



A Planning and Zoning Best Practice Guide for Child Care Facilities



PREPARED BY:

RYAN SOUCY, AICP

Senior Economic Development
Planner, CUPPAD



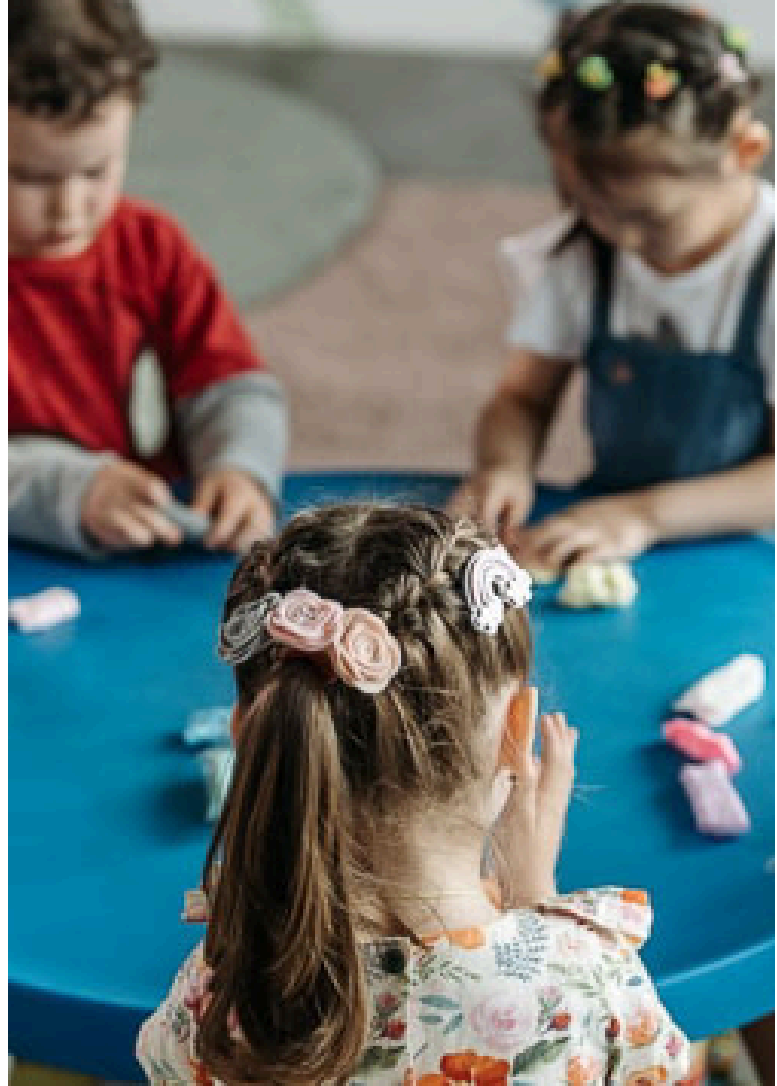
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About

Local planning commissions are uniquely positioned to have an impact on the landscape of childcare across the Upper Peninsula. They are responsible for crafting the land use policies that envision healthy, thriving communities and neighborhoods as well as the zoning regulations that help implement them and ensure compatibility among a variety of other land uses. With the current state of childcare and the challenges the industry is facing, perhaps it is time to reevaluate our existing frameworks and determine if local policies and regulations have been achieving the desired results.

This resource is intended to guide planning commissioners as they work to adopt their local planning and zoning documents. It draws on important pieces of state legislation, such as the Child Care Organizations Act of 1973, and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA) of 2006 to recommend actions that can be taken to align and improve upon communities' efforts regarding the environment of child care.

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- As of 2023, approximately 44% of Michiganders live in a childcare desert, meaning there are no childcare providers within their immediate area.
- Average cost of infant care in Michigan is \$13,000/ year, which can represent 20-40% of family income.
- It has been reported that over 66% of parents had to make educational, training, and career sacrifices because of lack of childcare.

