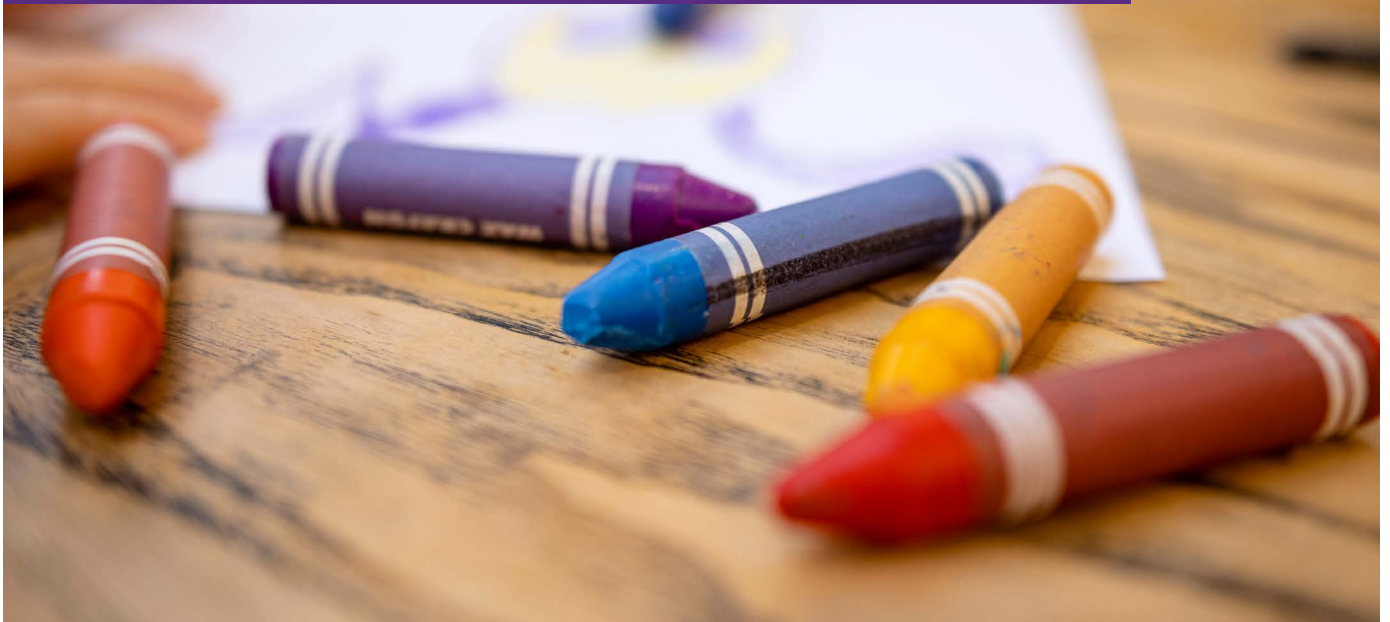


ZONING PRACTICE

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Creating a Childcare-Friendly Community



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Creating a Childcare-Friendly Community

By Lauren Sayre, AICP, and Ashley Jankowski

Access to affordable, high-quality childcare is vital to a child's health and well-being and a family's financial stability. Childcare allows parents to remain in school or the workforce and generate needed income and healthcare coverage with the confidence that their children are receiving safe, first-rate care and developmental support. Furthermore, childcare is necessary for the economic resiliency of entire communities.

Despite its importance, affordable and accessible childcare options remain out of reach for many families across the country. This is due, in part, to the fact that the supply of childcare facilities simply does not meet the growing demand. While overly restrictive zoning may not be the primary cause of this shortage, local regulations can present significant barriers for prospective operators.

This issue of *Zoning Practice* explores how zoning reforms and other complementary actions can foster a more supportive environment for childcare facilities. It begins with brief overviews of the ongoing childcare crisis and the regulatory landscape for childcare facilities before outlining the key components of a childcare-friendly approach to zoning.

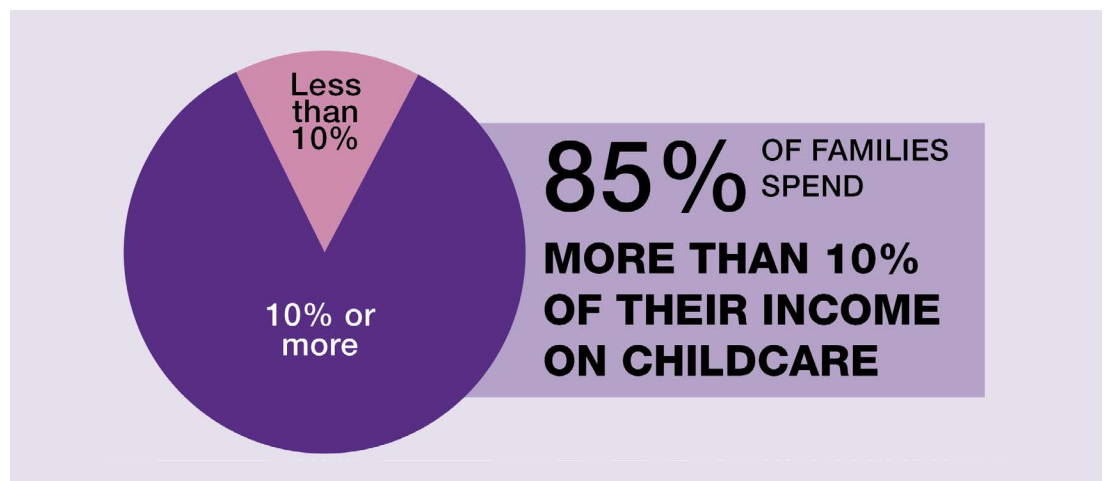
The Childcare Crisis

More than half of children in America—particularly those from low- and middle-income, Hispanic, and rural communities—live in a childcare desert, which is a census tract with more than 50 children under age five that contains either no childcare providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed childcare slots (CAP 2020). The impacts of this ongoing childcare crisis are often felt most acutely by low- and middle-income families, where it is likely more affordable for a parent or guardian to step out of the workforce entirely to care take.

