General Meeting Agenda

ASHLAND GENERAL

EARLY LEARNING AND AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE AD-HOC COMMITTEE AGENDA

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Siskiyou Room - 51 Winburn Way - 11AM

I. Call to Order

1. Confirm quorum present
2. Approval of draft minutes from 3.6.25 (see agenda packet)
3. Suggested additions to today's agenda
4. Brief announcements

II. Public Forum

III. Continuation of Business from March Meeting

1. Final approval of article for the Southern Oregon Business Journal (see agenda packet)
2. Business engagement work plan (see agenda packet)
3. Cultivating future funding beyond June 2026

IV. New Business

1. Revisiting committee's progress by priority (see agenda packet)
2. Presentation of progress report to City Council
3. Items from committee members

V. Adjournment to May 1 Meeting

If you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact Kerrick Gooden at citymanageroffice@ashlandoregon.gov or 541.488.6002 (TTY phone number 1.800.735.2900). Notification at least three business days before the meeting will enable the City to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to the meeting in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

ASHLAND GENERAL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES
March 6, 2025

Note: These are draft minutes until approved by the committee.

I. Call to Order

Call to order at 11:03am
Members present: Verner, Therkelsen, Hyatt, Keller-Hand, Love, Ransford, Seward
Council liaison present: Bloom
Staff liaison present: Gooden

1. Approval of draft minutes from 2.6.2025

Motion made to approve minutes of 2.6.2025
Motion: Love Second: Therkelsen
All ayes - motion passed

II. Election of Committee Chair

Committee members provided and discussed nominations for committee chair.
Motion made to elect Love as Committee Chair
Motion: Hyatt Second: Keller-Hand

All Ayes - Motion Passed.

Staff Liaison will send a link to committee members regarding a free training webinar on public meeting law offered by LOC

III. Public Forum

none

IV. Business engagement work plan

Committee discussed:

- Chamber of Commerce responded they could not release business list information - committee discussed alternatives.
- The committee's childcare initiative was discussed as a priority at a recent Council retreat - ad-hoc committee will likely be extended for one year to June 30, 2026 - discussed provider reliance on public funding.
- Economic development is anticipated to be prioritized - discussion of the possibility of childcare/early learning as a subcommittee for any economic development committee that may be created: create draft proposal by Dec. 2025.
- Communication to and from providers regarding changes and promotion of the childcare grant initiative. Keller-Hand and Hyatt to contact providers about sending letters of support ot the City Council.
- Discussed positive impacts on families and ongoing provider need for assistance with behavioral issues.

- Discussed how to cultivate future funding for childcare grants, such as with an endowment fund, and approaching Rogue Federal and Evergreen Bank to explore possible financial tools.
- Members discussed developing a list of questions as a business survey, including larger non-profit organizations such as OSF, Chamber, SOU and ASD- discussed developing a subcommittee for this. Verner and Therkelsen agreed to draft ideas for discussion April meeting.
- Discussed how to incentivize summer programs.
- Hyatt participated in an interview with the Childrens Institute in Portland: https://childinst.org/our-work-in-early-childhood-development/communications/podcasts/
- Staff Liaison will bring this to City Manager's Office for consideration regarding publishing on City's website or otherwise.

V. Discussion of draft article for the Southern Oregon Business Journal

Committee discussed edits for this draft. Love would like to finalize within a week so Committee can develop a recommendation to Council to publish in Southern Oregon Business Journal and elsewhere as appropriate. Committtee discussed adding a call to action for what businesses can do to further this work and an 'open invitation' to business owners for their perspective. Committee also discussed rendering a condensed version after finalization for additional distribution as appropriate.

VI. New Business

Seward spoke about the Make a Circle Documentary by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
NAEYC is celebrating its Week of the Young Child April 5-11. Seward received a license for this documentary and will be setting up screenings at the library and is considering other venues such as SOU, RCC, and Mountain Meadows
- makeacirclefilm.com
Committee discussed this may be a great preface for any endowment fund discussions.