SOURCES: MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, US CENSUS 2023, MICHIGAN.GOV

The Master Plan

The master plan is the policy basis for your community's zoning regulations. More than that, it's a document that serves to bring the community together to learn about and develop strategies for navigating key community issues. Stakeholders from a variety of different backgrounds may contribute to the development of the plan in many ways, whether it's sharing their professional knowledge or their lived experiences. When crafting community plans, we find that the topic of

childcare is often overlooked, despite its importance to the local economy and value to the development of the next generation. Planning is never meant to be done in a vacuum, so be sure to reach out to the topic experts in your community. Regarding childcare, parents and childcare providers can be valuable resources as you look to develop strategies. There are a number of ways in which they can be engaged and provide input, including surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews.

Best Practice: Developing a childcare strategy using focus groups.

Focus groups are a great way to both familiarize yourself with an issue and to gain meaningful feedback from stakeholders nearest to it. You can do this by identifying subject matter experts in the community and asking them if they would be willing to take part in a focus group—in this case, childcare providers and early childhood educators are ideal experts. Parents of young children who are either seeking childcare, or who have existing arrangements can provide unique perspectives and experiences also.

Additionally, it is important to choose focus group members who are representative of the community you serve whenever possible, which could be low-income individuals, historically marginalized populations, people living in rural areas, or persons with limited mobility. After selecting half a dozen or so individuals to comprise your focus group, set a meeting time that works for all, being mindful that scheduling can be difficult for working parents. Videoconferencing though services like Zoom and Microsoft Teams offer a convenient option for virtual participation.

Next, develop a loose agenda and three to five questions to keep your group focused and on track. Allow space on the agenda for brief introductions so everyone can get acquainted. Focus group questions should be designed to stimulate conversation among the participants while getting to the core of the topic. Some sample questions may include:

- Where do you think the environment of childcare is headed in the community? Are we on the right track, and if not, what needs to be done differently?
- What childcare needs are not being met across the community?
- What does your ideal vision of childcare look like in the community? What are the elements of a that vision and what steps could be taken to help us achieve it?
- In your opinion, what are the most significant barriers to enabling more childcare spaces in the community?
- Are childcare institutions located in the areas where it is most needed? If not, what is preventing it from being located there (e.g. local regulations, inadequate facilities, lack of providers)?
- Finally, what is the order of priority among the issues the group identified? What could have the greatest impact toward helping the community achieve the vision?

Be sure to take notes to capture the main points of the discussion so that you can refer to them later. These notes can then be drawn on to create draft strategies, starting with goals and working towards achievable objectives. Goals are broad aspirational statements that indicate a desired state, while objectives are more precise components of the goal that describe what and how you intend to reach the goal. When crafting your strategies, pay special attention to discussion content regarding locational barriers, as these may suggest additional land use changes are desired. With this framework, your commission will be equipped to identify the challenges, needs, and opportunities within the community.



The Zoning Ordinance

While the master plan establishes the policy direction for land use in a community, the zoning ordinance is the regulatory tool that implements those policies. In Michigan, zoning must be based on a plan for land use under the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA). As communities consider strategies to improve the environment for child care, it is important that zoning classifications, standards, and approval processes align with both the master plan and applicable state law.

Local zoning ordinances influence where child care establishments are permitted, how they are reviewed, and what site standards apply. Even when state law addresses certain aspects of regulation, communities retain discretion in how uses are classified and how objective standards are structured. Thoughtful zoning reform can reduce unnecessary barriers while maintaining compatibility with surrounding land uses. The detailed zoning best practices that follow in the appended guide provide a structured framework for evaluating and updating local ordinances.



From Policy to Implementation



Improving access to child care requires coordinated policy action at multiple levels, including land use planning and zoning. By aligning master plans with updated zoning ordinances and adopting clear, objective regulatory frameworks, communities can remove unnecessary barriers while preserving neighborhood character and compatibility.



The zoning best practices that follow translate these policy principles into a structured Good, Better, and Best framework, with model ordinance language that communities may adapt to local conditions. Together, this guide and the appended zoning framework are intended to support practical, legally aligned reforms that expand child care access through predictable and proportionate regulation.

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ZONING BEST PRACTICES FOR CHILD CARE

Zoning plays a major role in whether child care is easy or difficult to provide.

While state licensing sets health and safety standards, local zoning determines where child care establishments are allowed and how they are reviewed. In many communities, zoning codes have not kept pace with current child care needs and can unintentionally create barriers. This guide is designed to help local governments align their zoning ordinances with Michigan law, clarify local authority, and identify practical changes that can improve access to child care. The focus is on clear rules, predictable approvals, and performance-based standards that support families, providers, and neighborhoods. Where performance standards are applied, best practices emphasize objective, residential-scale standards addressing parking, drop-off and pick-up activity, and safety, rather than discretionary or commercial-scale requirements.