Costs for Parents and Communities

Even in places where childcare options are present, these options can remain financially out of reach. In 2021, 85 percent of families spent more than 10 percent of their income on childcare (CCE 2025). For comparison, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services deems housing costs affordable if they are capped at just 7 percent of household income ([Figure 1](#)). Childcare costs regularly exceed the cost of housing, straining the budgets of working families everywhere. A separate

Figure 1. Amount of income spent on childcare (Source: CCE 2025)



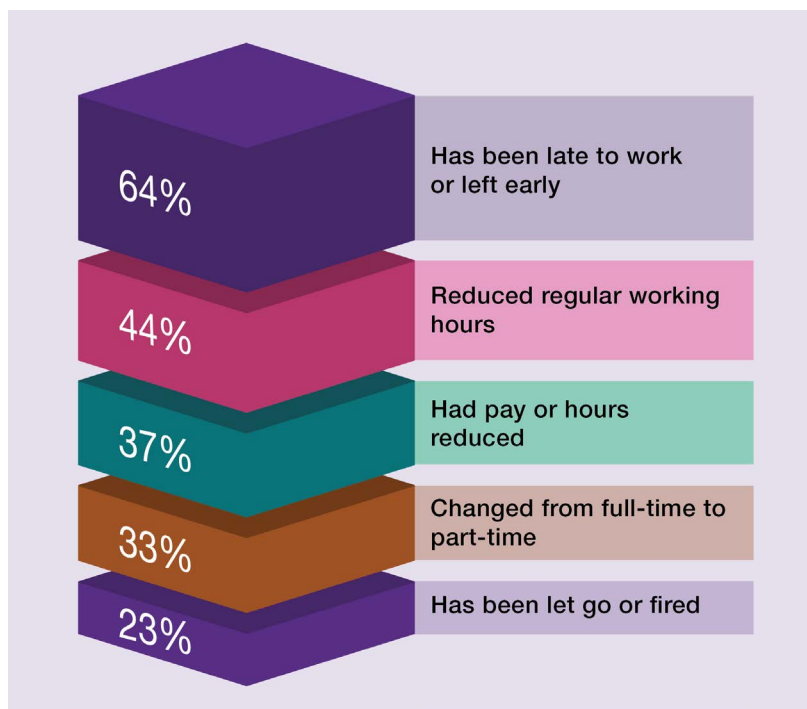


Figure 2. Percentage of poll respondents' impact of insufficient and costly childcare (Source: Bishop 2023)

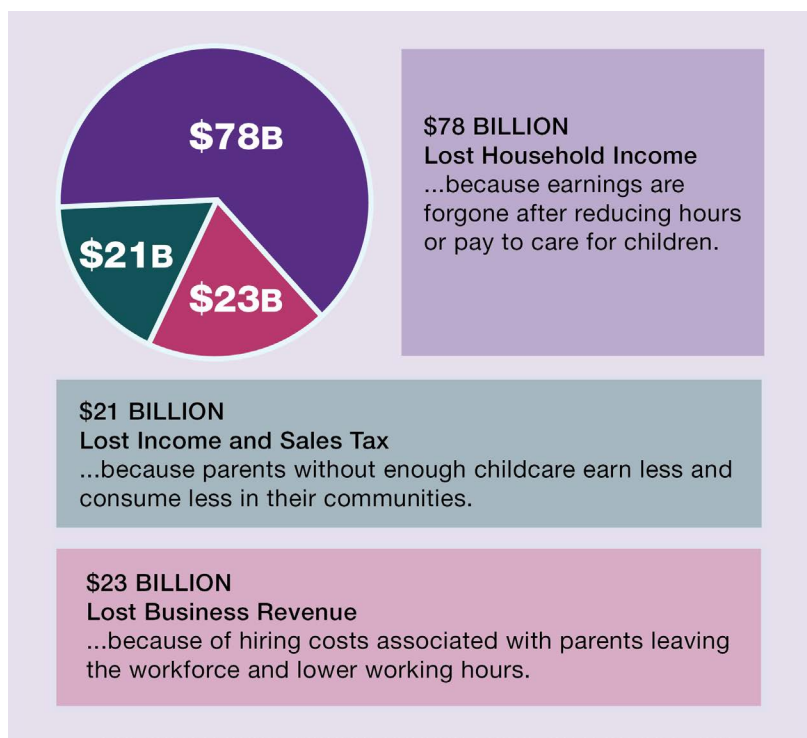


Figure 3. Revenues lost due to lack of childcare (Source: Bishop 2023)

study from the Economy Policy Institute reported that, in 2023, childcare costs exceeded college tuition costs in 38 states and the District of Columbia (EPI 2025).

