

## Roll Call

The Kalamazoo City Commission met as a Committee of the Whole on Monday, February 6, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall.

## COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Mayor David Anderson  
Vice Mayor Don Cooney  
Jeanne Hess  
Stephanie Hoffman  
Chris Praedel

## COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

Qianna Decker  
Esteven Juarez

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, City Attorney Clyde Robinson, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

## Commissioners Excused

Commissioner Praedel, seconded by Commissioner Hoffman, moved to excuse the absences of Commissioners Decker and Juarez. With a voice vote the motion passed.

## Public Comments

When an opportunity was given for general public comments, the following people addressed the City Commission:

In Person

Regena Nelson, City resident, spoke about the positive lifelong impacts of Early Childhood Education (ECE) on the individual learner.

Sheri Welsh, City resident, spoke about the impact of quality ECE on the workforce and current labor shortages.

Dr. Charmane Echols with KC Ready 4's spoke about the difficulties of finding and retaining quality ECE teachers.

Namita Sharma, City resident and Chair of the KC Ready 4's Board expressed support for quality ECE.

Call In

None

**2023-05-01**

Presentation and Panel  
Discussion on Early  
Childhood Education

The following panel of experts delivered a presentation entitled *Early Childhood Community Partners: Committee of the Whole, February 6, 2023*:

Kevin Ford, Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo Coordinator

Grace Lubwama, CEO of the Kalamazoo YWCA

April Goodwin, Executive Director of Southwest Childcare Resources & Referral

Kristyn Buhl-Lepisto, Executive Director of KC Ready 4's

Rachel Roberts, Executive Director of Preschool Programs for the Kalamazoo Regional Educational Services Agency (KRESA)

Tim Bartik, Senior Economist at the W.E Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

In response to questions and comments from City Commissioners, the panelists provided the following information.

- there have been a lot of conversations with the state about ECE funding. Kalamazoo is well-positioned in the event discretionary funds become available for innovation. Work is being done to raise interest in private donors. At some point these threads will need to be brought together.
- the “Pre-Promise” proposal is good, but the investment needed to start lower: ECE started at pre-natal care. Stakeholders are not going to wait for the City to do something. There was an opportunity for ECE leaders to be innovative.
- 77 people in Kalamazoo County are interested in opening child care centers under the new state program, and some employers are already paying for one-third of childcare costs through the Tri-Share program.
- next steps should include looking at the existing ECE system to find the gaps and determine how the system could be strengthened.
- regarding the City’s role in ECE, a conversation was needed about financial investment and other ways the City could help, such as quick, efficient approval processes for building permits and inspections. There is a need for short term capital investments and support for short-term operating costs.
- the time needed to implement the Pre-Promise was about three years.
- Community leaders need to listen to community needs – what families need. Parents say their biggest concern is have a safe place to send their children; it’s an issue of basic public health and safety. If the City makes the investment, ECE leaders will implement the program. This is equity work.
- Michigan has one of the highest pay gaps between Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) teachers and Kindergarten – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers: \$20,000 per year for public GSRP/public K-3 teachers and \$30,000 per year for public GSRP/private K-3 teachers. Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) education was not adequately funded. Pre-K education cost more because of mandated small class sizes.
- teachers at privately owned ECE programs make less than publicly funded programs: non-GSRP teachers make \$12/hr. An increase in these wages would impact families. The majority of ECE teachers are women and people of color (POC). The work to address low wages was equity work.
- low wages affected the ability of providers to attract and retain teachers. How do we attract people to go into this field? How high do wages need to be?
- there are good universal Pre-K programs in other places. The programs in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Boston, Massachusetts have shown good long-term success. Private programs need to be included in the discussion to give parents options. If all Pre-K programs were run through the public schools, private daycare centers would close because their budgets depend on having children in all age ranges up to kindergarten. Right now, there is no model for universal childcare, ages 0-3 or 0-4.

**2023-05-01**

Presentation and Panel  
Discussion on Early  
Childhood Education  
(cont’d)

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(cont'd)

- Governor Whitmer's plan is to implement universal Pre-K education over the next 3-4 years, but people could influence that timeline.
- the Governor has made grants available. We have been working with the state to make funding equitable at the policy level.
- in 2019 there were 131 on the waitlist for KC Ready 4's; in 2023 there are 292 on the waitlist.
- It has been difficult to get movement on this issue because policy changes do not create movement; the policy makers do not know what needs to be implemented. There disconnect that starts with the language used to talk about ECE. For example, the need for childcare is not just 9-5 anymore, so childcare cannot be just 9-5. The question is, who is not part of the discussion, and if they were part of the discussion, what would they say?
- for the Kalamazoo Public School District as a whole (not just the City of Kalamazoo) the costs and benefits for ECE would go up 50%.
- for universal ECE, the national cost estimate is \$30 billion per year for universal Pre-K and \$80 billion per year for 0-5 care for those under the poverty line.

Commissioner Praedel stated the community needed to act together to address the need for Early Childhood Education. Commissioner Praedel remarked on the importance of reading and how ECE would help in this area. Commissioner Pradel noted young people had education debt, rising housing costs, rising childcare costs, and they were overwhelmed.

Vice Mayor Cooney stated the community was doing great things together in the way of research, infrastructure, and collaborations, but it needed to address ECE. Vice Mayor Cooney spoke about the importance of creating a movement to provide quality ECE.

Commissioner Hoffman stated the City did not need to have another meeting on this topic; the next step was to make deep investments in ECE.

Mayor Anderson indicated the City could not be the only funder in this effort but would be a partner; the question was how the City could be the most effective partner. Mayor Anderson remarked that the City could also be an effective advocate, but support was needed from other cities also. Mayor Anderson thanked the panelists.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:46 p.m.

Scott A. Borling  
City Clerk

Approved by the City Commission on: \_\_\_\_\_

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