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Cold Spring Cuts Parking Fees in Half

*Main Street merchants say
meters hurt business*

By Michael Turton

The Cold Spring Village Board agreed on Wednesday (June 12) to halve the hourly rate for metered parking on Main Street and raise the time limit by an hour after merchants complained they were losing customers.

The five trustees agreed to lower the \$4 per hour rate to \$2 per hour and to allow drivers to pay for a minimum of 30 minutes, rather than an hour. They also said they would raise the maximum time allowed from three hours to four.

In addition, the fees at the municipal lot on Fair Street, which are \$2.50 per hour on weekdays and \$3.50 per hour on weekends, will be lowered to \$2 per hour daily. That will also be the fee for spots at Mayor's Park that will be available after the Fair Street culvert is repaired. The Fair Street lot has a 72-hour time limit.

The board kept the fine for a parking ticket at \$75.

Because raising the maximum time requires amending the Village Code, the board must hold a public hearing, which is scheduled for June 26. The board can change the fees without a code revision.

The changes will cost the village an estimated \$100,000 in revenue from parking fees, which the board has budgeted for the 2024-25 fiscal year at \$285,000. The village took in \$29,000 from the 80 metered spaces on Main Street between April 5,

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Michelle O'Meara (left) is the director of Stepping Stones daycare in Philipstown and Denise Giannasca is its owner.
Photo by L. Sparks

Special Report

Who Will Watch the Kids?

Child care shortages weigh on parents, providers

By Leonard Sparks

Kelly Hines' criteria during her long job search were simple: If an employer required even one day a week in the office, she didn't apply.

For over a year, one frustrating search stifled another for the Beacon resident, a freelance graphic designer and art director. She and her husband struggled to find affordable care for their 2-year-old daughter, floundering in a limbo faced by many families needing child care.

"We're too wealthy to get any help but too poor to afford care," said Hines.

Denise Giannasca also faces a challenging search.

Six years ago, she opened Stepping Stones Childcare and Development in Philipstown. On April 29, Stepping Stones broke ground on an expansion that will create room for additional children.

With a waiting list of three dozen families, Giannasca said the challenge isn't demand but finding qualified employees in a field where the average hourly pay is \$16.92, according to the state. "We can't pay what people are really worth," said Giannasca, who just posted four job openings for teachers.

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Beacon Schools Weigh Cellphone Restrictions

*Superintendent says
changes possible in the fall*

By Jeff Simms

The Beacon City School District is considering changes to its policy on student cellphone usage, a thorny subject that many schools have wrestled with.

Superintendent Matt Landahl said on Wednesday (June 12) that changes could be implemented in the fall to "strengthen our policy" but provided no details. Landahl said he plans to update the community this summer.

The district's existing policy, adopted in 2021, says that phones are allowed during "non-instructional time" if students follow the district's code of conduct and the acceptable use policy. According to the code, teachers and administrators can confiscate phones if students are violating the policy.

However, several parents asked the school board in April for more restrictions. One parent, Hana Ramat, a psychotherapist whose son will enter Rombout Middle School in the fall, said this week that she hopes the district will require students to turn in their phones while at school.

Echoing comments made in recent years by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, Ramat said there's an "epidemic of mental illness" among children and teens. Research, she said, suggests that smartphones, which were introduced about 20 years ago, have been a major factor.

"Especially with young girls, the research is very clear and the impacts

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Gregory Purdy Jr. pushes on a barricade on Jan. 6. His distinctive jacket was entered into evidence at trial.
FBI

Dutchess County Brothers Guilty in Jan. 6 Attack

*Uncle also convicted in
D.C. jury trial*

By Chip Rowe

Two Dutchess County brothers and their uncle were found guilty by a federal jury in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday (June 11) for their role in storming the Capital on Jan. 6, 2021.