Purpose and Use of This Guide

This guide provides best practice recommendations and sample zoning language to assist cities, villages, townships, and counties in Michigan in reviewing and updating their zoning ordinances as they relate to child care establishments. It is intended for use by planners, zoning administrators, local attorneys, planning commissions, and elected officials seeking to align local regulations with Michigan law while reducing unnecessary barriers to child care.

The guidance presented here is advisory and is designed to support informed local decision-making. Communities should adapt the recommendations and sample provisions to fit their existing ordinance structure, local conditions, and legal counsel. Nothing in this guide is intended to replace or supersede state law or formal legal advice.

Part 1: Definitions

Because Michigan law distinguishes between family child care homes, group child care homes, and child care centers, zoning ordinances must use definitions that reflect those distinctions. When zoning ordinances use outdated or inconsistent definitions, child care providers can face unnecessary confusion, delays, or barriers. This guide uses definitions drawn from state law to clearly distinguish between family child care homes, group child care homes, and child care centers. Establishing consistent definitions helps ensure zoning is applied fairly, aligns with state requirements, and provides a clear foundation for the best practices that follow.

- **Child Care Establishment**

Child care establishment means any licensed facility or home in which children are cared for and supervised for periods of less than 24 hours a day. This includes family child care homes, group child care homes, and child care centers, as defined below.

- **Family Child Care Home**

Family child care home means a private residence licensed by the State of Michigan in which 1 to 6 unrelated children are received for care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, operated for compensation, and licensed under Public Act 116 of 1973 (MCL 722.111 et seq.).

This may include up to 7 children under the increased capacity allowance authorized by the State of Michigan, provided all applicable staffing and age distribution requirements are met.

- **Group Child Care Home**

Group child care home means a private residence licensed by the State of Michigan in which 7 to 12 unrelated children are received for care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, operated for compensation, and licensed under Public Act 116 of 1973.

This may include up to 14 children under the increased capacity allowance authorized by the State of Michigan, provided all applicable staffing and age distribution requirements are met.

- **Child Care Center**

Child care center means a facility, other than a private residence, licensed by the State of Michigan to receive one or more children for care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, operated for compensation, and licensed under Public Act 116 of 1973.

This includes day care centers, preschool programs, nursery schools, and before- or after-school programs not operated by a public or private school.

Part 2: Zoning Districts and Use Permissions

This section addresses how child care establishments are classified and where they are allowed within local zoning ordinances. It uses a Good, Better, Best framework to show how communities can move from minimum statutory compliance to more supportive, predictable approaches.

The focus is on aligning zoning with Michigan law, treating residential child care uses consistently with other dwellings, and allowing child care centers in districts where similar community-serving uses are appropriate. The approval process is addressed separately in Part 4.

Family Child Care Homes

Good	Permitted by right in all zoning districts where residential uses are permitted.
Better	Permitted by right in all residential zoning districts, with ordinance language clearly stating that family child care homes are treated the same as any other dwelling for use permission purposes.
Best	Permitted by right in all zoning districts where residential uses are permitted, including mixed-use districts that allow housing, with explicit ordinance language confirming residential treatment.

Group Child Care Homes

Good	Permitted as a special land use in residential zoning districts.
Better	Permitted by right in residential zoning districts.
Best	Permitted by right in all zoning districts where residential uses are permitted, including mixed-use districts that allow housing.

Note: Michigan law addresses group child care homes differently by municipality type based on how they have historically been regulated through zoning. For counties and townships, the statute limits discretion when group child care homes are subject to special or conditional use review but does not expressly require that such a permit process be used. This guide reflects that framework by identifying compliant permit-based approaches while also highlighting lower-barrier, permitted-by-right practices where communities choose to adopt them.

Child Care Centers

Good	Allowed as a special land use in commercial or institutional zoning districts.
Better	Permitted by right in commercial and institutional zoning districts where similar community-serving uses are allowed.