The lack of affordable and accessible childcare has caused significant interruptions for working parents and caregivers across the board. In a 2022 survey of working parents with young children, 64 percent of respondents reported that childcare gaps caused them to arrive late or leave early from work, 44 percent reported reduced working hours, 37 percent reported they experienced reduced pay or hours, and 33 percent reported they had to change from full-time to part-time work (Bishop 2023). Furthermore, 23 percent reported they have been let go or fired because they needed to provide their own childcare coverage ([Figure 2](#)).

And the cost borne by families in making these decisions is significant. In 2022, \$78 billion was lost in household income, as earnings were forgone after parents reduced their hours or pay to care for children ([Figure 3](#); Bishop 2023). Together, these lofty price tags and large-scale income reductions can serve to decrease social mobility and reinforce the cycle of poverty by limiting parents' ability to pay for food, medical, and educational expenses, and to build wealth during their prime working years.

Access to childcare is not only a family concern; childcare is necessary for the economic resiliency of entire communities. It facilitates educational attainment and participation in the workforce, especially by women, and allows parents to reliably contribute to and consume within their local economy. Businesses benefit from childcare, as it enables them to recruit and retain top talent. Access to childcare ensures that employees can more readily meet job requirements with fewer reasons to miss or reduce work. Further, the childcare industry directly provides thousands of jobs to local employees. In 2022, the gap between childcare supply and demand resulted in a combined \$21 billion in lost income and sales tax, and \$23 billion in lost business revenue (Bishop 2023).

Challenges to the Provision of Childcare

Locally, developing a childcare site and acquiring the necessary permits and business license can be a daunting and cost-prohibitive process for new business owners. Further, as commercial rents, construction costs, and the prices of everyday items skyrocket around the country, up-front capital requirements and monthly operational costs will continue to rise. Despite these growing expenses, childcare is met with significant underinvestment. While primary and secondary educational institutions usually receive governmental support, childcare facilities are often private and for-profit, and therefore do not receive the same level of public financial support or subsidy. Without intentional and sustained policy and investment, all business-level expenses associated with owning and operating a childcare facility are borne by small business owners, staff, and families.

Commercial childcare facilities and their available licensed childcare slots also rely on an adequate supply of well-trained childcare educators. These essential roles require significant training and the acquisition of numerous credentials and often involve more educational and physical caretaking responsibility than that of a teacher. However, the number of childcare educators is rapidly declining as low wages and limited benefit packages remain unlivable for professionals, especially in areas with a high cost of living. While offering competitive, equitable wages for childcare educators is a necessary step forward in addressing the crisis, this would serve to increase the cost of childcare even further.

Evidently, the childcare crisis is a wicked problem—and it is important to understand how planning and zoning can play a role in addressing it.

A Challenging Regulatory Landscape

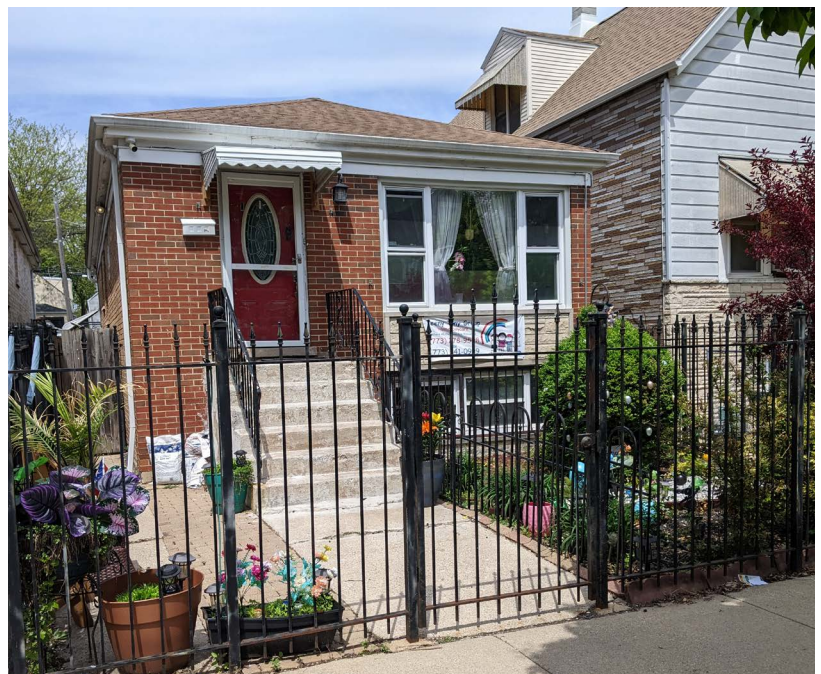
While the specific definitions and standards for types of childcare facilities vary by state, there are two basic categories: in-home childcare and commercial childcare. These categories have different licensing, operating, and facility

requirements as well as different upfront and operational costs.

Both in-home childcare facilities and commercial childcare facilities are carefully regulated by the states in which they are situated. While a robust regulatory framework ensures safety and quality care for children as well as protections for childcare educators, the current framework poses significant financial and procedural barriers that unintentionally serve to limit the supply and increase the cost of childcare facilities.

