allow Childcare Centers in All Applicable Zones

- Land Uses-where allowed

*X=Not Permitted; A=Accessory Use; CUP=Conditional Use; P=Outright Permitted*

	Resource Protection District	Residential-Protection District	Low-Density Residential District	Medium and High Density Residential Districts	Commercial Districts & ESUV	Town Center	Manufacturing Districts
<b>Child day care center</b>	X	X	<del>CUP</del> P	<del>X</del> P	NC - P GC - P IC - P	P	<del>- M-1 - CUP M-2 - X MICO - CUP/-</del>
<b>Family child care home or Family child day care home</b>	X	A	A	A	NC - P* GC - P* IC - P*	P	-

NOTE: ALLOW CHILD DAY CARE CENTER AS OUTRIGHT PERMITTED IN LDR & MDR. ADDRESS CHILD CARE CENTERS VS FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES IN THE INDUSTRIAL ZONES.

### **3. Performance Standards:**

NOTE: The following section describes the existing regulations specific to "family child care home" as an accessory use to a residential dwelling:

#### **A. Family child day care home or family day-care home in Residential districts.**

- A. Meet Washington State child day care licensing requirements;
- B. Comply with all building, fire, safety, health code and business licensing requirements;
- C. Conform to lot size, building size, setbacks, and lot requirements of this chapter except if the structure is a legal nonconforming structure;
- D. Comply with the applicable provisions of the sign code of this title;
- E. Make no structural or decorative alteration which will alter the single-family character of an existing or proposed residential structure which would make it incompatible with surrounding residences

NOTE: The following section describes proposed considerations for regulations pertaining to child care centers:

#### **B. Day care facility/Child Day care centers**

- ESSB 5509 allows for cities to impose reasonable restrictions on the permit, including pickup and drop-off areas.
  - Can be determined during permit review, for any new construction for a childcare center
- Propose new subsection in the parking code SMC 18.42 to:
  - Address loading space or drop-off/pick-up space requirement (SMC 18.42.050)
  - Address minimum off-street parking requirements for child care centers
- Existing buildings that wish to be converted into a childcare center require compliance with the building and fire code regulations, performance standards would then be similar to the requirements for family day care homes, A, B and C above.
- Allow signs for child care centers in the LDR/MDR zones
- Allow design review flexibility for childcare centers and conversions of existing buildings.



# Child Care Report

February 2025

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## INTRODUCTION

This report is presented to the Pierce County Council pursuant to the budget proviso found in Ordinance 2023-65s2, Section 2.

Ordinance 2023-65s2, implementing the 2024-2025 Pierce County Budget directs that, “The Economic Development Department shall identify best practices, regulatory options, and incentives that could be used to support the provision of infant and child-friendly workplaces and on-site child care within businesses and multi-family housing developments. The department shall present this information along with department recommendations to the Council’s Economic and Infrastructure Development Committee no later than February 1, 2025.”

### Process

The Pierce County Economic Development Department conducted a study to identify best practices, regulatory options, and incentives that could be used to support the child care industry. The study was approached from the perspective of child care providers as businesses, not as service providers. That is to say, the study looked for obstacles to business operations rather than looking at the particulars of providing child care.

The study began with phone conversations with child care providers, asking questions about what is working well, what is not, and what are areas, if improvements were made, where it would be easier to run a business. As a starting point for the conversations, a question was posed, “What are the biggest pain points or points of friction for your child care business?” Contacts for those conversations were drawn from a list of businesses that had accessed other programs administered by the Department, and therefore had an existing relationship and level of trust. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Economic Development Department distributed over \$175,000 to 11 child care businesses, and 19 more received assistance through the Community Navigator or other partner programs.