Gregory Purdy Jr., 26, a 2016 Carmel High School graduate who lives in Hopewell Junction, faced 12 charges, including six

felonies, and his uncle, Robert Turner, 42, formerly of Poughkeepsie, faced nine charges, including three felonies. Both men were accused of assaulting police officers. Matthew Purdy, 25, faced four misdemeanor counts and was acquitted of two.

Purdy Jr. and Turner were imprisoned following the verdict; Matthew Purdy was released until sentencing for all three men, which the judge scheduled for Oct. 18.

By one estimate, about 140 police officers were injured during the Jan. 6 assault, which was an effort to prevent the certifica-

tion of President Joe Biden's election win. One protester was shot and killed by a Capitol police officer and the riot is believed to have contributed to the deaths of at least three police officers.

According to the Justice Department, more than 1,450 individuals have been charged with crimes related to Jan. 6, including more than 500 accused of felonies for assaulting or impeding officers.

The Purdy brothers are sons of Gregory Schwartz-Purdy, a Republican from Kent

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	Dutchess	Putnam
Children Under 13	37,144	12,586
Child Care Slots	8,026	2,960
Current Programs	209	59
Closed Programs*	76	19
New Programs*	48	10

*2020-23

Sources: NY Department of Labor; Child Care Council of Dutchess and Putnam

Kids (from Page 1)

Wage and benefits support for workers and the expansion of financial assistance for parents are two key recommendations in an April report from the state Department of Labor and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), which regulates programs operating more than three hours a day and administers subsidies to qualified families.

In Putnam County, weekly costs for full-day child care range from \$245 to \$327 and, in Dutchess, from \$230 to \$343, according to the Child Care Council of Dutchess and Putnam, based in Poughkeepsie. The rates are higher for infants and can be “almost like paying for a mortgage,” said Adeline Arvidson, a counselor for the organization.

The Child Care Council assists providers and parents, offering classes on topics such as first aid, recordkeeping and active-shooter training, and guiding families through the process of finding care and financial aid for children up to age 12.

“Any family you talk to, whether it’s a single parent or a two-parent household with two incomes, child care is a burden financially,” Arvidson said.

Providers are also burdened. Despite \$2 billion in federal pandemic aid earmarked in New York for child care programs, Dutchess lost 76 programs between 2020 and 2023, and Putnam County, 19, according to the Child Care Council. “There’s been a few new ones, but not enough to compensate for the difference,” said Arvidson.

“Any family you talk to, whether it’s a single parent or a two-parent household with two incomes, child care is a burden financially.”

