



Memorandum

TO: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
FROM: Charlene Ramont, Assistant Director
RE: Opportunity Council – Early Learning Center (Bellis Phase I) Capital Contract
DATE: NOVEMBER 7, 2025

Attached is a contract between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council for your review and signature.

■ Background and Purpose

This contract provides for the funding of the interior build out of the child care facility located in the project known as Bellis Phase I. Once complete the facility will create an additional 70 child care slots, of which no less 25% will be reserved for children from households that have an income 85% or lower than the current state median income (SMI).

According to the latest census¹, there are approximately 10,500 children under the age of five living in Whatcom County. The total current child care capacity in the County is, however, only 3,686 children enrolled in 106 programs² leaving a substantial service gap. Access to safe and affordable access to child care is more salient among families at or below the federal poverty line: in a low income needs assessment³ conducted by the Opportunity Council, child care access was ranked as one of the most important needs for families with children under five who also ranked it as lowest in availability across multiple needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic further limited access to safe and affordable child care in Whatcom County. Across the state, Washington lost approximately 25% of their child care workers⁴ due to the pandemic and has still not fully recovered.

■ Funding Amount and Source

Funding for this contract, in an amount not to exceed \$944,084 is provided by the Community Priorities Fund. These funds are included in the 2026 budget. Council authorization is required, per WCC 3.08.100, as funding for this contract exceeds \$75,000.

Please contact Eric Chambers, Special Projects Manager at 360-778-6199 or EKChambe@co.whatcom.wa.us if you have any questions.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/whatcomcountywashington>

² <https://www.opoco.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ELAFS-Community-Needs-Assessment-2023.pdf>

³ https://www.opoco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Community-Needs-Assessment_09.15.21editspdf.pdf

⁴ <https://www.childcareed.com/r-00284-child-care-industry-trends-during-the-recovery-from-the-covid-19-pandemic.html>