A survey was developed, based on those phone conversations, and was distributed to approximately 400 email addresses associated with approximately 500 child care facilities. Facilities included home-based, center-based, and school-based child care. Facilities receiving the survey were gleaned from a list provided by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families, who oversees child care providers in Washington. The list was current as of October 2023. A more recent list was requested through a public records request, but to date has not been provided by the agency. Forty-seven responses were returned for a response rate of 12%. The proportion of child care centers in the responses was about equal to the proportion of centers in all of Pierce County. Home-based child care facilities were over-represented and school-based facilities were under-represented. Respondents were in both rural and urban, and incorporated and unincorporated parts of the county. No responses were received from facilities on JBLM, or from around the Bonney Lake plateau. Complete survey results are presented in the Appendix.

Finally, the zoning code and development regulations related directly to child care businesses were reviewed. The review was conducted with an eye toward addressing issues mentioned by operators of child care businesses. Many of the obstacles discussed later in this report relate to regulations or factors beyond the county’s control, but surveys and research revealed opportunities where the county could reduce or mitigate those challenges. Several options for policy changes are presented later in this report.

## Challenges

As with any small business, operating a child care business is hard. But aside from the normal issues faced by small businesses, like meeting payroll and staying ahead of the market, child care businesses face additional challenges unique to their industry.

### Regulations

Businesses that care for other people’s children are heavily regulated. In the survey, respondents were given a list of state and local agencies and asked which ones they interact with. On average, business operators listed six agencies, and many reported they are regulated by 10 or more agencies. Each agency comes with its own set of reporting and regulatory compliance requirements. That makes staying in compliance complex and challenging.

Interview and survey respondents commented that advance notice or compliance guidance is often not given when regulations are changing, or if notice is provided, it is frequently confusing, unclear, or conflicting. Respondents also noted that inspections, which tend to be “surprise” compliance visits, seem to be punitive rather than trying to achieve the policy goals the regulations are trying to achieve. Any time there is a violation found, regardless of how minor it is, a report is generated which becomes accessible to insurers who often use that information to increase the rates they charge.

### Workforce

Workforce is another area of extreme challenge for child care businesses, as it is with most companies. Child care operators noted it is always a struggle to balance rewarding workers with adequate pay that reflects their efforts, while still charging affordable tuition. Providing benefits to workers is often lost in that balancing act. Many noted they would like to provide benefits to their workers but doing so would force them to raise tuition rates beyond what parents can afford.

Finding qualified staff, and providing training to keep staff qualified, is also a challenge. Washington State has requirements for annual training for child care workers. Respondents noted that it is fairly easy to find training to meet the requirements, but it can be challenging to provide workers with the time they need to complete the training. In addition, finding qualified substitute workers to fill in when regular workers are absent is difficult.

Child care centers also reported challenges such as finding a location that is zoned correctly, affordable enough to purchase or lease considering the need to renovate to meet regulatory requirements. Most child care centers did not start as a home-based child care facility, but rather, started as a commercial operation. The challenges faced by home-based child care facilities wanting to grow into a child care center were similar, but the order of concerns was slightly different with start-up costs being a somewhat larger concern than regulatory requirements.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Child care businesses highlighted a broad range of challenges they face in their day-to-day operations. Many of those challenges are not within the purview of Pierce County to address. The ability to open and operate a child care business is mainly impacted by regulations, restrictions, and requirements controlled by the State, by cities and towns, and by private home-owner associations. The following recommendations are changes Pierce County could implement that may ease some of the challenges mentioned by survey respondents.

### Child Care Centers

#### Recommendation #1: Consistently Allow Child Care Centers in Community Plans

**Why it's important:** The vast number of zones, and the inconsistency between similar zones in different areas, is confusing to people looking for a location for a new facility. For example, in Moderate Density Single-Family zones in Frederickson, Level 1 Child Care Centers are allowed outright, but they are not allowed at any level in Gig Harbor. Normalizing the zoning code could go a long way to making the code comprehensible to business owners.

#### Recommendation #2: Turn Conditional Use Permit Requirements into Administrative Use Permits

**Why it's important:** The Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process is expensive, time consuming, and confusing for people not accustomed to working with development regulations. After spending the time and expense pursuing a CUP, there is no guarantee that permits will be provided at the end of the process. Changing the requirement to an Administrative Use Permit would make the process shorter and less expensive, but still allow the county to impose conditions for community compatibility.