Best	Permitted by right in commercial, institutional, and mixed-use zoning districts where residential or civic uses are permitted, including downtown districts and adaptive reuse areas.
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Note: In addition to the district permissions listed above, a child care center may be permitted as an **accessory use** to a principal institutional, industrial, or commercial use, provided all applicable zoning standards are satisfied.

Part 3: Performance Standards

Once child care uses are allowed in appropriate zoning districts, performance standards address how those uses operate on a site. Performance standards should focus on managing real land-use impacts, such as parking, circulation, outdoor play areas, and compatibility with surrounding uses, without duplicating or conflicting with state child care licensing requirements. Best practices rely on clear, objective standards that are proportional to the scale of the child care establishment and are applied consistently, regardless of whether the use is permitted by right or subject to special land use approval.

Family Child Care Homes

- **No child-care-specific performance standards are recommended.**
- Family child care homes should be subject only to the same zoning standards that apply to any other dwelling in the district.
- Health and safety requirements, including supervision and outdoor play safety, are addressed through state child care licensing rather than zoning.
- General nuisance and traffic safety provisions remain applicable, as they are for all residential uses.

Group Child Care Homes

Group child care homes may be subject to limited, objective performance standards that reflect their slightly larger scale while maintaining their residential character and focus on addressing site-specific land use impacts. Such standards are limited to:

- Apply spacing standards expressly allowed by state law, including a minimum 1,500-foot separation from other group child care homes where applied.
- Regulate outdoor play areas only to the extent required by state child care licensing, without imposing additional zoning-based fencing or design requirements.
- Limit parking standards to non-resident staff, consistent with typical residential expectations, and require short-term, on-site drop-off and pick-up space sufficient to maintain safe access and visibility during peak periods, including winter conditions.

- Ensure drop-off and pick-up activity is designed to prevent traffic hazards or obstruction of the public right-of-way, without requiring commercial-scale circulation, stacking lanes, or engineered drop-off loops.

Child Care Centers

As non-residential facilities, child care centers warrant performance standards focused on site design and day-to-day operations.

- Apply parking standards sufficient to serve staff and families during peak drop-off and pick-up periods, without requiring excess parking beyond demonstrated need.
- Require safe drop-off and pick-up areas that prevent queuing into the public right-of-way and protect pedestrians; do not mandate specific stacking lengths or engineered layouts unless clearly necessary.
- Regulate outdoor play areas only to the extent required by state child care licensing; zoning should not duplicate licensing standards.
- Apply buffering or screening only where centers directly abut residential uses, and limit requirements to what is necessary to maintain compatibility.
- Use clear, objective, and measurable standards; avoid discretionary judgments about neighborhood “fit” or “appropriateness.”

Part 4: Approval Process

Once zoning districts and use permissions are established, the next question is how child care uses are reviewed and approved. Approval process matters because it determines whether providers face predictable, administrative review or discretionary processes that add time, cost, and uncertainty. Michigan law allows different approval approaches depending on municipality type and child care establishment type, but best practices focus on matching the level of review to the scale and impact of the use. This section outlines Good, Better, and Best approaches to approval that support child care while maintaining compatibility with surrounding areas.

A. Family Child Care Homes

Because family child care homes function as residential uses, approval processes should be minimal and mirror those applied to other dwellings.

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved administratively in the same manner as any other dwelling. • No special land use permit, conditional use permit, or public hearing is required.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly exempt from special land use, conditional use, site plan review, or other discretionary approval processes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval limited to verification of compliance with generally applicable zoning standards for dwellings.
Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No zoning approval required beyond what is required for any other dwelling in the district. Ordinance language clearly states that family child care homes do not trigger additional zoning review or approval based on the provision of child care.

B. Group Child Care Homes

Approval processes for group child care homes should reflect their residential character while allowing limited review to confirm compliance with objective standards.

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject to special land use or conditional use approval with review and public hearing by the planning commission. Review is limited to confirming compliance with clearly stated, objective standards. Approval must be granted when applicable standards are met.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitted by right, with administrative review to verify compliance with objective zoning standards. No public hearing or discretionary findings are required.
Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved administratively in the same manner as other permitted residential uses. Ordinance language clearly states that compliance with objective standards is sufficient for approval and does not trigger discretionary review.

C. Child Care Centers

Because child care centers are non-residential uses, an approval process is appropriate to confirm compliance with zoning standards, but it should remain predictable and proportionate to the scale of the facility.