In-Home Childcare

In-home childcare provides care for small groups of children within the business owner's primary residence in an intimate, home-like setting. The facility is typically staffed by one or two certified caregivers and are often favored due to their ability to offer nontraditional hours for parents with variable work schedules and lower childcare fees. In-home childcare facilities are usually state-licensed, with some exceptions for caregiving to family members, and regulated to limit the number of children permitted in the home at a time. These childcare facilities are typically located in residential districts and tend to seamlessly blend into the fabric of a neighborhood.



An in-home childcare facility in Chicago (Credit: David Morley)

A commercial childcare facility in Grand Ledge, Michigan (Credit: Ken Desloover/iStock Editorial/Getty Images Plus)



Throughout the United States, in-home childcare may be referred to by the following terms: family/group childcare homes, family/group daycare homes, large family childcare homes, small family childcare homes, child development homes, family childcare learning homes, childcare homes, drop-in family childcare homes, part-time family childcare homes, school-age family childcare homes, and more.

Commercial Childcare

Commercial childcare provides care for groups of children of all ages who are unrelated to the business owner. These children are often placed in classroom-like environments by age with numerous staff members who provide caretaking and educational support. Commercial childcare facilities are managed by a center director, who oversees the program and its staff, but can be operated by private owners, for-profit chains, government agencies, public schools, or nonprofit entities, such as faith-based organizations and community organizations. These facilities usually offer full-time childcare services and do not include offerings such as youth religion classes, athletic activities, or social groups. Commercial childcare facilities are typically licensed, but some states offer exemptions for specific ownership entities. In most cases, they are located in commercial buildings as a primary use or as an accessory use to another nonresidential

use and are often found in commercial or mixed-use districts.

Throughout the United States, commercial childcare may be referred to by the following terms: childcare center, daycare center, infant care center, toddler childcare center, early care and education, child development center, childcare learning center, early head start center, head start center, nursery schools, preschools, drop-in centers, early childhood programs, and more.

State and Local Licensing

Across the country, licensing is the main mechanism through which the U.S. regulates childcare. This multi-step process is carried out at the state or local level and serves to set and enforce minimum health and safety requirements that childcare programs, their facilities, and their hired childcare educators must meet to legally operate. For example, to receive a license, a childcare facility must carry out background checks and thorough training programs for all childcare educators, and its building must meet all building codes, sanitation and occupancy standards, and emergency planning requirements. For the most part, these health and safety licensing components are fair and successfully function to promote security and well-being for all children. However, licensing itself is a lengthy and expensive process.

Most license applications require significant proof of childcare training, medical testing and clearance, a documented business plan including curricular items, internal policies and procedures, emergency plans, and more. Even as a qualified childcare educator, in some states, licensure is dependent on selecting a potential site for the childcare facility, receiving zoning approval, and eventually passing inspections, which all add additional regulatory complications.

Obtaining a license is just the first step for a childcare facility—regulatory requirements continue well beyond that point. To maintain licensure, providers must fulfill ongoing obligations, including regular training sessions, routine inspections, and consistent documentation. These requirements ensure that childcare facilities uphold safety, quality, and compliance standards, but they also add a significant administrative burden that providers must navigate continuously.

Even as a qualified childcare educator, in some states, licensure is dependent on selecting a potential site for the childcare facility, receiving zoning approval, and eventually passing inspections, which all add additional regulatory complications.

Local Zoning

Recognizing the highly regulated nature of the childcare industry is essential when considering its intersection with zoning regulations. While zoning standards may not be the most complex requirements that operators must meet, these standards play a fundamental role in the siting and occupancy of childcare facilities. For example, if a childcare facility is prohibited—either outright or through overly restrictive standards—then compliance with other regulations becomes irrelevant. Ensuring that zoning regulations allow for and actively support childcare is a crucial first step in expanding access.

A review of multiple municipal zoning ordinances across Michigan revealed several key areas that often create barriers to childcare development. These include ambiguous (or absent) use definitions, overly restrictive use permissions, and infeasible use standards. A well-informed approach to zoning can help create a more supportive environment for childcare facilities, ensuring that regulatory frameworks work together to expand access rather than hinder it.

Childcare-Friendly Zoning

Communities can make the biggest impact on childcare development by proactively reviewing and updating their zoning ordinances. Importantly, zoning for childcare often directly parallels broader zoning best practices aimed at encouraging accessible and user-friendly ordinances, promoting mixed-use development, and supporting small businesses. Strategies such as permitting by-right uses, reducing parking requirements, and minimizing unnecessary use standards not only benefit childcare facilities but also contribute to more flexible, efficient, and sustainable zoning regulations.

Clear and Precise Definitions

Clear and precise definitions in zoning ordinances are essential for consistent interpretation and application of regulations. They ensure that all stakeholders—municipal officials, developers, and residents—share a common understanding of key terms, reducing ambiguity and preventing misinterpretation. Well-defined terms for childcare facilities help eliminate confusion regarding their classification, and distinguishing between different types of childcare operations ensures that appropriate zoning provisions are applied. This clarity promotes more efficient decision-making, reduces potential disputes, and fosters a regulatory environment that supports childcare development.

When reviewing a zoning ordinance, a community should first ensure that definitions for childcare facilities are clearly established. These definitions should be specific and categorized by facility type, such as in-home or commercial, to

eliminate ambiguity. The classification of childcare facilities depends on state licensing regulations, and each definition should align with the terminology used by the state licensing authority to ensure consistency, clarity, and regulatory compliance.