#### Recommendation #3: Review the Cutoff Between Level 1 and Level 2 Child Care Centers for Economic Feasibility.

**Why it's important:** Currently the difference between Level 1 and Level 2 child care centers is “less than 25 children” for a Level 1 facility, and “25 or more children” for Level 2. The County should examine whether the 25-child cutoff is a reasonable number based on the financial feasibility of operating a business. Of the 168 licensed child care centers in Pierce County, only 23 have a capacity under 25 children, with an average of 75 children for all centers. The distinction between Level 1 and Level 2 may make the development regulations unnecessarily complex while not providing a benefit.

#### Recommendation #4: Allow Child Care Centers as an Accessory Use in Industrial and Commercial Zones.

**Why it's important:** Currently, child care centers are not an allowed use in most industrial zones, and allowance in commercial zones is inconsistent. A broad allowance as an accessory use in commercial and industrial areas would increase the opportunity for employers to make child care available to their employees and neighboring workplaces.

## Home-based Child Care Facilities

### Recommendation #1: Clarify that Home-Based Day Care Facilities are NOT Subject to Home-Occupation Standards.

**Why it's important:** Currently, home-based day care facilities are not subject to the Home Occupation standards found in Pierce County Code 18A.37.110. However, in other jurisdictions they are subject to Home Occupation standards. Making it clear in the Pierce County Code that Home Occupation standards do not apply may be helpful to prospective businesses in understanding our requirements, especially if they have been exploring options in multiple jurisdictions. Possible language might be, "18A.37.100(A)(4) Home-based day-care facilities are not subject to the standards set forth in 18A.37.110."

### Recommendation #2: Clarify that Home-Based Day Care Facilities are Allowed in All Zones

**Why it's important:** Currently, home-based day care facilities are allowed in all zones, but the Pierce County Code language is ambiguous. A minor change to 18A.37.100(A) would add clarity for people considering opening a home-based facility. Possible updated language could be:

"18A.37.100(A) Home-Based Day care facilities ~~may be~~ are allowed to operate from a residence in all zones and are required to comply with the following standards:"

### Recommendation #3: Review the Prohibition on Play Equipment in Setback Areas for Home-Based Day Care Facilities

**Why it's important:** Currently, Pierce County Code 18A.37.100(A)(2) states, "Play equipment shall not be located in any required front or interior yard setback area." This requirement should be reviewed, as it may preclude prospective home-based day care businesses from opening in communities characterized by small building lots, or on larger rural lots where the home is built near a property line.

## Other Considerations

This report has focused on child care businesses in Pierce County, highlighting the challenges they face and providing some insights into what it's like to operate one. Pierce County as a regulating body can help with some of the challenges identified such as zoning and development regulations. However, many of the challenges mentioned such as workforce needs, subsidies, and regulatory and reporting requirements, must be addressed at the state level.

Several surveys of the broader business community have attempted to measure the degree to which the availability of child care impacts other businesses, and steps those companies may be taking to address the problem. The results of those efforts have been mixed with some study findings conflicting with each other. For example, a January 2025 survey of Pierce County businesses asked respondents, "Do you have trouble hiring or retaining workers due to child care issues?" Out of 356 responding businesses, 7% said yes. Conversely, a survey conducted in 2024 by the Economic Alliance of Snohomish County asked the same question and had 63% respond yes (out of 74 total respondents). An older study conducted by the Association of Washington Business found that in 2018, "67% of employers reported that child care challenges caused absenteeism among their employees." While the impact of child care issues on businesses may be unequal across industries and regions, it has been estimated that child care issues cost the Washington State economy over \$2 billion annually.

The policy and code changes recommended above would only impact unincorporated Pierce County. **However, most child care facilities are in the incorporated cities and towns.** Once the County has reviewed and adjusted its policy framework regarding child care businesses, it may be helpful to present that body of work to the cities and towns as model legislation that could be duplicated throughout the county.

