

Pickleball Play in Toronto

Date: May 18, 2023

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks Forestry & Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Interest in pickleball, an indoor/outdoor paddle sport that combines elements of tennis, badminton and table tennis, continues to grow. This report outlines the City's approach to accommodating this fast-growing sport, including a review of the demand, distribution and scheduling of pickleball courts in the City of Toronto parks and community recreation centres. The report also identifies future opportunities to support pickleball, including mechanisms to permit pickleball on underutilized flat surfaces in 2023.

In response to increasing demand, the City has expanded outdoor courts from one to 165 over the last five years. With the addition of more than 30 new outdoor courts (either shared with other sports or dedicated to pickleball), this total will reach nearly 200 by the end of 2023. Pickleball programming is now offered in more than 50 community recreation centres across Toronto.

This report also recommends amending the scope of work for three new tennis court complex projects in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's 2023-2032 Council Approved Capital Budget and Plan to include dedicated pickleball courts, located in North York, Scarborough and Toronto-East York. A purpose built dedicated pickleball court complex in Centennial Park has also been identified through the Centennial Park Master Plan, and will be delivered as part of the plan's implementation.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff continue to assess demand of this growing sport by measuring indoor attendance, tracking requests for new courts and evaluate under-used public tennis courts in areas with access to alternative tennis court locations for conversion to pickleball courts. Pickleball court lines will also continue to be painted onto outdoor hard surfaces based on demonstrated demand.

Starting in 2023, as part of the Facilities Master Plan (FMP) Five Year Review, staff will review the need for further pickleball provision across Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. City Council amend the scope of work for three new planned tennis court complexes with lights in the South, East and North Districts, in the 2023 Council Approved Capital Budget and 2024-2032 Capital Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to include the development of new purpose built, stand-alone pickleball courts with lights:

- a. FMP - Tennis Court Pickleball Complex with Lights (1) South
- b. FMP - Tennis Court Pickleball Complex with Lights (1) East
- c. FMP - Tennis Court Pickleball Complex with Lights (1) North

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan 2019-2038, adopted in November 2017, included Recommendation 31 to identify and evaluate under-utilized public (tennis) courts in well-served areas for conversion to pickleball, club tennis or multi-sport courts, as a short term measure to meet demonstrated demand for pickleball.

To respond to community interest for dedicated purpose-built pickleball facilities, this report recommends amending the scope of work for three new planned tennis court complexes with lights, categorized as growth-related projects, in the 2023 Council Approved Capital Budget and 2024-2032 Capital Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR), to include new dedicated pickleball courts. These projects are currently planned over 2024-2026, at a cost of \$3.245 million as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Capital Projects in the 2023-2032 Capital Budget and Plan (In millions)

Project Name	2024	2025	2026	Total
FMP Tennis Court Complex with Lights (1) South	\$0.070	\$0.990		\$1.060
FMP Tennis Court Complex with Lights (1) East	\$0.070	\$0.990		\$1.060
FMP Tennis Court Complex with Lights (1) North		\$0.075	\$1.050	\$1.125
Total	\$0.140	\$2.055	\$1.050	\$3.245

There is no incremental impact to the capital costs by incorporating pickleball courts into the three planned tennis court complexes with lights projects in the current 10-Year Capital Plan for PFR, as the existing planned budgets will be utilized, fully funded by Development Charges (XR2114). As identified in Table 2 below, at this time it is estimated that there will be an operating estimate of \$0.023 million gross and net for each new planned tennis court pickleball complex with lights completion, starting in 2025 for two courts, with the third added in 2026. PFR will accommodate within existing resources, where possible, to maintain and operate the new court complexes. Any incremental operating impacts will be included in future budget submissions for consideration.

Table 2: Estimated Financial Impacts (In millions)

2025	2026*
Gross/Net	Gross/Net
\$0.046	\$0.069

*reflects annual estimate for 2027 and subsequent years

PFR will continue to paint additional pickleball court lines onto City tennis or other sports courts in response to demonstrated demand and in relation to other community and park use priorities, and where resources permit.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 15, 2022, City Council approved the 2023 Capital Budget and 2024-2032 Capital Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and \$3.245 million for three new planned tennis court complexes with lights in the South, East and North Districts, over 2024-2026.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MPB4.1>

At its meeting on June 15, 2022, City Council requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report back on a mechanism to permit pickleball on underutilized flat surfaces and to consider painting pickleball court lines on underutilized surfaces in summer 2023.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.MM45.8>

At its meeting on May 27, 2022, the Etobicoke York Community Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to study the feasibility of converting tennis courts at Rotary Peace Park to pickleball and constructing new pickleball courts at Coronation Park – Etobicoke, in consultation with the local Councillor.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EY32.21>

