



FAIRFAX – SAN ANSELMO CHILDREN'S CENTER

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Founded:
Ethel Seiderman, 1973

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School District Votes to Evict 50 year old Low-Income Child Care Center

Fairfax, CA - January 22, 2024 — The Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center (FSACC), the sole subsidized child care site in Ross Valley, is facing closure as the Ross Valley School District (RVSD) moves forward with eviction plans. The center, **servicing low-income children and families for over 50 years**, faces an uncertain future despite a substantial purchase offer made in November 2023.

On January 18, 2024, the RVSD Board of Trustees voted unanimously to evict FSACC, rejecting the center's **good-faith offer to purchase the property for \$1.56M** plus non-cash promises, valued at over \$1.4 million, bringing the total to the property's \$3 million appraised value. This was a cash offer, not contingent on financing. Reflecting this, the offer included a non-refundable 10% deposit upon signing.

This good faith offer, based on previous negotiations between the FSACC and the District, was backed by funds from the County of Marin, the Marin Community Foundation, and other sources. As presented at the January 18th RVSD Board meeting, the FSACC has a solid plan to purchase and upgrade the facility to address maintenance that the RVSD previously deferred, ensure continued and future safety, and invest in the long-term sustainability of the property. The Board held closed meetings before and after the FSACC's open session presentation, during which the RVSD Board of Trustees ultimately voted to begin eviction proceedings.

The decision to issue an eviction notice without engaging in good faith negotiations to sell the Deer Park property to the FSACC comes at a time when **education is recognized as an equalizer to address historic inequities**, providing opportunities for young children to reach their potential regardless of background. While Marin County is recognized as one of the most affluent counties in the nation, it is not without need of these specific opportunities. "We have a responsibility to make Marin more inclusive, not less inclusive. If the Children's Center closes, many of the few families of color in this area will no longer be able to afford to live here without the quality affordable childcare the Center provides, making a very white area even whiter," say Julia Howard-Gibbon, FSACC and RVSD parent.

- The FSACC have 110 subsidized child care slots
- Over **75% of children at FSACC are children of color** in a region that is over **80% white**
- The County currently has a **waitlist of over 900 children** for subsidized child care
- FSACC has actively sought out and explored alternative locations, working with a task force led by third party Marin County Office of Education, which concluded **no viable relocation site** exists

During the RVSD meeting, many trustees claimed they were concerned about the safety of the children at the property and their own potential personal liability. "...*If that is their true concern, selling the property to the Center and letting the FSACC upgrade is a win-win for everyone*," said Carl D. Brown, FSACC Board Member and Parent. "*How is evicting children a better solution?*" Indeed, a successful eviction will result in a loss in revenue for the school district without resolving the Board Members' individual liability concerns, as eviction here creates a vacant public property for which the District will still hold liability.

Additionally, "*the District's safety concerns do not match what experts have told us*," says Stephanie Hellman, Project Consultant for the FSACC. **The property was recently inspected by numerous professionals and regulators, including architects, engineers, contractors, the Town of Fairfax Building Department, and the Ross Valley Fire Department, none of whom suggested the Center is unsafe or recommended removing children from the property.** Julia Howard-Gibbon added, "*As a parent and president of the FSACC board, I*

have reviewed all the safety and facility reports done on the property and I can say with confidence that I not only feel safe sending my child to the Center every day, there is no place I would rather send him.”

The FSACC provides more than childcare; it offers social and emotional support, comprehensive educational programming, nutritional meals, transportation, and community connections. Closure would not only deprive low-income families but also contribute to a widening education and equity gap. The fate of FSACC, the lifeline for many families, rests in the hands of the RVSD's next steps.

The FSACC is a **vital and valued resource** in the Ross Valley community. FSACC supporters urge the school district to reverse course and allow the Center to purchase the property.

“What am I going to do?” says a mother of two toddlers who attend the Center’s preschool. “I have to work. If I can’t take them there, I have to stay home and then how do I work to put food on the table? It affects everything.”

*“The Children’s Center is a place where children are safe and thrive in a natural setting. I’ve lived at my house ~20 years and it’s located quite close to the Deer Park entrance. The Children’s Center and its families have been model neighbors. If the Center cannot stay in Deer Park, **what is going to happen to that property?** The Deer Park neighborhood at large is very concerned about this, starting with what would happen if the property becomes vacant. I urge the school board to move beyond general bureaucracy in this process and to look to loftier community goals. With one decision you can remove the burden of your risk liability and give Ross Valley what it needs – a permanent home for the Children’s Center.”* said Janet Garvin, President of RVSD’s 7-11 Committee on Deer Park property at RVSD meeting on January 18, 2024.

*“We (Marin County Office of Education) want to expand Early Childhood Education, that means we can’t watch it contract...the staff in my office tell me the **FSACC is consistently rated as the best preschool in Marin.** Not only just a loss of a preschool but a loss of an example for others”,* John Carroll, Superintendent Marin County Office of Education.

*“The displacement of this extremely important and absolutely necessary institution for SO MANY low income families will be a **disaster**, especially at a time when child care is simply out of reach financially for the families of those children,”* Amal Crespo, Language teacher and tutor.

*“The Children’s Center is a place where children are safe and thrive in a natural setting. I’ve lived at my house almost 20 years and its located quite close to the Deer Park entrance. In the time I’ve lived there, the Children’s Center and its families have been model neighbors. Truly. As you all know, **there’s overwhelming support in this neighborhood and Fairfax for making Deer Park the permanent home for the Children’s Center.** If the Center cannot stay in Deer Park, what is going to happen to that property? The Deer Park neighborhood at large is very concerned about this, starting with what would happen if the property becomes vacant. I urge the School Board to move beyond general bureaucracy in this process and to look to loftier community goals. With one decision you can remove the burden of your risk liability and give Ross Valley what it needs – a permanent home for the Children’s Center.”* Janet Garvin, Deer Park neighbor and President of 7-11 Committee related to Deer Park property.

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