**Most of the regulations child care businesses must follow are developed and administered by Washington State.** The industry is understandably heavily regulated and closely watched. The primary concern is the safety and wellbeing of the children cared for in child care settings. At the same time, the amount of reporting and monitoring for changing regulations undertaken by businesses is extremely burdensome and takes time away from actually caring for children.

The state should look for opportunities to streamline oversight of child care businesses. With some facilities answering to 11 or more separate agencies, there may be ways to combine some reporting requirements. Also, compliance inspections can be a source of stress and perceived punishment, rather than an opportunity for improvement focused on child wellbeing. Efforts should be made by all agencies involved in child care oversight to approach compliance as a path to building stronger businesses and a more qualified workforce. There may also be an opportunity for Pierce County or the State to create an ombuds-person or “navigator” to provide technical assistance, answer questions, help find information, provide insights into changing regulations, and share tips for staying in compliance.

Many child care business owners indicated that despite the challenges, they don’t want to do anything else. They love the work, they care for the wellbeing and growth of the children, and they want to be the best employer they can be. Despite the frustrations and investments that come with starting a business, whether a child care center or home-based child care facility, they don’t regret the efforts, and many would do it again.

## REFERENCES

In addition to the original work conducted for this study, the following sources also provided information and insights:

An, S., Wase, L., & Wilson, N. (2024). *child care Needs and Family, Friend, and Neighbor child care Providers in the AANHPI Community of Pierce County*. Tacoma: Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.

City of Seattle. (2023). *Ordinance 126131 - child care Near You package*. Seattle.

Economic Alliance Snohomish County & Snohomish STEM. (2024). *Final Report on Lack of child care*. Everett.

Pierce County Economic Development Department. (2025). *2025 Business Pulse Survey (unpublished draft)*. Tacoma.

Washington State child care Collaborative Task Force. (2019). *The Mounting Costs of child care*. Olympia: Washington State Department of Commerce.

Washington State Department of Commerce. (2021). *Washington State Child Care Access Strategy*. Olympia.

# APPENDIX

## Survey Results

There are about 500 child care facilities in Pierce County, including home-based child care, child care centers, and school-based or pre-school facilities. Some child care operators own or run more than one facility. Surveys were sent to 393 un-duplicated email addresses of facilities in Pierce County. 47 responses were returned for a response rate of 12%. The proportion of child care centers in the responses was about equal to the proportion in all of Pierce County. Home-based child care facilities were over-represented and school-based facilities were under-represented. Respondents were in both rural and urban, and incorporated and unincorporated parts of the county. No responses were received from facilities on JBLM, or from around the Bonney Lake plateau.

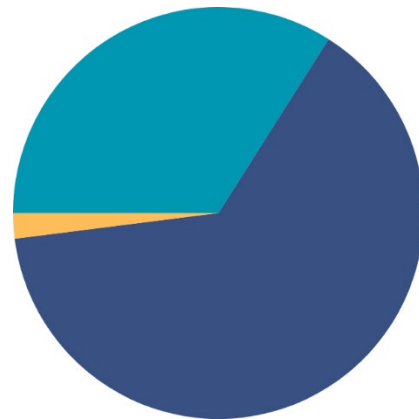
Child Care Facilities in Pierce County (2023)			
Child Care Center	168	33%	<span style="color: #00A0C0;">■</span>
Home-Based	222	44%	<span style="color: #2E3192;">■</span>
School-Based	115	23%	<span style="color: #FFA500;">■</span>
<b>Total</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>100%</b>	



