

ELM PARK ELC, LLC

628 Radar Road
Yachats, OR 97498

October 19, 2025

Via email

Mayor Ward
Council President Carp
Council Vice-President Beaudreau,
Councilors Wantz and Webb

Re: October 20, 2025, City Council Meeting: Elm Park Early Learning Center

Dear Mayor and Council:

This public comment relates to the Elm Park Early Learning Center (the “Center”). I will briefly review the amazing community effort that has brought us this far, and where we currently stand.

Florence has long been a childcare desert, with slots for only about 25% of the children aged 0-6. Over the years, the Council has held periodic work sessions devoted to the chronic need for additional childcare in Florence and its impact on family income, local businesses, and community development. The Child Care Working Group, with City support, has labored for years to expand and improve available childcare in Florence by working with other groups, including Siuslaw Vision and the Chamber of Commerce.

City Manager Erin Reynolds initiated conversation with me in early 2024 about including an early learning center with Elm Park Apartments. Based on the established need for more childcare and after public meetings, the Council agreed to sell a 0.37-acre site for development of the Center. We filed four land use applications, leading to multiple public hearings before the Planning Commission.

Obtaining the \$4,250,000 in funding required for the Center has been difficult. The strong community support for expanding childcare in Florence was a key to our fundraising. Head Start of Lane County (“HSOLC”) and Our Coastal Village, Inc. (“OCV”) were able to win two highly competitive state grants totaling \$2,750,000. The balance of the funding comes from three foundations (\$350,000), one public charity (\$750,000), a partnership with PeaceHealth (\$175,000), the City of Florence (\$53,250 reduction in site purchase price) and \$45,900 in donations from forty individuals through a GoFundMe campaign to the Florence community (including the campaign’s match feature).

We are finalizing the grant contracts to prepare for the November 17 closing of the site purchase which will include cash deposits from all the funding sources of the total amount required to construct the Center. Bidding is now underway and will conclude by November 1. Construction will begin by November 30.

The Center has 5,500 square feet and four 780-square foot classrooms each with an attached children’s restroom, plus a kitchen, teacher work area, and a 2,250 square foot outdoor play area. It will accommodate up to seventy-six children aged 0-5. HSOLC will provide Early Head Start and Head Start programming in two classrooms. A local, licensed childcare provider will use the other two classrooms

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 (“Community Rooms”) to care for eighteen infants and toddlers (no more than eight infants) and for twenty preschoolers.

Community childcare activists created Siuslaw Childcare Friends (“SCF”) to (a) develop the childcare workforce for all local providers, (b) provide financial assistance to families who cannot afford full market rate childcare, and (c) serve as steward of the two Community Rooms.

After outreaching local providers and publishing an ad for the community provider position, SCF engaged Stepping Stones Center for Early Learning, LLC as the Community Provider, run by Jenn Lukashev, a licensed and experienced local childcare provider. Jenn has been actively involved in improving conditions for the Florence child care community through the Child Care Working Group and otherwise.

Jenn will bring to the Community Rooms the same quiet professionalism, positivity, and willingness to listen to all, and work for the greater good, that she has shown the childcare community over many years.

Sincerely,

Layne Morrill,
Elm Park ELC, LLC