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Aspen Council selects design concept for Burlingame early childhood center

Megan Webber, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer
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Aspen City Council gave feedback and supported moving forward with the schematic design of the Burlingame Early Childhood Education Center at its work session on Monday.

Since the project was approved, the city of Aspen has worked with a consultant to gather public feedback and develop an initial design process. Staff asked the council on Monday for guidance on which of two design concepts to pursue and how the council would like to move forward with the schematic design process.

“Tonight we have two design concepts, and we’re going to see if there’s a preferred alternative or if there’s a different direction altogether that the council would like to go,” said City Manager Sara Ott. “What I would encourage the council to do is, if you’re able to choose one of these design concepts tonight, it would be extremely helpful, and we’ll take this project to 100% schematic design.”



A woman and child look over the plans for the Burlingame Early Childhood Education Center at an open house on May 5. Aspen City Council supported moving forward with the schematic design process at its Monday work session. Courtesy of the city of Aspen



A rendering of the front view of the Burlingame Early Childhood Education Center.
Courtesy of the city of Aspen

Staff presented two different design concepts for the roughly one-acre project site: “hillside” and “streetside.” The hillside plan would place the early childhood center, along with four affordable housing units, on Harmony Road on two residential lots. The childhood center and housing units would be located in separate buildings to provide some space between them. The total cost for the hillside plan is estimated at \$20,244,999.

The streetside plan would integrate the childhood center and seven affordable housing units on all the lots on the parcel, in addition to 57 parking spaces, some of which would be located underground. The total cost for this plan would be roughly \$5 million more than its hillside alternative, estimated at \$27,364,214.

Jen Phelan, development manager in the city’s asset management department, said that the biggest driver in the cost difference between the two plans is the underground parking. She also said that an advisory group made up of city staff and Kids First board members preferred the hillside plan.

The council also ultimately supported the hillside plan, with members saying they believed it would be more cost efficient, more aesthetically pleasing and better for the future of Aspen.

“I just think we need to focus on what are the needs today as much as what will be the need in 20 years,” Councilwoman Rachel Richards said. “Projects like this take time to plan, take time to come to fruition — and it’s very hard for any of us to try to guess what the need would be in 20 years, but I think you need to build for the future and not just today’s situation.”

Councilman Skippy Mesirow agreed that the demand was an important factor for him, and he asked to see more information from staff about the demand for child care and how it is trending. He also said he would like to understand more about how many teachers it would take to staff the facility and who would live in the affordable housing units. Ott said that the units are intended to be available for any early childhood education teachers, not necessarily the ones staffing the Burlingame center.

Council members were unanimous in their preference of the hillside plan, although concerns still arose around the council table.

“I respect the approach that the hillside concept brings to this, so I think that’s probably our smartest track — not just because of the benefits that are enumerated here,” Mayor Torre said. “My questions come in along with greater concerns about staffing it, about the housing to staff it, and our future plans for some sort of facility at the Lumberyard: not necessarily knowing whether those both as facilities are necessary and warranted moving forward.”

Ott said that both projects will continue. As far as the Burlingame center is concerned, staff will now move toward 100% schematic design and engage with the Burlingame community throughout the process. She expects this work to take several months and does not expect the project to return to the council table with an update for quite a while, she said.

Megan Webber

Reporter

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