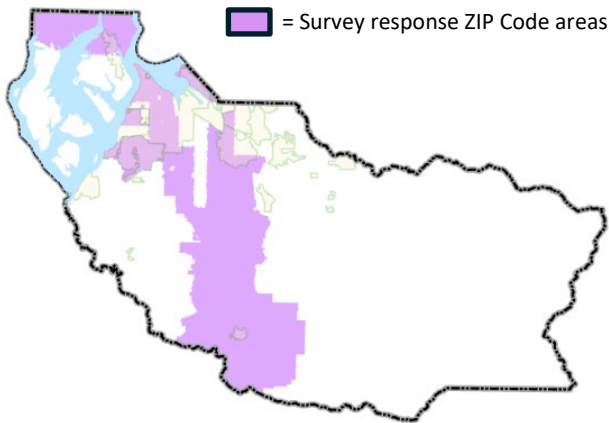
## Survey Responses

### 1) What type of child care business do you operate?

What type of child care business do you operate?			
Child Care Center	16	34%	<span style="color: #00A0C0;">■</span>
Home-based	30	64%	<span style="color: #2E3192;">■</span>
Preschool	1	2%	<span style="color: #FFA500;">■</span>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>	



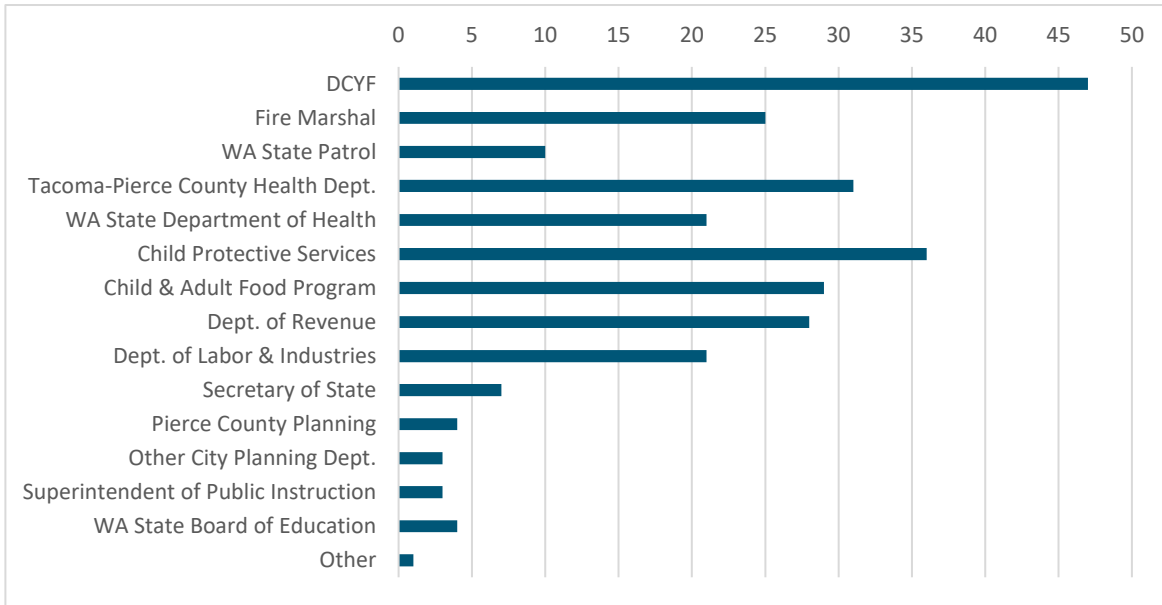
## 2) What is your ZIP code?



## 3) What government agencies do you interact with (check all that apply)?

### Average = 6 Government Agencies

DCYF	47
Fire Marshal	25
WA State Patrol	10
Tacoma-Pierce County Health Dept.	31
WA State Department of Health	21
Child Protective Services	36
Child & Adult Food Program	29
Dept. of Revenue	28
Dept. of Labor & Industries	21
Pierce County Planning	4
Other City Planning Dept.	3
Superintendent of Public Instruction	3
WA State Board of Education	4
Other	1



**4) Rate how much of a problem the following items are for your business. In other words, which are the biggest "pain points" or causes of friction for you as a business owner/manager.**

1 = it's not a problem --- 5 = it's a big problem

Business Concern	Average Score
Finding substitutes when staff are absent	4.2
Providing benefits to staff	4.1
Finding qualified staff	3.7
Wages to tuition ratio	3.7
Learning about changing requirements	3.6
Meeting requirements when they change	3.4
Enrolling enough children to care for	3.1
Keeping staff current on training	2.9
Enrollment to staffing ratio	2.6
Attendance to staffing ratio	2.6