By-Right Use Permissions

Zoning districts generally restrict development to specific permitted uses. Many communities face childcare deserts, where zoning restrictions limit the availability of providers. By allowing commercial childcare facilities as a by-right use, municipalities and counties can streamline the approval process, eliminating lengthy and costly special permits or variance requirements that often deter new facilities from opening. Additionally, integrating childcare into commercial, residential, and mixed-use areas promotes walkable, family-friendly communities, aligning with modern land use goals that prioritize essential services.

Broadening the zoning districts where childcare facilities are allowed by right will help remove unnecessary barriers and increase access to quality childcare options. Many states mandate that in-home childcare must be permitted by right in residential districts. However, even if this is not a state requirement, communities should ensure that in-home childcare facilities are permitted by right in all residential districts.

As communities grow, enabling the colocation of childcare facilities within existing or new commercial, industrial, institutional, or educational sites can provide families with more convenient options while maximizing land use efficiency. Integrating childcare into workplaces, schools, and community centers supports working parents, enhances accessibility, and fosters economic growth. These actions collectively create a more childcare-friendly zoning framework, making it easier for providers to establish and expand services where they are needed most.

Reasonable Use Standards

Use standards are a category of zoning regulations that impose specific conditions or requirements on particular types of land uses, typically with the intent of mitigating any potential negative impacts

on surrounding properties. These regulations can include provisions related to site design, operational constraints, or additional approval processes that go beyond general zoning requirements. While use standards are often implemented with the goal of protecting neighboring properties and ensuring compatibility between different land uses, they can sometimes create unintended barriers, particularly for essential services such as childcare facilities.

For childcare providers, zoning use standards can introduce additional hurdles that make it more difficult and costly to establish or expand operations. In many cases, these regulations impose requirements that exceed what is applied to similar uses, despite the fact that state licensing requirements already include stringent health and safety standards.

While use standards are often implemented with the goal of protecting neighboring properties and ensuring compatibility between different land uses, they can sometimes create unintended barriers, particularly for essential services such as childcare facilities.

By evaluating and revising these zoning standards, communities have the opportunity to reduce unnecessary barriers and support the expansion of childcare facilities. Eliminating excessive requirements that go beyond what is necessary for health and safety can improve the economic feasibility of opening and maintaining childcare facilities, particularly in areas where access to childcare is already limited. Since childcare facilities are already subject to rigorous oversight through state licensing and regulatory agencies, reducing overly restrictive zoning requirements does not compromise the well-being of children or the surrounding community. Instead, it helps create a more balanced regulatory approach that acknowledges the vital role of childcare services while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

Hours of Operation

Ordinances that restrict the hours during which a childcare facility can operate—such as limiting hours from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. or capping the duration of daily operations—can be particularly problematic for families that rely on childcare services outside of standard work hours.

Outdoor Space

Outdoor space requirements that exceed state minimums can create unnecessary financial burdens and can make childcare facilities spatially infeasible. For example, in many local Michigan zoning ordinances, the requirements for outdoor space were 350 percent above the state licensing requirement for in-home childcare and 417 percent above the state licensing requirement for commercial childcare (Figure 4). These standards are arbitrary numbers that communities think will ensure a healthy environment for children but are not based on data or research and, as a result, impose an overly restrictive requirement on childcare providers.

Parking Minimums

Parking minimums can also pose challenges, particularly in urban areas with limited available space. These standards may include requiring parking spaces in excess of parking necessary or mandating extensive drop-off/pick-up stacking areas, particularly for in-home childcare facilities.

Lighting

Communities often assume that childcare facilities require heightened security measures, leading to regulations that impose stricter standards than those applied to other uses within the same zoning district. One common example is lighting requirements, which may be set at a significantly higher level than what is mandated for similar establishments. While safety and security are essential considerations, overly stringent lighting standards can place an unnecessary financial burden on childcare providers and create barriers to establishing or expanding facilities.