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject to special land use or conditional use approval. Review is limited to confirming compliance with adopted performance standards and basic site plan requirements. Approval must be granted when standards are met.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitted by right, subject to administrative site plan review. Review is limited to objective standards for parking, circulation, buffering, and outdoor play areas. No public hearing is required.
Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitted by right with clear, administrative approval timelines.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site plan review is limited to objective standards and does not allow denial based on subjective compatibility or neighborhood opposition. • Ordinance language clearly separates site plan compliance from discretionary land use decisions.
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Part 5: Additional Zoning Tools and Incentives

Beyond use permissions, performance standards, and approval processes, zoning can also be used to encourage the establishment and retention of child care. These tools are optional and should be applied carefully, but they can reduce cost, uncertainty, and administrative burden for providers. Best practices focus on incentives that are clear, easy to administer, and tied to documented barriers, rather than adding new layers of review or conditions.

A. PARKING FLEXIBILITY

Parking requirements are often a barrier to child care, particularly where demand is limited to short peak periods during drop-off and pick-up.

Family Child Care Homes

Good/Better/Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply the same off-street parking requirements that apply to any other dwelling in the zoning district.
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Group Child Care Homes

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply residential parking requirements, with additional parking limited to non-resident staff.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit parking requirements to non-resident staff only and prohibit parent drop-off or pick-up parking minimums. • Allow flexibility where on-street parking or shared parking is available.
Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate fixed parking minimums for group child care homes and rely on residential parking standards, supplemented by objective performance standards to address safety or access issues if they arise.

Child Care Centers

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply standard parking requirements for similar institutional or community-serving uses.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow reduced parking requirements based on demonstrated demand, shared parking, or limited peak-hour use. • Permit alternative compliance where on-street parking or nearby public parking is available.

Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate fixed parking minimums and allow parking to be provided based on operational need, shared arrangements, or proximity to other uses. • Rely on objective performance standards to address overflow or safety issues rather than preset ratios.
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B. FEE REDUCTIONS AND WAIVERS

Up-front zoning and permitting fees can be a barrier for child care providers, especially for small operators or those reusing existing buildings. Fee policies are a simple way to reduce cost without changing land use standards.

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply standard zoning and permit fees, with administrative fee reductions available under clear, written eligibility criteria.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow reduced zoning, site plan, or permit fees for child care establishments through a clearly defined administrative policy. • Apply reductions consistently, without requiring additional approvals or justification beyond eligibility.
Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully waive zoning, site plan, and use-related permit fees for child care establishments, or establish a standardized, automatic fee reduction. • Clearly state eligibility and fee treatment in ordinance or policy so applicants know costs up front.

C. ADAPTIVE REUSE ALLOWANCES

Allowing child care to locate in existing buildings can significantly reduce cost, shorten timelines, and expand options without changing neighborhood character.

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child care to locate in existing buildings where the use is otherwise permitted.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child care to locate in existing buildings without requiring variances solely due to existing building conditions.
Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exempt adaptive reuse projects from zoning standards that cannot reasonably be met due to existing building conditions.

D. FLEXIBLE DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS

Rigid dimensional standards can unintentionally limit where child care can locate, even when the use itself is appropriate.

Limited flexibility can help accommodate outdoor play areas, circulation, and safe site layouts without undermining the intent of the zoning district.

Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply dimensional standards for child care in the same manner as comparable uses in the zoning district.
Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow limited departures from dimensional standards when needed to provide outdoor play areas, safe circulation, or functional site layout.
Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear, built-in dimensional flexibility for child care so compliance does not require variances or discretionary approvals.

Part 6: Sample Zoning Text

This section provides sample zoning language that reflects the best practices described in this guide. The examples are intended to illustrate how communities can translate policy concepts into clear, enforceable ordinance provisions. They are not intended to be adopted wholesale. Local governments should review and adapt the language to fit their existing ordinance structure, terminology, and legal counsel guidance.

The sample provisions focus on clarity, predictability, and alignment with Michigan law. Where applicable, the language emphasizes objective standards, administrative review, and consistent treatment of child care uses. Communities are encouraged to use these examples as a starting point and tailor them to local conditions while maintaining the underlying best practice principles.