**5) Do you use any software services to help with business operations (check all that apply)?**

Software Tool	# Using	% Using
Kinder Connect	26	55%
Wonderschool	1	2%
Brightwheel	12	26%
Quickbooks	13	28%
Procare	7	15%
Check-in Zone	1	2%
None listed	6	13%

**6) Do you have capital project needs like needing new equipment or building upgrades?**

Capital Project Needs (i.e. new equipment or building upgrades)		
Yes	28	60%
No	19	40%
Total	47	100%

**6a) Of those with capital project needs:**

Are those capital project needs due to changing regulations or license requirements?		
Yes	16	57%
No	12	43%
Total	28	100%

What is the estimated cost for your capital project needs?	Median	Max	Avg.	Std. Dev.
	\$ 22,250	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 90,960	\$ 202,474

## Home-based Child Care Only

7) Have you considered growing from a home-based child care to a center-based child care?

Have you considered growing from a home-based child care to a center-based child care?		
Yes	10	33%
No	20	67%
Total	30	100%

8) Please rank the following possible obstacles that you have faced or that are keeping you from becoming a center-based business:

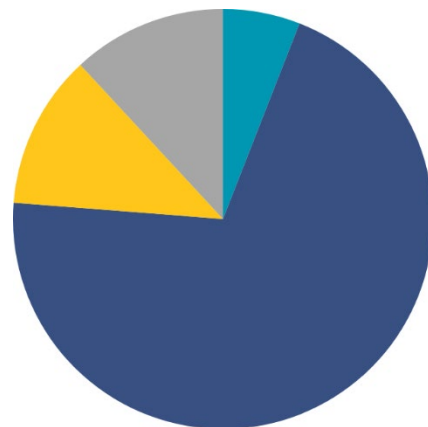
1 = minor obstacle --- 5 = major obstacle

Possible Obstacle	Average Score
Finding a suitable commercial location	4.8
Cost of renovating a commercial location	4.7
Cost of buying/leasing a commercial location	4.4
Permitting	4.3
Zoning	4.2
Finding qualified staff	4.0
Finding enough qualified staff	3.6
Licensing	3.0
Training for staff	2.9
Understanding the process	2.9
Training for myself	2.4

## Child Care Centers and Pre-schools Only

### 9) What type of business structure do you have?

Business Type	Count	%
Corporate facility	1	6%
Independent business	12	71%
Non-profit	2	12%
No Response	2	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>



### 10) Which best describes your facility location?

Facility Type	Count	%
Co-located with a church	1	6%
Co-located with a public school	2	12%
Stand-alone commercial building	12	71%
Stand-alone commercial building, Co-located with a private school	1	6%
No Response	1	6%

### 11) Did you grow from a home-based child care to a center?

Did you grow from a home-based child care to a center?		
Yes	4	24%
No	13	76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>

**12) Please rank the following possible obstacles that you faced when starting your center-based business.**

*1 = minor obstacle --- 5 = major obstacle*

Possible Obstacle	Average Score
Permitting	5.0
Cost of renovating a commercial location	4.8
Cost of buying/leasing a commercial location	4.5
Licensing	4.3
Zoning	4.3
Finding a suitable commercial location	4.0
Finding qualified staff	4.0
Finding enough qualified staff	4.0
Understanding the process	3.7
Training for staff	3.3
Training for myself	2.7