At its meeting on April 26, 2022, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report on the sport of pickleball including the distribution of current pickleball facilities across the city and opportunities to add more, an assessment of demand for pickleball, and a review of the current scheduling of pickleball with a view of expanding the hours of play offered at City-run recreation centres.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.IE29.18>

At its meeting on November 7, 2017, City Council approved the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan 2019-2038 which included Recommendation 31: Identify and evaluate under-utilized public (tennis) courts in well-served areas for conversion to pickleball, club tennis or multi-use sport courts. Prioritize the establishment of pickleball courts in the short-term through re-lining projects based on demonstrated demand.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.EX28.2>

COMMENTS

Pickleball was invented in the USA in 1965, and combines elements of tennis, badminton and table tennis. The game can be played by singles or doubles, both indoors and outdoors, on a 20 ft. x 44 ft. court, using lightweight paddles, a perforated, light-weight plastic ball, and often a portable net. Court lines can be marked onto any small flat surface, including purpose-built pickleball courts, tennis courts, dry pads, school yards, and even residential driveways. Using a portable net, almost any small flat surface can be adapted for playing pickleball.

Pickleball has been gaining popularity in Canada since Pickleball Canada and Pickleball Ontario were launched and began to promote the sport in 2009 and 2011, respectively. Enthusiasm for the sport has dramatically increased during the pandemic, as people looked for new ways to keep fit while socially distanced.

Pickleball is one of the world's fastest growing sports in part because it appeals to diverse groups and skill levels. Given the ease of play, pickleball continues to be popular with older adults, however the fastest growing age group among Canadian players is 18 to 34. Pickleball Ontario, the sport's provincial governing body, has seen a 35 per cent increase in participation over the past five years, and currently offers insurance, coaching certification and tournaments to over 8,100 pickleball clubs and associations (including over 1,800 groups in the Toronto area).

Pickleball in Toronto

In 2022, eight local clubs formed the Toronto Pickleball Alliance to collectively support the growth of the game and player skill development. Currently the Toronto Pickleball Alliance represents over 1,000 players and each of the member organizations report having waitlists to join or having capped membership due to limited court availability to play.

In December 2022, City staff worked with the Toronto Pickleball Alliance to survey its member organizations in order to understand current demand. Survey responses reflected community interest for more pickleball courts, including: multiple outdoor courts in one location to organize group play; multiple stand-alone pickleball courts to host local, national and international tournaments; more permit hours for club play in community centre gyms; on-line information about court locations; and booking options for courts.

Responding to Demand

The planning framework that guides the City of Toronto's provision of sports and recreation amenities is the Council approved Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan 2019-2038. The Facilities Master Plan (FMP) identified pickleball as an emerging sport and includes the following actions:

- Identify and evaluate underutilized public courts in well served areas for conversion to pickleball, club tennis or multi-use sports courts
- Prioritize the establishment of pickleball courts in the short term through re-lining projects based on demonstrated demand

When the FMP was adopted in 2017, the City had one outdoor pickleball court at Kirkwood Park (Don Valley West - 15). Today there are 165 outdoor pickleball courts in 78 Toronto parks, 123 of which are lit for night play.

Information about courts and programming is summarized below. A comprehensive list and a map of City of Toronto pickleball court locations is available on the [City's website](#).

Outdoor and Indoor Pickleball Courts

Among the City's 165 outdoor pickleball courts, two are stand-alone pickleball courts, 106 are painted onto tennis courts, and 57 are painted onto flat dry pads including outdoor ice pads, skating trails and one retired wading pool. In 2023, 29 additional pickleball courts are planned through the painting of court lines on existing public tennis courts and other park assets such as dry pads. Staff will also engage tennis clubs in order to explore opportunities to further support pickleball on tennis club courts throughout the city.

Indoors, pickleball court lines have been added to the gyms in 59 community recreation centres. Attachments 1: 2022 Outdoor Pickleball Courts in Parks by Ward and Attachment 2: 2022 Indoor Pickleball Programming Locations by Ward provides indoor and outdoor pickleball courts in Toronto.

Outdoor and Indoor Pickleball Programming

Outdoor and indoor pickleball programming opportunities are available for all ages at locations throughout the city. A variety of indoor drop-in and registered learn-to-play pickleball programs have been offered at community recreation centres since 2008. Although the pandemic restricted indoor recreation for much of 2020 and 2021, the City offered 270 drop-in and registered programs at 58 locations in 2022. These programs

provided more than 9,000 hours of pickleball play with a total attendance of more than 53,000 participants. Table 3: 2022 Indoor Registered and Drop-In Pickleball Programs by Community Council District provides a summary of indoor pickleball programming by Community Council District in 2022. Attachment 2: 2022 Indoor Pickleball Programing Locations by Ward provides indoor program locations in Toronto.