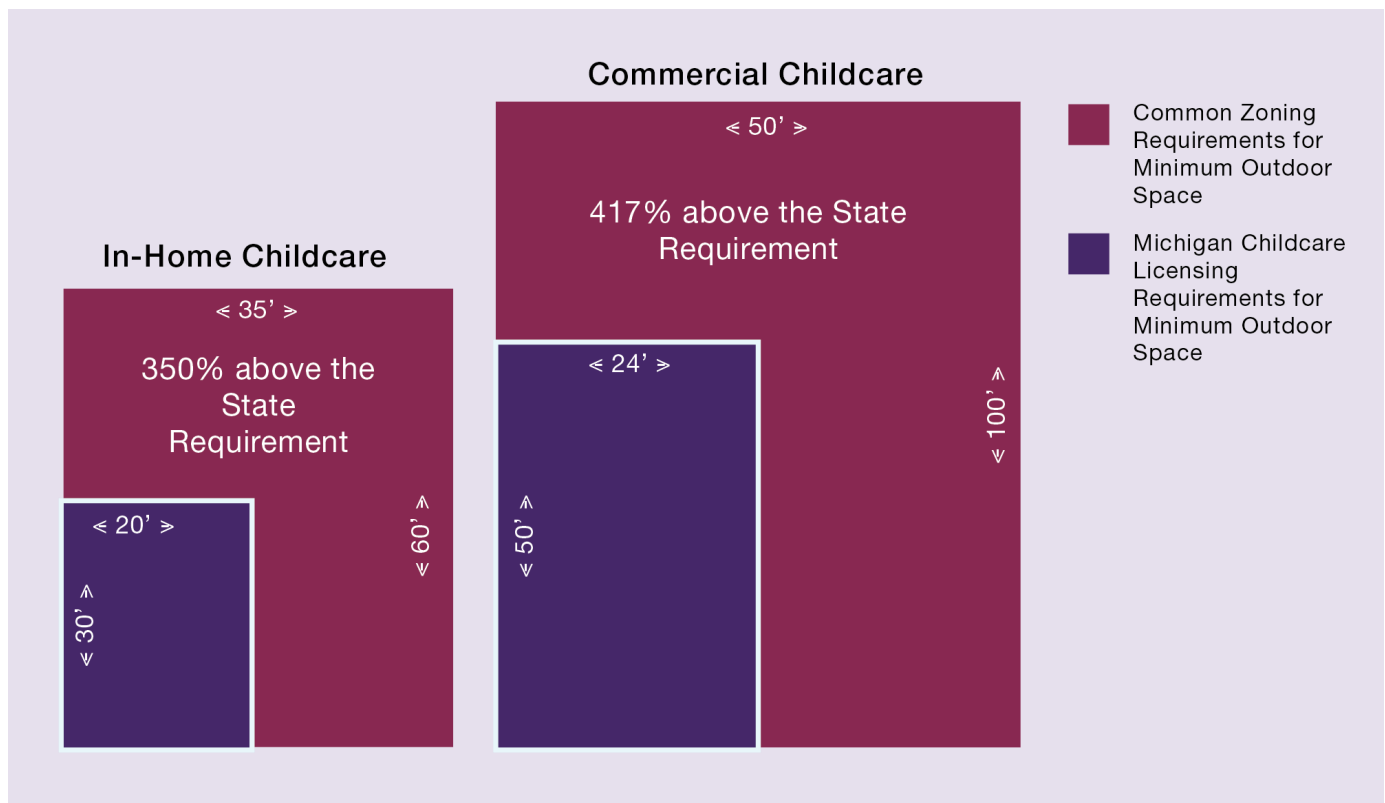


Figure 4. Michigan childcare licensing versus common local zoning requirements for outdoor space (Credit: McKenna)

Screening

Childcare is sometimes mistakenly viewed as a nuisance use, leading communities to impose strict screening requirements. These regulations often mandate expensive measures, such as masonry walls or full-lot screening, rather than focusing on screening outdoor play areas where security is most needed. While the goal is to enhance safety and minimize potential off-site impacts, such rigid requirements can create unnecessary financial burdens for childcare providers.

Buffering or Separation Standards

Restrictive location requirements—such as permitting childcare facilities only on major thoroughfares, corner lots, or at a specific distance from other facilities—can significantly reduce their feasibility within a community (Figure 5). This is especially important for in-home childcare, as many homes are not situated on major roads or corner lots, meaning such requirements could entirely prevent them from obtaining childcare licensure. Further, even if a potential childcare facility meets all zoning-ordinance-required buffering and separation standards, they still must navigate the complexities of licensure.