### 13) Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about operating a child-care business? (Verbatim comments)

#### Child Care Centers and Pre-schools

- It's all about who you (Directing) your site, their knowledge, experience, and education.
- Paying for permits eats up grant money.
- We got recently licensed and there are certain things that I don't understand, and no one wants to answer them clearly like the difference between Occupant load and capacity. Does occupant load is per building or per classroom? And I have many more questions.
- There is always a need for upgraded technology to manage platforms on site. Internet continues to be a huge struggle in school buildings. Making sure sites have the equipment they need is also costly. In addition, small business accounts with banks are charged high fees for processing tuition internally and NSF's. Being able to provide health insurance that is useful is impossible financially unless you are a not for profit.
- Un-funded mandates and regulations are making running and operating a child care business impossible. Legislation by people who have never run a child care business are putting people out of business.
- In addition to all of the above i.e. finding staff, no enrollments, licensing regulations are getting absurd, zoning and building regulations are burdensome just to name a few now liability Insurance is through the roof and coverage is half of what it was even a year ago, (if you can find it at all.) Insurers are now going straight to a provider's last few inspections and are denying coverage-based solely on what they read on line. Licensors are not partners with providers they are there to find reasons to write up a provider. Example: I know of a provider that had the broom the wrong way, the licensor wrote the provider up for a serious violation and at renewal time the provider's insurance carrier dropped them due to the "serious violation" Everyone I talk to that is not a boots on the ground provider seems to not know about the insurance crisis -why is that?
- We need to keep those children who have signed up for the program. Because the curriculum is not carried out by the teachers on a daily basis, there is no consistency in the program with the daily routine and therefore the children lose interest in learning and having fun.
- Funding building maintenance (we have been in this building since 1969) is very expensive to be drawn from tuition charged to families.
- Trying to run a child care business with all the demands from DCYF, your county, and all other aspects can be difficult. That is part of running a business. However, DCYF makes us feel like we are always in a, got you, state. We never know when the licensure is going to come and no matter how much work you do they will always find even the smallest things to write up, as we were told we will always find something even if it's minor that we have to fix it's part of our job, so then you have to take all that time fixing items such as there was a broom left out, we really should have this lock replaced on a cupboard, your cribs are out a code which we spent hours online finding that they weren't out of code and then copied that certificate to put under every single crib that was grandfathered in when we bought the business... Things like that that make it so Hard... as a private business I don't have time for this. I understand compliances and making sure that every center is doing what they need to do to keep our children safe, but why does it need to be this way? We are doing a service for our community, and they make us feel so on edge with

their spontaneous visits. While we're dealing with that, we are up against corporate daycares that have tons of funding and don't have the struggles of a small business trying to pay their employees well to show how much you value them, keeping tuition down for your families, professional development, writing grants, curriculum.... it's just a lot! There's obviously a need in our area for more infant and toddler care. We would love to add some portable classrooms, how can you afford this between getting DCYF to approve it, county permits, and more it just becomes this vicious cycle. I just wish there was a better cohesive system, equity between small business and these corporate centers, and equity and opportunities. Where I know one day daycare in our area, got this huge grant from the tribe where they literally walked into our door said we have money left over. We want to give it to you. When we're over here, just struggling to make it.

## Home-based Child Care Facilities

- There have been grants offered to child care providers to do remodeling or for property acquisition. Unfortunately, these grants are only awarded to large companies. Programs that are economically sustainable with the capacity to open new centers. We are at full capacity and even though we have many families contact us, we turn them away. We have been trying to expand for the last two years but it has been very difficult.
- We need the county to advocate for more resources for our county. All the programs that help providers such as imagine institute are focused on Seattle and Pierce County. Also, we need a program like best start kids from king county. We need to train our staff! The county needs to invest in trainings.
- It's getting g harder to please parents and licensing the rules don't always make sense or over the top.
- Very low wages
- Running an in-home child care facility is time consuming, can be emotional at times, tiring, but very rewarding. A lot of us continue to stay in the business because we care, and we do find it rewarding. I wish the WACs and government entities were a bit less restrictive. Jumping through hoops can be even more exhausting the working with families and children. MOST PEOPLE DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT WE DO IN A DAY. I am not even sure how to remedy that. Sometimes perks, or lifting of some requirements would be sweet.
- There is so much disconnect and lack of communication/information statewide.
- We need better communication local school districts, the fire department and the police department and daycares. We don't know what is expected of us to get kids ready for school and the only way we know about a dangerous situation in our area is from word of mouth from others not from the first responders.
- Benefits would help us as we hire qualified staff and to keep the staff also better pay for quality teaching for onboarding.
- Licensing needs to be collaborative rather than punitive with providers! It would make a much better relationship!
- Licensing rules are over the top and the lack of training as it changes is overwhelming.
- I like my job, I work with passion, and I like to work with children and their families, but we need more support of the state. Thank you!