In addition, in 2022, free opportunities to try pickleball were offered at parks throughout Toronto as part of the Play Mobile program, a City of Toronto sport development initiative in partnership with Nike, reached 10,000 participants in 2022. Full program details, including schedule and locations can be found at [Play Mobile – City of Toronto](#).

The 2023 winter and spring recreation sessions offered a total of 211 drop-in and registered programs, representing 6,800 hours of pickleball play. PFR will be offering 48 programs with more than 1,750 hours of pickleball play this summer season and is preparing programming plans for the fall session. A recreational learn-to-play pickleball program delivery model is planned, including staff training on a standardized instructional approach.

Table 3: 2022 Indoor Registered and Drop-In Pickleball Programs by Community Council District

2022	North York	Toronto East York	Etobicoke York	Scarborough	City Wide Total
Programs	68	116	34	52	270
Program Hours	1,509	3,236	1,237	3,114	9,097
Drop-In Visits	10,176	18,964	4,196	15,618	48,954
Registered Visits	300	573	1888	1,729	4,490
Total Visits*	10,476	19,537	6,084	17,347	53,444

*reflects the number of players in a registered program or attending a drop-in session

Booking and Permitting Pickleball Courts

Outdoor dry pads and other under-utilized hard-surface areas can be booked for group pickleball online, through the [City's website](#). This enables pickleball leagues to schedule multiple games or events such as skill development sessions at the same time.

Pickleball games can also currently be booked at courts shared with tennis at Champlain Parkette, Park Lawn Park and Jonathan Ashbridge Park. Shared courts at Birchmount Park will also be available for booking this summer.

A higher demand for pickleball permits is expected for 2023 as leagues become more aware of the opportunity to reserve multi-sport courts.

Expanding Pickleball Opportunities: Short Term and Longer Term Actions

The City continues to seek opportunities to expand the provision of outdoor and indoor pickleball in the short and long term.

In the short term staff recommend amending the scope of work for three new planned tennis court complex with lights projects in the Council approved 2023-2032 Capital Budget and Plan in order to include dedicated pickleball courts within three approved projects in North York, Scarborough and Toronto-East York through the Facilities Master Plan. The locations for these new, purpose-built pickleball facilities will be identified starting with the submission of the 2024-2033 Capital Budget and Plan for PFR. In addition, a purpose-built pickleball court complex will be delivered as part of the Centennial Park Master Plan implementation in Etobicoke-York.

As outlined in the Facilities Master Plan, staff will continue to evaluate under-utilized outdoor sports courts for possible conversion to pickleball and will continue to add pickleball court lines to outdoor park surfaces, including tennis courts, where there is demonstrated demand and where resources permit. For example, up to five pickleball courts can be painted in a typical dry pad for spring, summer and fall use. Similarly, in indoor spaces, new pickleball court lines will continue to be taped to gym floors where requested and operationally feasible, and will be formally painted when floors are refinished.

Any consideration to convert existing park assets will include a public engagement process to ensure concerns of park users are assessed and addressed. These future efforts will be informed by work underway this year in two wards, Etobicoke Centre - 2 and Etobicoke-Lakeshore - 3. In 2023, in response to demand from pickleball users and after a public engagement process last summer, the City is converting the single tennis court at Valleyfield Park (Etobicoke Centre - 2) to five dedicated pickleball courts. Staff are also reviewing the feasibility of converting tennis courts at Rotary Peace Park (Ward 3 Etobicoke Lakeshore) to pickleball as well as exploring the feasibility of pickleball courts on the former lawn bowling area at Coronation Park (Etobicoke-Lakeshore - 3) in response to Etobicoke Community Council request. Staff are working with the local Councillor to evaluate these sites.

PFR also supports a network of more than 60 community tennis clubs that operate on City parkland. Staff will engage with these key stakeholders through the Toronto Tennis Liaison Committee to explore membership demand and opportunities to support pickleball at Community Tennis Clubs.

In the long term, future tennis and sport court state of good repair projects will consider the inclusion of stand-alone pickleball courts, as two or more pickleball courts can fit within a similar footprint to one tennis court. Pickleball court lines will be included as a design standard on new community recreation centre gyms, and opportunities to build purpose-built, stand-alone pickleball courts will be considered where other sport courts are being developed.

Looking forward, as part of the Facilities Master Plan Five-Year Review report to Council in 2024, staff will review the need for pickleball provision across the City, based on data and emerging needs, including those identified in this report.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: 2022 Outdoor Pickleball Courts in Parks by Ward
Attachment 2: 2022 Indoor Pickleball Programing Locations by Ward