A. CITIES, VILLAGES, TOWNSHIPS, AND COUNTIES

Good, Better, and Best Language

Family Child Care Homes

1. A family child care home is a permitted use in all zoning districts where residential uses are permitted.
2. A family child care home shall be treated as a residential use for all zoning purposes.
3. No zoning standards, requirements, or conditions shall be imposed on a family child care home that do not also apply to other dwellings in the same zoning district.
4. A family child care home shall not be subject to special land use approval, conditional use approval, site plan review, discretionary approval, or a public hearing.
5. Health, safety, staffing, and outdoor play requirements for family child care homes shall be regulated solely through state child care licensing and shall not be regulated through zoning.

B. CITIES AND VILLAGES

Good Language – Group Child Care Homes

Use Permission

- A group child care home is permitted as a special land use in residential zoning districts.

Spacing

- A group child care home shall be located at least 1,500 feet from another group child care home, consistent with state law.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Non-resident employees may use on-street parking where on-street parking is permitted.
- Where on-street parking is not available to serve non-resident employees, one off-street parking space shall be provided for each non-resident employee, in addition to any off-street parking otherwise required for the dwelling.
- A group child care home shall provide at least two designated on-site spaces for short-term parent or guardian drop-off and pick-up.
- Designated drop-off and pick-up spaces required under this section shall be limited to short-term use and shall not be counted as required off-street employee parking.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Special land use approval shall be granted upon a finding of compliance with the standards of this section.
- No additional discretionary standards or conditions shall be applied.

Better Language – Group Child Care Homes

Use Permission

- A group child care home is permitted by right in residential zoning districts.

Spacing

- A group child care home shall be located at least 1,500 feet from another group child care home, consistent with state law.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Non-resident employees may use on-street parking where on-street parking is permitted.

- Where on-street parking is not available to serve non-resident employees, one off-street parking space shall be provided for each non-resident employee, in addition to any off-street parking otherwise required for the dwelling.
- A group child care home shall provide at least two designated on-site spaces for short-term parent or guardian drop-off and pick-up.
- Designated drop-off and pick-up spaces required under this section shall be limited to short-term use and shall not be counted as required off-street employee parking.
Note: This final bulletpoint separates longer-term employee parking from short-term parent drop-off, recognizing that they create different impacts and should be handled differently. It allows employees to use on-street parking where available, requires off-street spaces only when needed, and separately requires short-term on-site drop-off space so parent activity does not spill into the street or displace employee or residential parking, especially in winter.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Approval shall be administrative and based on compliance with this section.
- No public hearing is required.

Best Language – Group Child Care Homes

Use Permission

- A group child care home is permitted by right in all zoning districts where residential uses are permitted, including mixed-use districts that allow housing.

Spacing

- No minimum separation distance shall be required between group child care homes.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Non-resident employees may use on-street parking where on-street parking is permitted.
- Where on-street parking is not available to serve non-resident employees, one off-street parking space shall be provided for each non-resident employee, in addition to any off-street parking otherwise required for the dwelling.

- A group child care home shall provide at least two designated on-site spaces for short-term parent or guardian drop-off and pick-up.
- Designated drop-off and pick-up spaces required under this section shall be limited to short-term use and shall not be counted as required off-street employee parking.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Approval shall be administrative and based solely on compliance with this section.
- No special land use permit, discretionary approval, or public hearing is required.

C. TOWNSHIPS AND COUNTIES

Good Language – Group Child Care Home

Use Permission

- A group child care home shall be issued a special land use permit in residential zoning districts upon compliance with the standards of this section, consistent with MCL 125.3206.

Spacing

- A group child care home shall be located at least 1,500 feet from another group child care home, consistent with state law.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Non-resident employees may use on-street parking where on-street parking is permitted.
- Where on-street parking is not available to serve non-resident employees, one off-street parking space shall be provided for each non-resident employee, in addition to any off-street parking otherwise required for the dwelling.
- A group child care home shall provide at least two designated on-site spaces for short-term parent or guardian drop-off and pick-up.
- Designated drop-off and pick-up spaces required under this section shall be limited to short-term use and shall not be counted as required off-street employee parking.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Special land use approval shall be granted upon a determination that the standards of this section are met.
- No additional discretionary standards or conditions shall be applied.

Better Language– Group Child Care Home

Use Permission

- A group child care home is permitted by right in residential zoning districts.

