

TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
MASSACHUSETTS

CHILDCARE COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting

Monday, March 31, 2025 at 12PM

1. Call to order – 12pm Open Meeting
 - o Chair K. Van Olst began the meeting at 12pm. Those present from the Child Care Committee were M. Smyth, R. Chang, K. Tucci, M. Stephen, J. Lucey.
2. Confirm future meeting dates – proposed:
 - o K. Van Olst confirmed the next three meeting dates and proposed moving the May meeting date to the 19th as it previously was scheduled for a holiday. Scheduled meetings are as follows: April 28th, May 19, June 23.
 - o M. Smyth will contact the library to reschedule the meeting space for May.
3. Discussion of plan to identify childcare needs and resources
 - o K. Van Olst proposed to divide into three working groups: one to connect with child care providers, one to engage with families who need or use child care, and one to build relationships with community partners.
 - o K. Van Olst introduced community members with expertise in this area to share their experience and projects.
 - o R. Chang shared information from the Town Clerk regarding the replies to the census from this past Fall. The population of Great Barrington is 7,114 and of that number 202 people are less than 5 years old. 844 are ages 5-18.
 - o K. Van Olst shared that she also spoke with the town clerk, and their office was able to provide some data, broken down by number of births per year for the last five years. K. Van Olst has not received data yet regarding the response rate for the census.
4. K. Van Olst introduced guest Amy Richards to speak, her career has been in work that promotes childcare and working at a macro level in regards to policy.
 - o A. Richards holds a doctorate in human development from Harvard and began her career there before joining a small startup in the 1980s called Work/Family Directions. The organization partnered with businesses, communities, and state governments—eventually working globally—to improve child care access and support women returning to work. Her work helped large employers across the

U.S. create child care centers, train millions of family daycare providers, and launch after-school and summer programs. Over the years, she conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups to support this work, expanding her efforts in the 1990s to include universities and law firms, with Massachusetts emerging as a national leader in employer-supported child care. She referenced the late Gwen Morgan, a colleague known for articulating the "three-legged stool" of child care: affordability, quality, and supply—all interdependent. Although the landscape has evolved since the 1980s, issues like staff retention, provider shortages, and affordability remain critical.

- o A. Richards responded yes to K. Van Olst's request to call on A. Richards when the committee creates surveys for information collection.
 - o R. Chang asked A. Richards about what support the Massachusetts government provides for childcare. She noted that while Mass.gov hosts a childcare site and assigns regional contacts, the available support seems limited. Chang mentioned that, unlike Connecticut's support for family daycare in Litchfield County, Massachusetts appears to have few or no direct state-funded services for family daycare. She asked if A. Richards knew of any additional state funding options.
 - o A. Richards explained that while she hasn't kept up with the latest developments since retiring, she knows the Massachusetts Office for Children offers technical support, particularly around provider development, licensing, and training. A. Richards emphasized the importance of exploring available state resources and noted the added challenge of operating in a region made up of small, interdependent towns rather than a major city. United Way of Eastern Massachusetts has history of supporting childcare initiatives, including family daycare networks. These networks, she explained, are especially beneficial for women looking to start home-based childcare businesses, offering services such as training, substitute caregiver networks, curriculum support, and administrative guidance.
5. K. Van Olst introduced Rachelle Walker to speak to the committee.
- o R. Walker is a pediatric liaison with Fairview, under the Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network. Her work focuses on developing systems to connect children and families with local resources and collaborating with community partners to expand those offerings when possible. Previously, she served as a care coordinator at MACONY Pediatrics in Great Barrington, where she worked closely with Dr. Chang and supported families by linking them with services outside the clinic. That role included strong collaboration with local schools and community programs like the Family Resource Center and PDC. This led to her current initiative: creating a comprehensive "resource hub designed to provide an accessible snapshot of essential services. The hub is intended for use by families,

providers, pediatricians, and community programs, and aims to be both printable and easily shareable.

- o R. Walker shared that the resource hub is divided into four sections:
 - Child Care (daycare, preschool) – the most complete and vetted section so far.
 - Behavioral, Social, and Mental Health – still in progress.
 - Food, Housing, Utilities, and Transportation
 - Medical Specialists – including speech-language pathologists and pediatric dentists, especially given the difficulty in accessing dental care in Berkshire County.
 - o R. Walker emphasized the balance between providing specific, helpful information and keeping the content maintainable as provider details often change.
 - o K. Van Olst asked if this document can be shared widely at this time. R. Walker responded that it is still being finalized, but will be ready to share widely in several weeks.
6. K. Van Olst introduced Jovanina Pagano, former social worker and currently private therapist for adolescents and adults and also provides community liaison services for the town, with past experience as an educational coordinator for after school programs for middle school and adolescents.
- o J. Pagano believes that the after-school program for Berkshire Hills, CLEO, is the largest free after school program in the Berkshires and the concern that the funding for this program through the 21st century grant will most likely be going away. Suggested that we further connect with Peter Dillion, superintendent and other community partners to learn more about the future of the CLEO program, how many students and families it serves and how they will be impacted going forward.
7. Subcommittees were created as follows:
- Providers: J. Lucey, A. Whitehead, M. Stephen
 - Families: M. Smyth, R. Chang, K. Van Olst
 - Community Partners: K. Tucci, R. Sears
8. K. Van Olst proposed the following timeline for the committee's work
- April/May: Assessment of what currently exists and the gaps
 - June/July: Identify Solutions
 - August: Examine Barriers
 - September: Forming Recommendation
 - October: Review
 - November: Report to the Selectboard
9. Identify Community Partners for collaboration

- o K. Van Olst wants to introduce a community member at a future meeting that owns a software company that works in the childcare space to talk about her work and support in terms of information sharing
- o R. Change expressed interest in Peter Dillon, the Superintendent, to come and talk to the committee about CLEO and what are the chances that that kind of a program could expand.

10. Adjournment

- o K. Van Olst made a motion to adjourn, M. Smyth seconded; Unanimous – All in Favor.
- o Meeting adjourned at 1:01pm