Recommendations for Incorporating Child Care Facilities

In Transportation Planning

The development and operation of child care facilities and programs are complex economic and social issues affecting land use, circulation, and community planning. Child care and early education have obvious educational and social benefits to society, local communities, and families as these programs prepare children for school emotionally, socially, and intellectually and enable them to succeed academically. Additionally, child care services enable families to participate in the workforce and maintain economic self-sufficiency.

Orange County has the opportunity to plan for and include child care in future transit oriented developments (TOD) as an essential part of the revitalization of established neighborhoods. Child care can support the goals of redevelopment, including revitalization, economic development, job creation, and transit ridership.

Economic & Social Benefits

The broader economic impact that child care has on our community has been documented in many reports including *The Economic Impact of the Child Care Industry in Orange County, (2002)[[1]](#endnote-1)* which quantified the contributions of child care to our local economy. The report found that licensed child care:

* Generates $719.5 million a year in gross receipts;
* Employs over 13,900 individuals in Orange County[[2]](#endnote-2);
* Enables Orange County working parents to earn approximately $828 million annually;
* Increases productivity and retention of employees in businesses in the county;
* Creates the potential for additional start-up businesses;
* Ensures future public savings on social needs by lowering high school drop-out and crime rates, and decreasing special education and welfare costs;
* Is a crucial component in developing the future workforce.

High quality child care programs significantly improve a child’s long-term educational success and chances of becoming a productive member of the labor force and society. Investing in the child care infrastructure of Orange County has direct benefits for the county’s overall economic competitiveness. Like transportation, education, public works, and affordable housing, child care is a necessary and vital part of the economic infrastructure.

Research indicates that a community’s most important investment is early childhood education. The early years are vital to a child’s social and cognitive development, children are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of living in poverty. Investing in quality child care and preschool provides a 10% return to society through increased personal achievement and social productivity[[3]](#endnote-3). Community Development must include child care facilities as a core neighborhood investment strategy if we are to increase access to top-quality child care programs that also allow parents to participate in the workforce. Without policies and investments to strengthen and expand the child care infrastructure, Orange County’s productivity and workforce development will be constrained.

Community Sustainability & Livability

Child care is often a missing piece in community planning despite its place as an essential component to our communities’ quality of life. Available homes, jobs, transportation, and child care are pieces of the puzzle for working families’ lives and are related to where they work and live.

A California Department of General Services study (1990) indicated that working parents add five to six miles to their daily commute for transporting children to child care and school, adding 1,352 extra miles traveled each year and resulting in approximately 56 pounds of auto emissions per person (California Health and Safety Code Section 1597.70). Connecting child care, transportation, and housing will assist parents to reduce vehicular trips, miles traveled, and commute times.

Including child care facilities in or adjacent to housing – especially affordable housing – that is also connected to transit oriented development adds to the community’s sustainability and livability through increased access to jobs, reduced trips, and improved air quality. Just as schools and community centers are built to provide services to resident families, so should child care facilities be included in development. Families may walk to nearby child care facilities, allowing easy access and fewer vehicular trips.

The benefits that child care provides in quality of life and economic stability for Orange County families are clear. We now must ensure that child care is included as an essential community service in transit-related planning and redevelopment activities.

1. Orange County United Way, Success By 6®, *The Economic Impact of the Child Care Industry in Orange County.* 2002 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Based on an estimate of direct jobs in the licensed child care sector and additional indirect jobs sustained by the child care industry. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Heckman, J. *The Heckman Equation*. [www.heckmanequation.org](http://www.heckmanequation.org). 2009 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)