Spacing

- A group child care home shall be located at least 1,500 feet from another group child care home, consistent with state law.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Non-resident employees may use on-street parking where on-street parking is permitted.
- Where on-street parking is not available to serve non-resident employees, one off-street parking space shall be provided for each non-resident employee, in addition to any off-street parking otherwise required for the dwelling.
- A group child care home shall provide at least two designated on-site spaces for short-term parent or guardian drop-off and pick-up.
- Designated drop-off and pick-up spaces required under this section shall be limited to short-term use and shall not be counted as required off-street employee parking.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- A group child care home is a permitted use subject to site plan review.
- Site plan review shall be limited to verification of compliance with the objective standards of this section.
- Approval shall not be denied, nor conditions imposed, based on subjective compatibility, neighborhood opposition, or discretionary findings.

Best Language– Group Child Care Home

Use Permission

- A group child care home is permitted by right in all residential zoning districts.

Spacing

- A group child care home shall be located at least 1,500 feet from another group child care home, consistent with state law.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Non-resident employees may use on-street parking where on-street parking is permitted.
- Where on-street parking is not available to serve non-resident employees, one off-street parking space shall be provided for each non-resident employee, in addition to any off-street parking otherwise required for the dwelling.
- A group child care home shall provide at least two designated on-site spaces for short-term parent or guardian drop-off and pick-up.
- Designated drop-off and pick-up spaces required under this section shall be limited to short-term use and shall not be counted as required off-street employee parking.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Approval shall be administrative and based on compliance with this section.
- No public hearing is required.

Good Language – Child Care Centers

Use Permission

A child care center is permitted as a special land use in commercial or institutional zoning districts within unincorporated areas.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Off-street parking shall be provided to accommodate employees and peak drop-off and pick-up activity.
- Drop-off and pick-up areas shall be designed to prevent queuing into the public right-of-way and to maintain pedestrian safety.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Special land use approval shall be granted upon a determination that the standards of this section are met.
- Review shall be limited to compliance with adopted performance standards and basic site plan requirements.

Better Language – Child Care Centers

Use Permission

- A child care center is permitted by right in commercial, institutional, and mixed-use zoning districts within unincorporated areas.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Parking shall be provided to serve employees and families during peak periods, without requiring excess parking beyond demonstrated need.
- Shared parking, reduced parking ratios, or proximity to public parking may be approved where appropriate.
- Safe, on-site drop-off and pick-up areas shall be provided to prevent traffic hazards or obstruction of the public right-of-way.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Approval shall be administrative and based on compliance with this section.
- Site plan review, where required, shall be limited to objective standards.
- No public hearing is required.

Best Language – Child Care Centers

Use Permission

A child care center is permitted by right in commercial, institutional, and mixed-use zoning districts.

Parking and Drop-Off

- Fixed parking minimums shall not be required; parking may be provided based on operational need, shared arrangements, or proximity to other uses.

- Clearly designated, safe drop-off and pick-up areas shall be provided to manage peak activity without creating traffic hazards, with design flexibility to account for seasonal conditions.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play areas and fencing shall be regulated only to the extent required by state child care licensing.

Approval

- Approval shall be administrative and subject to clear, predictable timelines.
- Site plan review shall be limited to objective performance standards and shall not allow denial based on subjective compatibility or neighborhood opposition.

D. CHILD CARE CENTERS AS ACCESSORY USES

In addition to the zoning district permissions identified above, a child care center may be allowed as an accessory use to a principal institutional, commercial, or industrial use, subject to the following provision.

Use Permission

A child care center may be permitted as an accessory use to a principal institutional, commercial, or industrial use, provided the child care center is clearly subordinate to the principal use and complies with all applicable zoning requirements of this ordinance.

Closing Thoughts

Zoning alone will not solve child care shortages, but it plays a meaningful role in shaping whether providers can locate, expand, and operate predictably within a community. By aligning zoning ordinances with Michigan law, clarifying local authority, and focusing on objective, proportional standards, communities can remove unnecessary barriers while still addressing legitimate land use impacts. The best practices outlined in this guide are intended to support families, providers, and neighborhoods by emphasizing clarity, consistency, and administrative simplicity, allowing child care to function as a compatible and essential part of everyday community life.