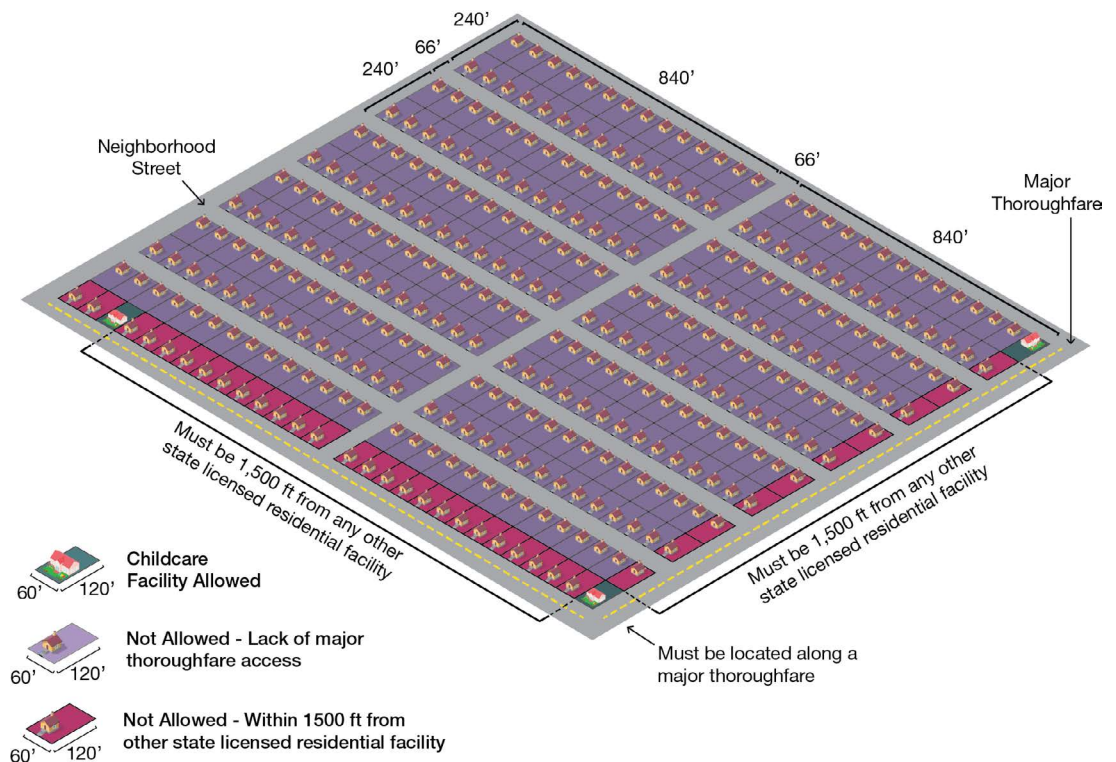
Signs

Signage restrictions are common in residential districts, making in-home childcare providers particularly vulnerable to these limitations. Completely prohibiting signage can have unintended consequences, making it more difficult for parents, visitors, and emergency personnel to locate the facility. Allowing appropriately sized and designed signage can help ensure visibility while maintaining the residential character of the neighborhood.

Noise

Noise restrictions in zoning ordinances are typically classified as either performance standards or nuisance standards, depending on how they are enforced. For example, regulations that limit noise based on time of day fall under nuisance standards, while those that set specific decibel limits are considered performance standards. These approaches are intended to ensure that businesses operate without creating significant disturbances. However, some ordinances impose additional noise thresholds or time-based restrictions specifically on childcare facilities—standards not applied to comparable land

Figure 5. The potential effects of restrictive location requirements on childcare facility siting opportunities (Credit: McKenna)



uses—which can create undue burdens for providers and hinder their ability to operate effectively.

Design Standards

Discretionary design standards lack specific, objective criteria and instead rely on the judgment of municipal staff, boards, or commissions for approval. While these standards are often intended to allow flexibility and maintain community character, their subjective nature can lead to inconsistent interpretations, favoritism, and uneven application. For childcare providers, this uncertainty can create significant barriers to opening or expanding facilities. For example, vague requirements that a building’s design must reflect the “character” of a neighborhood can be interpreted in multiple ways, resulting in delays or added costs. Establishing clear, objective design standards can promote a more transparent, equitable, and predictable approval process for childcare facilities.

Meaningful Incentives

Eliminating obstacles to opening and operating childcare facilities is an important first step, but communities can go further by actively encouraging childcare

development. One effective approach is the use of zoning incentives—non-financial tools that municipalities and counties can implement to promote specific types of development. These incentives create a more supportive regulatory environment, making it easier for childcare facilities to establish and thrive within the community.

There are several ways that childcare incentives can be nested into a community’s zoning ordinance. One of the most effective strategies is offering density bonuses, which allow developers to build additional residential or commercial units if they include childcare facilities in their projects. By integrating childcare into new developments, communities can create more accessible options for families while incentivizing developers to contribute to public needs.

Another approach is to adjust dimensional standards to help childcare providers optimize available space, especially in urban or high-demand areas where large parcels are limited. To encourage childcare development, communities can reduce setback requirements to allow commercial childcare in smaller or nontraditional spaces, adjust lot size and coverage rules to accommodate facilities

Jurisdiction	Zoning Incentive Summary
Austin, TX	In the downtown, a project may achieve bonus area by providing daycare services within the project. (§25-2-586(E)(3))
Lewiston, ME	Parking and drop-off requirements for a proposed childcare facility may be reduced if lower demand is demonstrated through transit use or a traffic engineer’s report comparing similar facilities, subject to city review. (Appendix A §XII.20.3.iii)
Orlando, FL	In the office, residential, mixed office-residential, mixed-use, and activity center districts, a density bonus or FAR bonus is offered for the inclusion of public goods and services, which explicitly includes child daycare centers. (§58.1103(b))
Porterville, CA	The city will grant a density bonus or additional incentive for housing developments that include a childcare facility, with conditions requiring the facility to remain operational as long as the affordable housing and serve a proportionate percentage of children from low-income households, unless adequate childcare facilities already exist in the community. (§302.04)
Seattle, WA	In the downtown, developers may receive bonus floor area by voluntarily entering into an agreement with the city, which can be fulfilled through building affordable housing or childcare facilities (the performance option), making a cash contribution to the city (the payment option), or a combination of both. (§23.49.012)

Examples of Zoning Incentives for Childcare Facilities

in high-demand areas, and provide flexible parking requirements for commercial childcare facilities in mixed-use developments or transit-friendly locations. Additionally, increasing height limits or floor area ratios (FAR) can encourage childcare integration into multistory buildings. By modifying these standards, zoning ordinances can help expand childcare access while making better use of available land and existing infrastructure.

Complimentary Actions

Although the zoning ordinance is the primary local regulatory tool, communities also have control over additional policies and processes that, when aligned with zoning changes, can help streamline and encourage the development of childcare facilities. Certain processes, such as development approvals, are often outlined within the zoning ordinance itself, meaning additional amendments may be necessary to ensure alignment.

As previously discussed, allowing childcare facilities as permitted uses rather than requiring special land use approval helps streamline the process for childcare providers, eliminating the need for an additional approval that could take months in some communities. If special land use approval is required, delegating final approval authority to the planning commission, rather than the governing body, is recommended, as it shortens the timeline and reduces the time and financial burden on providers.

Another way to alleviate administrative, financial burdens for childcare providers is to waive or reduce application fees associated with development approvals.