~ Adeline Arvidson
Child Care Council of Dutchess and Putnam

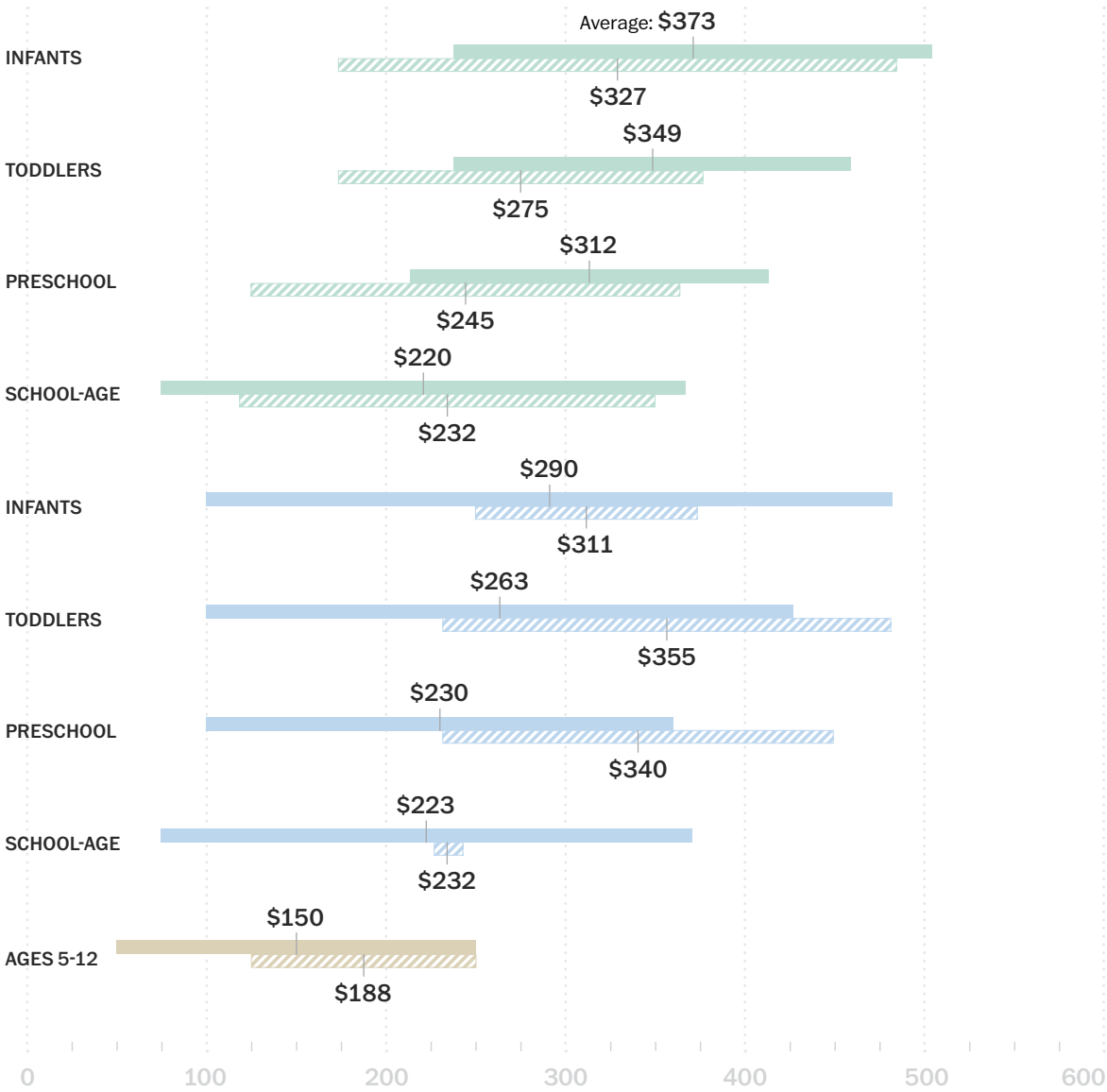
Nearly half of the programs that closed in Putnam between 2020 and 2023 have not been replaced. In Dutchess, it’s more than a third.

A shortage existed before the pandemic, according to a March report by Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress. It found that the roster of licensed providers fell by 33 percent in Dutchess and 34 percent in Putnam between 2007 and 2023. Beacon had four

Weekly Rates for Full-Day Care

- = Dutchess
- ▨ = Putnam
- = Commercial
- = Home-Based
- = Before/After School Care

Source: Child Care Council of Dutchess and Putnam



fewer providers than the 19 from 2007, according to the report, which provided municipal-level data for the region’s 13 cities.

There would be a need even if all the programs in Dutchess and Putnam operated at the capacity allowed by their licenses — Putnam would have one slot for every 2.5 children under age 6 and Dutchess would have one slot for every 3.1 children, with the gaps widening for older children.

But without enough teachers to meet minimum staffing requirements, some programs are struggling to reach capacity and most have a waiting list, said Arvidson. That shortage is partly why the Child Care Assistance Program has millions in unspent subsidies for care, according to the new state report.

Dutchess spent less than half its allocation of subsidies in 2022 and Putnam less than 20 percent, according to Pattern for Progress, which said problems with marketing, ease of use and other areas have hampered the program’s reach.

“Some providers are telling me it’s a little bit better than last year,” said Arvidson. “But they’re still struggling to get to their licensed capacity because they can’t increase the number of children they care for unless they can hire someone.”

