

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR



SHINES FOR ALL

[The East Hampton Star](#)

September 25, 2025

Good News for Childcare Programs



As the Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center marked its first week taking babies between 12 and 18 months, two teachers, Rebecca Sales, in white, and Deyi Rodriguez, introduced some of them to East Hampton Town Supervisor Kathee Burke-Gonzalez, in back, and Councilwoman Cate Rogers.

Durell Godfrey

By Bettina Neel

September 25, 2025

Last week marked a turning point for two early childhood care providers in East Hampton Town. The Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center in East Hampton celebrated the first week of a new program for babies between 12 and 18 months, and Project Most received an emergency grant to cover operational costs at the Montauk Child Care Center, which provides all-day care to children as young as 6 weeks old at the Montauk Playhouse.

The East Hampton Town Board voted unanimously last Thursday to approve the emergency grant for Project Most, which took over operation of the child care program at the Playhouse last summer, when the Economic Opportunity Council, the Patchogue nonprofit that had been running it for 17 years, announced that it would be leaving Montauk in May after operating at a loss for years — and losing a quarter of a million dollars in 2023 alone.

The town board put out a request for proposals in February, and announced in March that it had selected Project Most, which has been running after-school and weekend enrichment programs and summer camps in East Hampton since 2000, to take over. It took about three months to obtain the necessary licensing from the state's Office of Children and Family Services. The center reopened in July.

“Everyone really saw the value of keeping the center open, and we were just so honored that the town chose Project Most to be the one to take it over,” Rebecca Morgan Taylor, the organization's executive director, said during a phone call on Monday. The Montauk Child Care Center has been a resource for affordable child care for local working parents since the mid-2000s, but the program is very expensive to run.

“There are very strict regulations on ratios to children, and the younger the child is, the higher the ratio. So you need more staff, basically, to take care of these little infants and babies,” Ms. Taylor explained. “The last organization was running it at a \$200,000 deficit, and we took it on knowing that, and we took it on after the town grant cycles were submitted, so we weren't able to submit a grant to the town last year.”

Ms. Taylor approached Town Supervisor Kathee Burke-Gonzalez about funding earlier this month, and the town board approved a grant of up to \$75,000 to help offset the operational costs of the program for the rest of the year. Project Most will have two lines in the town's 2026 budget — one grant for the afterschool programs it runs at the John M. Marshall Elementary and Springs Schools, and another for the Montauk Child Care Center.

“We live in times where both parents have to work,” Ms. Burke-Gonzalez said during a phone call on Monday. “And we need affordable, reliable child care, where our kids can go and be nurtured, and loved, and cared for — and educated, because kids really need to be school-ready when they get to kindergarten — and that’s what these wonderful programs are providing.”

The board's vote occurred just hours after the supervisor's visit to the Eleanor Whitmore Center. The center's leadership had been interested in expanding services to younger children for decades, and it announced the program earlier this year. Its first eight infants arrived on Sept. 15, in accordance with the strict child-to-caregiver ratios mandated by the state, and additional support for staffing the infant program is included in the center's 2026 town grant proposal.

“There were three little boys there, and you could see how quickly these kids had bonded with their teachers and caregivers. And I’m sure when the parents are dropping their kids off, they’re seeing those connections too,” Ms. Burke-Gonzalez recalled of her visit. “As a working mom, there was guilt when I first had to drop my kids off to school because I couldn’t be home with them. The work of the Eleanor Whitmore folks, and the Project Most team — it’s a joy to see.”

“A lot of the kids that are in this program end up becoming our teaching assistants, and some of them go on to be teachers, which is awesome because, you know, you want to inspire kids to love learning and love school,” said Loretta Davis, Project Most’s donor and community outreach director. “And with the Montauk Playhouse and the child care center, I think it’s important for us to get the word out that this is a community service that’s offered.”

“The town is trying to find ways to keep young local families here. And so when they talk about affordable housing, or the new emergency room — child care falls right into that, especially at the early age of 6 weeks,” Ms. Taylor added. “We have made up some of what the other organization said they were losing, but it needs to be subsidized to keep it affordable for working families.”