Therkelsen spoke about Trusted Homes Community Land Trust (https://trustedhomesclt.org) and the Sunstone Housing Collaborative (https://sunstonehc.org/) and their efforts for the potential development near the high school including plans for an onsite childcare center. THCLT is co-applying for grants in conjunction with Ooregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC) to include spots for infants and toddlers.

VII. Adjournment

Adjourned at 12:10pm

Business and Childcare: A Crucial Symbiosis

John M. Love, Joanie Keller-Hand, Lynn Ransford, Lisa Verner, and Paula Hyatt[1]

When Melinda Carver (not her real name) finally found a job with a Jackson County business after months of looking, she faced a serious dilemma: who would care for her 2-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son. As a single parent, Melinda had little choice but to find childcare if she were to be able to go to work every day. The job was in Ashland, and she was hoping to find a childcare center either close to her employer, near home, or along the route she would drive each day from Medford.

The Challenge of Finding Childcare in Jackson County: It's a Desert

In many parts of the state—and across the country—families have considerable difficulty finding childcare. According to the Southern Oregon Early Learning Hub, Jackson and Josephine Counties are a childcare desert.[2] This means that less than 33 percent of children under 5 years of age have access to a childcare opening.[3] Families living in poverty have even more challenges: just 18 percent have access to publicly funded childcare slots.[4] Lack of childcare is a major barrier to finding and holding a job.

And when childcare *can* be found, its cost is a serious barrier. A recent survey found that in Jackson and Josephine counties, the monthly cost of infant care averaged about 29 percent of the

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[1] The authors are members of the City of Ashland's Ad Hoc Committee for Affordable Childcare and Early Learning (https://ashlandoregon.gov/932/Affordable-Childcare-Ad-Hoc-Committee).

[2] Oregon has sixteen Early Learning Hubs, created to help families navigate the systems that will allow them to increase access to high-quality early care and education opportunities. The Southern Oregon Early Learning Services Hub serves Josephine and Jackson Counties and is located at Southern Oregon University. https://www.soesd.k12.or.us/early-learning-hub-2/

[3] The data cited here are from the SOELS Hub's director, René Brandon's 7/25/23 presentation to the committee.

[4] Poverty is defined as a family income at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, or $62,400 for an Oregon family of four in 2024. (https://povertylevelcalculator.com/poverty-level-calculator-results)

income of a family earning 200 percent of the federal poverty level ($62,400 for a family of four), and preschool care cost 20 percent.[5] Rep Cyrus Javadi, R-District 32, a member of Oregon's House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services, recently made the case for childcare as an economic tool.[6] Citing a 2022 report, Javadi notes that the Oregon economy suffered $304 million in lost productivity from absenteeism and turnover.[7] Clearly, as we discuss here, working families need help, which both businesses and government agencies can provide. Affordable childcare could make the difference. But not just any childcare. Parents/employees need quality childcare that is provided by trained professionals, is accessible and convenient to their home or workplace, is affordable for them, operates during the days and times needed, is stable, and in other ways meets the employee's needs.

Providing Childcare Offers Clear Benefits for Businesses

Businesses can play a major role in successfully making all this work. According to the former CEO of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi, "The biggest investment we can make in the future of our population is to build a reliable, high-quality, safe, and affordable care infrastructure, focused on childcare from birth to age 5…."[8] Businesses find they have a more productive workforce when parents can focus on work and are not distracted with worrying about their children's health and safety. In addition, Nooyi found that expenditures for onsite childcare at PepsiCo's headquarters in Atlanta meant reduced commuting time and resulted in a significant return on the investment in terms of loyalty and peace of mind for current employees; it was also a terrific recruiting tool.