A pandemic upsets a fragile system

On a recent morning at Stepping Stones, one of four state-regulated programs operating within the Haldane Central School District, workers began dismantling an

outdoor playset to make room for a second building, which should be finished by September.

On another part of the property, pre-kindergarteners raced around the lawn. They then marched inside, dropped their shoes into a bin beside a classroom door and sat in a semicircle as Michelle O’Meara, the center’s director, read to them.

Artwork, games and toys filled the room. A display of flower petals made from coffee filters ran along a wall, underneath words painted in script: “Masterpieces / Every child is an artist.”

At the Child Care Council’s Champions of Child Care ceremony last month, both Stepping Stones and O’Meara received awards. When the addition is ready, the program will enroll more infants and, for the first time, young students who need care before and after school, or when schools are closed.

“We’re excited,” said O’Meara.

A similar child’s world exists inside the Tioronda Learning Center in Beacon, one of 16 programs within the Beacon City School District, including afterschool programs run by the Beacon Recreation Department at the city’s three elementary schools and its center on West Center Street.

Miniature chairs and tables fill part of Tioronda’s space, along with books, Legos, crayons and a wall painted with a sylvan scene depicting animals, grass-covered hills and a blue sea.

Meredith Hairston’s resume included 20 years at a “prestigious” preschool in Manhattan when, in 2019, she took over the half-day nursery school Christ Church United Methodist in Beacon operated out

of its building on Union Street.

She scheduled a series of open houses the following January, and learned that some Beacon parents had enrolled their children in child care programs in East Fishkill and Wappingers because they could not find openings in the city, especially for infants and toddlers.

Those conversations also revealed “an outpouring of interest for more all-day facilities in Beacon,” said Hairston.

In addition to Philipstown, Stepping Stones’ children come from Beacon, Fishkill and as far away as Mahopac, said Giannasca.

Two months after Hairston held her first open house, the pandemic shut down schools and child care. Providers had to furlough staff just when child care was still needed by emergency responders, health care workers, grocery cashiers and others whose jobs were deemed essential. Calls from those employees “flooded” the Child Care Council’s phones, said Arvidson.

Hairston closed the Tioronda Learning Center on March 13, 2020. “We Zoomed our preschoolers in for daily, routine stuff, just to kind of keep them grounded at home,” she said. “I would bring out my sock puppets and do all of the songs we did together.”

Federal funding flowed to providers nationwide. Stepping Stones and other programs in Beacon and Philipstown received, in 2021 and 2022, a combined \$1.2 million to pay rent and utilities and boost wages for employees.

There has been some relief for the parents of 4-year-olds because of pre-K programs offered by the Beacon and Garrison school

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Artwork is displayed on a wall at Stepping Stones in Philipstown.

Photo by L. Sparks

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districts. Most private programs have openings for 4-year-olds, said Arvidson.

Parents fortunate enough to win a pre-K seat avoid the cost of child care but private providers lose “an important segment” of revenue, according to Pattern for Progress. Child care programs can earn twice as much from 4-year-olds because the staff-to-child ratio can be 1-to-8 compared to 1-to-4 for younger children, the nonprofit said.

Before Beacon began accepting applications in March, Hairston said she had “families calling my phone off the hook, showing up at my door, emailing me” because they feared missing out on a spot in Beacon’s program.

Mandated staffing is part of the reason why infant openings are the hardest to find. According to the Child Care Council, Dutchess, with 361, and Putnam, with 162, have fewer slots for infants than any other age group.

“Sometimes, it’s not cost-effective, and that’s really what it boils down to,” said Hairston at the Tioronda Learning Center, which also has a waiting list. “You can’t ask people with an infant to pay double the amount that someone with a preschooler is paying.”

A dearth of workers

At Stepping Stones, the waiting list for toddlers is “out of control,” and some of the families who use the center are expecting another child, said O’Meara. Expanding will bring room for infants, along with space for school-age children needing care before and after school.

