

This brief offers local infrastructure strategies to uplift families, fuel economies, and advance shared prosperity for cities through child care.

THE CHILD CARE CHALLENGE TO SOLVE TOGETHER

San Mateo County is **short nearly 9,000 child care spaces** for infants, toddlers, and school-age children. **Fewer than 45% of eligible children receive subsidized care** – a crisis that strains families, limits child development, and slows the local economy. Solving it takes a coordinated effort across public agencies, private partners, community organizations, and local leaders. **Cities have a vital role to play** – through zoning, permitting, and infrastructure investment, they can help expand access and create more prosperous and family-friendly communities.

CHILD CARE BELONGS IN CITY PLANNING

High-quality child care is more than a service. It's essential infrastructure that helps cities thrive.

Supporting working families

Reliable care enables parents to stay in the workforce—**\$122 billion** is lost nationally each year due to child care disruptions.

Boosting children's futures

High-quality preschool helps children start school ready to learn, reduces special education needs by 50%, increases graduation rates by 29%, and leads to higher lifetime earnings.

Driving economic growth

Every **\$1 invested in child care generates \$2** in local economic activity, supporting small businesses, jobs, and regional vitality.

Shaping livable communities

Access to care influences where families live—**83%** of millennial parents say family-friendly benefits impact job and location decisions.



CLIMATE & CHILD CARE

Climate change is already disrupting early learning — from school closures to poor air quality — and young children are especially vulnerable to its health impacts.

Outdoor play, critical for brain development, is increasingly limited by unsafe conditions. Cities can play a vital role by helping child care providers expand climate-resilient indoor and outdoor spaces and by connecting programs to resources before, during, and after climate-related disasters.

Child care infrastructure builds strong, inclusive, prosperous and sustainable communities

WHAT CITIES CAN DO

Integrate Child Care into City Planning

Add child care as a priority in your city’s General Plan and sector-specific plans – such as Housing, Land Use, Climate, and Public Facilities. Embedding it in long-range planning ensures consistent focus and resource alignment.

Remove Local Barriers

Make it easier for child care providers to open and operate programs:

- Reform **permitting processes** to be more transparent and efficient
- Waive **permit fees** or offering **tax credits** for child care development
- Reduce **parking and traffic requirements** where feasible
- Update **zoning and land use policies** to allow more flexibility
- Create a **child care start-up guide** to help providers navigate city processes

Use Developer Impact Fees

Cities can charge one-time fees on new development to help fund public infrastructure, including child care. These developer impact fees must reflect a project’s fair share of costs and are allowed under California’s Mitigation Fee Act (AB-1600).

Negotiate Development Agreements

Cities can negotiate development agreements that include child care as a community benefit. These legally binding contracts can:

- Require developers to include a child care facility in the project
- Offer incentives for integrating child care into residential, commercial, or mixed-use developments

Local Tax Measures

Cities can seek voter approval to collect **parcel taxes, sales taxes and school district bonds** (limited to capital expenditures).

City-Operated Child Care and Preschool Programs

Most Peninsula cities operate preschool, child care and/or after-school programs, most often through their Recreation Departments.



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

- Amend local zoning ordinances to remove obstacles to establishing child care in all zoning districts, where appropriate and safe for children.
- Negotiate with developers to provide space for child care in all types of projects

MORE RESOURCES



Sources for this document include: SMC Child Care and Preschool Facilities Task Force Final Report and Recommendations, 2017; SMC Child Care Needs Assessment, Brion Economics, 2022; The Importance of Ensuring Adequate Child Care in Planning Practice: Child Care and Sustainable Community Development, American Planning Association, 2011; APA Policy Guide on the Provision of Child Care, 2007; Strategies for Increasing Child Care Facilities Development and Financing in California, Building Child Care Collaborative, 2007; Economic Impacts of Early Care and Education in California, UC Berkeley, Center for Labor Research and Education, 2011; San Carlos Child Care: Preliminary Options and Recommendations, Economic & Planning Systems, Inc., 2017.