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[5] Sektnan, M., & Houston, L. "2022 Oregon Child Care Market Price Study," Oregon Department of Human Services and Oregon Early Learning Division, March 2023. www.oregon.gov › delc › 2022-child-care-market-rate-report.pdf
[6] Javadi, Cyrus. "The Cost of Care: Why Childcare Is Breaking Oregon's Economy," *Substack.com,* January 23, 2025. https://cyrusjavadior.substack.com/p/the-cost-of-care-why-childcare-is?publication_id=3216827&post_id=155550563&isFreemail=true&r=4n1lyz&triedRedirect=true
[7] ReadyNation is "the premier business member organization focused on cradle to career education since 2006." https://www.strongnation.org/readynation/about-us
[8] Nooyi, Indra K. "We Need to Solve America's Childcare Crisis." *Saturday Evening Post*, November/December 2022.

There is equally strong evidence closer to home, in northern Oregon. In fall 2020, Boardman Foods, Inc., in Boardman, Oregon, decided to expand their after-school program, which had been operating for 18 years, and created Families First Childcare. They began small, with a center serving 15 children in a borrowed room in the Morrow County School District. Today the center provides care and support for more than 80 children, including infants (ages 0-2), toddlers (2-3), preschoolers (3-4), and school age children (ages 5-12).[9]

Boardman Foods doesn't do this alone. It has mobilized a community of sponsoring companies, including Lamb Weston, Threemile Canyon Farms, Tillamook County Creamery, and Amazon. Together, their support allows Families First Childcare to charge parents just $850 a month for infant care (when Boardman's cost for personnel alone is $2,000). With only about 50 employees, Boardman's childcare program has the capacity to also serve children from about 40 other employers in their region.

On their website, Boardman explicitly identifies the corporate benefits resulting from their investment in childcare for its employees:

- Improved employee morale and productivity, as employees know their children are well-cared for
- Reduced absenteeism, since parents have fewer childcare problems
- Enhanced recruitment and retention, as childcare adds to the attractiveness of the business and employees are less likely to leave for a competitor that doesn't offer childcare
- Positive company image, improving the company's reputation.
- Increased employee loyalty and dedication to the company

[9]Taken from https://www.familiesfirstchildcarecenter.com/about. Families First Childcare provides high-quality programming, having adopted the nationally recognized Creative Curriculum. The Creative Curriculum was designed for flexibility and adaptation to suit the interests and needs of each child. For more information, see https://teachingstrategies.com/lp/the-creative-curriculum/?_bt=74217347509697&_bm=e&msclkid=71cdd6c0a2e6150ce180b141092e0edc

- Healthier work-life balance, leading to reduced stress, increased job satisfaction and fulfillment
- Boost in employee engagement and focus on their work
- Higher employee well-being and mental health, knowing their children are in a safe learning environment
- Tax benefits that the employer may be eligible for
- Community impact, contributing to the well-being of future generations and fostering social responsibility.

Parents Also Reap Important Benefits From Employer-Provided Childcare

These benefits to employers mirror the benefits that the parents/employees reap. They begin with greater peace of mind knowing their children are safe, are learning, and can be visited during work breaks. Parents are then better able to focus on their work (perhaps resulting in enhanced opportunities for advancement) and can maintain a healthier work-life balance, better mental health, and pride in their contribution to the company's goals.

***Not* Having Childcare Has Hidden Costs for Both Parents *and* Businesses**

Without adequate childcare, parents (usually moms) have to reduce hours worked, take a position in which they cannot fully make use of their education and experience, or take time out of the labor force to stay at home with the kids for sometimes many years. This results in fewer opportunities for advancement, loss of seniority, adverse impacts on their retirement savings, and reduced lifetime earnings. In 2023, nationally, 26 percent of mothers were stay-at-home parents.[10] In

[10] National Women's Law Center (https://nwlc.org/issue/child-care-early-learning/)

an online article for *The Atlantic*, Ashley Fetters described the "working-to-afford-child-care conundrum."[11] She reported that in the January 14, 2020 Democratic presidential debate, the moderator referred to a young parent who had written in saying many parents had to either quit their job or settle for cheaper, lower-quality childcare. She asked candidate Pete Buttigieg, "How will you prioritize accessing quality affordable childcare in your first 100 days in office?" His response included the unforgettable phrase, "I meet professionals who sometimes say that they're working in order to afford childcare in order to be able to be working." What's wrong with this picture?