It will also require front-line teachers, who are required by state law to undergo 15 hours of training in their first six months and 30 hours of additional education every two years on topics ranging from the principles of childhood development and nutrition to identifying abuse.

“It’s so important because the role you’re playing can impact a child for the rest of



Stepping Stones is building a second building to enroll more infants and, for the first time, school-age children.

Photo provided

their life,” said Giannasca.

That is why providers identify a shortage of teachers as their most pressing issue, and the state considers bolstering those employees as an important step in expanding child care.

A survey of child care centers and after-school programs by the Empire State Campaign for Child Care found in March 2023 that they enrolled 28,000 fewer children than their licensed capacity and had 3,800 unfilled positions and 750 unused classrooms.

Salaries that leave an estimated 12 percent of child care workers living below the federal poverty line — more than twice the rate of workers overall in New York, according to the state report — is not the only reason.

“People working 10 to 11 hours a day, in a classroom all day with 10 to 11 children, it’s a tough, tough job,” said Giannasca.

The federal pandemic funding, which expired in 2023, was “a one-shot deal” that allowed Stepping Stones to increase its pay, said Giannasca. But once the money is gone, “I can’t sustain” those increases, she said.

In 2023, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that the state’s 2023-24 budget included

additional funding to underwrite bonuses of \$2,300 to \$3,000 and to help programs recruit new staff. As of January, New York had distributed \$330 million to providers, who can also use the grants to award bonuses to staff who refer new workers and to reward new hires.

Immortalizing such support is one of the recommendations from the Office of Children and Family Services and the Department of Labor, who say that a permanent funding stream will “curtail the flight of educators from the field and encourage others to enter the field.”

The agencies also recommend that the funding give providers the flexibility to not only supplement wages and give bonuses but to fund health insurance and retirement benefits.

Expanding subsidies

An estimated 94 percent of child care workers are women, according to the state Department of Labor. Women are also most likely to own a child care center or home-based child care program and more likely

Resources

Families can search for licensed child care programs at the state Office of Children and Family Services website (ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/looking). Search by program type, ZIP code, county or school district to view inspection results.

For information about subsidies from the Child Care Assistance Program, call the Dutchess County Department of Community and Family Services at 845-486-3190 or the Putnam County Department of Social Services at 845-808-1500, ext. 45304.

Residents in either county can visit hs.ocfs.ny.gov/CCAPeligibility to complete an eligibility questionnaire.

to have to sacrifice work when families cannot afford or find care.

“Women have the children and, unfortunately in this country, we’re still expected to stay home with them,” said Hairston. “But we don’t have means, fundamentally, to support us to do that, so it’s a catch-22.”

In 2022, full-time care for an infant at a center cost \$21,826 annually, 155 percent more than full-time, in-state tuition at public four-year universities in New York, according to the state Department of Labor.

To make care affordable to more families, New York has been steadily expanding eligibility for its Child Care Assistance Program, which covers some or all costs for eligible families.

Under expanded income limits issued in October, a two-person household that had been limited to \$54,900 annually can now make up to \$67,400, and the ceiling for a family of four rose from \$83,200 to \$99,200, according to Arvidson.

In their report, the Office of Children and Family Services and the Department of Labor recommend that the state continue expanding eligibility, and set a goal of universal child care.

Hines priced programs in Beacon, and even in Queens, near her husband’s job, where their daughter could be dropped off in the morning. Enrolling there would have required her husband to leave home at 5 a.m. and return to Beacon, with a toddler, at 7:30 p.m., she said.

She posted about her search on a local Facebook page and someone suggested that she look for a person providing informal care in their home. That led to a woman in Fishkill who, said Hines, has years of child care experience and a large home where she looks after children for \$65 a week.

Hines said she is now working remotely full time, using the woman for three days a week and caring for her daughter at home on the other two days. “For now, we’re in a good place,” she said.