- Licensing not being flexible and fair.
- Recently the state and Pierce County stopped to pay attention on home-based family child cares. We can't have access to the grants and other incentives (despite in the description the home family child cares are mentioned) in comparison with the bigger entities: centers, non-profits, and public schools. Being a smaller business owner you can't compete to the bigger entities. In addition, the bigger entities take away our 3- and 4-years old kids for the ECEAP programs (public schools). We offer high-quality child-care services and are rated by EA. But it's not enough for the governmental agencies to notice our valuable impact for the society. We kept our doors open during pandemic, but we were not recognizing first respondents despite the kids of medical and stores' staff attended our child cares on regular basis during pandemic. The schools were closed but we offered services for the school age kids at that time. It's very sad that family child cares are pushed to go out of the business slowly. Home family child cares and their families need support from the Pierce County
- It feels like a dying business ever since Covid.
- I love being home.
- The hours are long, and the breaks are very short.
- 1. The job doesn't end when we close. 2. If I hire help for cleaning, shopping, paper work, yard work, the cost cuts into our bottom line. 3. Hiring competent thorough people is difficult. 4. home-based child care is not viewed as a real business. 5. resources and respect are difficult to come by
- Business has been slow; I have always had my vacancies filled...not since covid though.

# Child Care Centers-

# Zoning Code Text Amendment

Planning Commission – March 5, 2026

Chrissanda Walker, Associate Planner



# Background

In 2025, the legislature adopted ESSB 5509 requiring GMA cities to allow childcare centers, and the conversion of existing buildings for the use of child care centers, as an outright permitted use in all zones except industrial zones. The intent of the bill is to remove barriers and help build more childcare facilities while also allowing for local flexibility.

Cities are required to adopt regulations by **December 31, 2027**

# Zoning Code Updates

## **Definitions**

Amend the definition of “Day care facility” to align with the state and remove redundancy.

## **Permitted Zones**

Child care centers are required to be outright permitted in all zones, except in the industrial zone where a conditional use permit can be required.

## **Performance Standards**

Review existing performance standards and address proposed regulations for child care centers.



# Definitions

**Childcare center** is defined in state law as an agency that regularly provides early childhood education and early learning services for a group of children for periods of less than 24 hours.

Amend SMC 18.04.0320 “Day care facility” to redundancy and be consent with state definition.



## “~~Child day~~ care center”

means a licensed facility providing regularly scheduled care including early childhood education for a group of children ~~one month of age through 12 years of age~~ for periods of less than 24 hours.

## “Family child care home”

means a licensed child care facility operated in the permanent residence of the provider that regularly **provides early learning and care for 12** or fewer children, including children who reside at the home, for periods of less than 24 hours.

# Land Uses - where allowed

	LDR	MDR/HD R	Commercial	Town Center	Industrial
<b>Child day care center</b>	<b>CUP</b>	<b>X</b>	NC – P GC – P IC – P	P	--
<b>Day care facility</b>	--	--	--	--	M-1 – CUP M-2 – X MICO – CUP/-
<b>Family child care home or Family child day care home</b>	A	A	NC – P* GC – P* IC – P*	P	--





# Performance Standards

## **Sign Code regulation**

Review the sign code regulations for family child care homes and allow signs for child care centers in residential zones.

## **Design compatibility**

Allow design review flexibility for childcare centers and conversions of existing buildings. Maintain compatible residential neighborhood character when in LDR zones.

## **Parking and Drop off/Pick up zones**

Add reasonable regulations related to loading zones and off-street parking requirements.



# Next steps