The Good News: Agencies and Businesses in Jackson County Can Address the Childcare Dilemma

Local governments throughout the state, including in Jackson and Josephine Counties, have limited resources and multiple demands for those limited resources. However, the city of Ashland demonstrated this economically vital resource support. In the 2023-2025 biennium budget cycle, the City Council set aside $240,000 for "affordability grants." These grants have enabled several local childcare providers to provide subsidies to low-income families, expand available care, and enhance staffing capabilities.

Businesses can take their cue from PepsiCo and Boardman and consider finding or creating onsite or near-site childcare facilities. To assist in this, they can investigate their potential for receiving one of the state's infrastructure grants from the Child Care Infrastructure Fund.[12]

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[11] Fetters, Ashley, "The Working-to-Afford-Child-Care Conundrum," *The Atlantic*, January 18, 2020. https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/01/working-afford-child-care-so-you-can-work/605206/

[12] Business Oregon is working with the Department of Early Learning and Care, other state agencies, and private and nonprofit entities to implement the Child Care Infrastructure Fund, a state grant and loan program. $10 million was awarded to 64 projects in fall 2024. The current round of funding just announced offers $15 million. Applications opened March 26, with an April 30 due date. This is a great opportunity for projects that will provide minor renovations/repairs, new construction or major renovation, and real property acquisition. (An additional $25 million in funding for this program is expected to be available in summer 2025.) https://www.oregon.gov/biz/programs/child_care_infrastructure/Pages/default.aspx

If the number of children of a single business's employees is insufficient to warrant this investment, as is the case with Boardman, companies could consider collaborating with others to pool their childcare services. Consortia of businesses could also operate childcare centers in partnership with existing services.

The Bottom Line

If parents can't find consistent childcare, they cannot hold jobs unless they have help from grandparents or friends and neighbors. The challenges Melinda faced in finding childcare mirror the challenges businesses have in hiring and retaining staff. In the end, we see five cornerstones of childcare that are vital to the wellbeing of both the businesses and their employees with young children:

- Accessibility—Is the childcare location reasonably convenient?
- Appropriateness—does the type of setting (center or home, large or small, religious or secular) meet the parents' needs?
- Stability—does the period the facility has been operating suggest it will continue?
- Affordability—can parents afford the fees, with or without subsidy assistance?
- Quality and safety—is the program licensed and does it meet standards set by Oregon's Department of Early Learning and Care?

As we've shown, businesses in Southern Oregon can play a vital role in resolving the childcare dilemma to benefit both themselves and their current and potential employees—the parents with young children. For questions and additional information, contact the committee's City Council liaison, kerrick.gooden@ashlandoregon.gov. And we encourage you to share your experiences with the committee. Have you learned ways of assisting your employees with young children that might help others? We happily welcome you to come to one of our monthly meetings.

Ad Hoc Committee on Early Learning and Childcare
BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT WORK PLAN outline

Goal: Engage key local businesses to further the work of the Ad Hoc Committee

1. Develop a long term sustainable business engagement program
    a. Identify an area in which to contact/recruit/work with businesses (catchment area)
    b. Find out whether businesses have childcare needs (employee needs)
    c. Integrate Ashland businesses into the Ad Hoc Committee's Childcare Plan
2. Identify businesses to contact
    a. Chamber of Commerce
    b. City of Ashland
    c. Hospital system
    d. 15-20 largest businesses in Ashland
    e. SOU
    f. others
3. Identify ways to contact businesses
    a. Flyers?
    b. In-person interviews?
    c. Mass emails?
    d. General meeting?
4. Develop questions to ask businesses
    a. Number of employees? With children below age 18? With children ages 0 to 5?
    b. Do your employees have childcare?
    c. Do any employees need childcare?
    d. others
5. Identify who to talk to at the businesses
6. Implement outreach plan and gather specific feedback into childcare efforts affecting businesses' workforces
7. Based on data collected, provide insight and suggestions on what supporting early childhood education would mean for working individuals and the success of their businesses
8. Develop a pilot project with one or more local businesses