Another way to alleviate administrative, financial burdens for childcare providers is to waive or reduce application fees associated with development approvals. This can include fees for site plans, special

land use permits, variance requests, and business licenses. High application costs can be a significant barrier, particularly for small, independent, or in-home childcare providers who may have limited financial resources. By reducing or eliminating these fees, communities can make it more feasible for providers to navigate the regulatory process, ultimately encouraging more childcare facilities to open and operate successfully.

Some communities impose additional investigation or annual licensing requirements specifically for childcare facilities, separate from a standard business license. These extra regulations are not only restrictive but also redundant, as childcare facilities are already subject to state licensing requirements. Local staff typically lack the expertise to verify compliance with childcare regulations, making these local requirements unnecessary. Additionally, annual licensing regulations often mirror initial investigation requirements but must be repeated yearly, creating an ongoing administrative burden. Both processes are usually accompanied by fees, adding yet another financial hurdle for providers. Accepting licensure from the appropriate childcare licensing authority should be sufficient, eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy while still ensuring compliance with essential safety and operational standards.

Childcare Readiness Collaboration

In the long term, planners should be setting their sights on fostering the local and regional relationships necessary to address childcare at a systems-wide scale. Fortunately, there are cross-disciplinary teams of planners, policymakers, and childcare advocates that are currently coming together to begin untangling the complex social, economic, and political drivers behind the crisis—and the results are encouraging. Two examples from Michigan show what this can look like in practice.

Redevelopment Ready Communities Childcare Readiness Toolkit

While there have been many local and regional efforts to address the planning

and zoning barriers to childcare, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) took a leading role in addressing the issue statewide. According to Michelle Parkkonen, AICP, EDFP, Managing Director of the Technical Assistance Programs at MEDC, “the childcare crisis is a multifaceted and evolving issue. To continue to deliver on the state’s Make It in Michigan economic development strategy, MEDC recognizes that quality, affordable childcare is vital to community health and long-term prosperity.” Parkkonen notes, “childcare is an economic development issue, and we need to rely on our deep bench of partners to find solutions that work for our unique communities across the state.”

This commitment led to the development of the [Redevelopment Ready Communities \(RCC\) Child Care Readiness Toolkit](#), which provides Michigan communities with essential resources and guidance to strengthen partnerships, refine planning processes, integrate economic development strategies, and adjust zoning regulations—ultimately facilitating the growth and expansion of childcare facilities. The toolkit is the product of cross-sector collaboration, involving Pulse at the Upjohn Institute, the cities of Battle Creek and Kalamazoo, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, Policy Equity Group, the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential, the Michigan Association of Planning, and McKenna, underscoring the critical role of strategic partnerships in addressing the childcare crisis.

Childcare SPARK in Marquette County, Michigan

Marquette County’s award-winning Childcare SPARK program is actively gathering expertise from business development, childcare operations, and childhood development organizations to lead a business accelerator model to help local entrepreneurs understand, launch, operate, and grow home-based childcare businesses. This program has also been recognized by the Michigan Association of Planning (Germain 2023). Similar strategic partnerships can be formed to tackle state-specific regulatory and zoning barriers, and to expand childcare readiness urgently and creatively.

Small Changes, Big Impacts

While the childcare crisis is a systemic problem that will take coordinated, sustained action from decision makers at all levels of government as well as the private sector, planners should not be deterred from taking immediate action; the stakes are too high. Across the country, individual planners can begin to promote childcare readiness at the local level.

Across the country, individual planners can begin to promote childcare readiness at the local level.

In the short-term, planners must begin to solicit buy-in from local administrations by advocating for these zoning and procedural recommendations as a means of ensuring economic mobility and security for local families, fortifying the local economy, and preparing the next generation of students and leaders with top-tier education and developmental support. As a start, planners can conduct some preliminary research to understand their locality’s childcare needs. For example, by using census data, planners can seek out the current and projected number of infant children and young families in a community and compare that with the supply of childcare facilities available. Further analysis can be conducted on the locations of childcare facilities as they pertain to specific land-uses and public transit routes to assess their convenience and accessibility.

Planners can also take the time to conduct a preliminary self-audit of a zoning ordinance and site development procedures and assess these tools for childcare barriers and opportunities. As a reminder, all types of childcare facilities—including in-home childcare facilities and commercial childcare facilities—should be clearly defined, differentiated, and permitted by-right in an expanded number of districts, with a particular focus on integrating childcare near and within neighborhoods, work places, and community facilities. Use standards—such

as hours of operation, fencing, and parking—should also be evaluated for their potential to hinder a childcare business. Communities might also consider offering zoning incentives such as square footage bonuses or increases to dimensional standards for the inclusion of childcare facilities on a site. Planners can also assess a community's development review process for opportunities to reduce time and waive application, investigation, and business licensing fees for childcare business owners.

While these planning and zoning changes may feel small, they can have outsized impacts that reverberate throughout the economy and improve the lives of communities everywhere.

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Lauren Sayre, AICP, is a Senior Planner at McKenna, supporting communities across the Midwest in planning, zoning, and childcare readiness initiatives.

She works with municipalities to assess zoning for childcare accessibility and has partnered, through McKenna, with MEDC and MAP, to develop a statewide childcare readiness toolkit. Sayre is passionate about creating safer, more efficient, and equitable systems that reflect community aspirations.



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sustainable, equitable, and economically resilient places to call home. Jankowski has an interdisciplinary background in urban sustainability and local journalism and believes in finding creative opportunities to engage new voices in planning through storytelling.

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