Ad Hoc Committee on Affordable Childcare and Early Learning
Progress on Short- and Longer-Term Goals
September 5, 2024

Goal	Activities to Date	Possible Future Activities
1. Advocate at the state level for Preschool Promise slots to be made available to programs currently licensed and operating in Ashland. A traditional Preschool Promise class supports 18 children. Having 18 Preschool promise slots would be a significant asset to our community and help greatly in supporting Ashland working families. Preschool Promise supports families earning at or below 200% of the FPL with free early learning opportunities.	The committee has not done specific lobbying yet, but the Ashland Family YMCA has received state funding for ___ Preschool Promise slots.	Reach out to Children's World and the other Ashland childcare providers to inform them about the process for applying for Promise Preschool funding.
2. Engage local businesses to assess their employees' needs, and investigate potential partnerships	Committee members published "The Economics of Musical Chairs" in the local online Ashland.news, April 2024	Prepare article for Southern Oregon Business Journal that would expand on the Ashland.news article. John spoke with founder/editor Jim Teece, and he's eager to accept our submission. Aim for about 2,000 words (at least twice as long as the April article). John will bring a draft outline to the committee's September 4 meeting.

Goal	Activities to Date	Possible Future Activities
3. Improve public awareness of early learning programs currently available in Ashland.	The team worked with a variety of partners, including SOESD, EQQUS Work Force Solutions, Business Oregon, SBDC, ODHS, DELC, and multiple local providers (see #4).	Continue reaching out to these partners as the committee expands its work. Also see #5.
4. Work with providers to ensure they are aware of grant opportunities and business development opportunities that support their long-term viability.	Committee chair Paula Hyatt reached out to all local, licensed providers (including YMCA, Children's World), Business Oregon, Asante, and local movers and shakers (including Peter Buckley, SOU President Richard Bailey, Cynthia Anderson) to ensure awareness of the city's Affordability Grant program announcement and the state's DELC/Business Oregon Childcare Infrastructure Grant opportunity this August/September.	Continue reaching out to all these providers and organizations as the committee learns about new grant- and business-development opportunities.
5. Engage Ashland's Community Development department regarding land use for early learning programs and how we can best support providers looking to locate programs in our city.	Chair Hyatt and committee member Verner met with Sunstone, and Hyatt also facilitated a meeting between the Sunstone's ED and Sunny Spicer and her team at Oregon Center for Creative Learning.	Work with Community Development to get a "place at the table" in connection with the group involved in planning the Croman Mills housing development. Explore with them possibilities for including a childcare center in that development. Advocate for one that could (a) serve all the children, 0-5 years of age, who might reasonably be expected in the number of families who would reside in the new development and (b) be located convenient to RVTD's expected bus line. Also determine the agency/organization/business that could apply for a grant in the next round of Child

Goal	Activities to Date	Possible Future Activities
		Care Infrastructure Program funding, and support them in submitting an application.
6. Explore strategies for collocating childcare and affordable housing.	NA	Include colocation plans in the application coming out of #5 and meet with SOU President Bailey regarding the project they have in the works rehabilitating an old dorm into senior living space to explore childcare colocation.
Longer-Term Goals		
1. Investigate, and support, development opportunities in infant and toddler care in Ashland.	Recommended that Children's World receive full funding requested for the city's Affordability Grant because of CW's offering of toddler care slots.	See short term goal #5.
2. Investigate, and support, development opportunities in care for children with special needs in Ashland.	Recommended that the Family YMCA receive full funding requested for the city's Affordability Grant because of its request for funding a part-time behavioral support specialist.	Advocate for the city to continue its Affordability Grant Program into the next biennium, and if possible, increase funding to reach more families enrolling children with special needs.