

# Pickleball Advisory Group Meeting 1 Meeting Summary

June 5, 2024

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# Introduction

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This report summarizes the first Pickleball Advisory Group (PAG) meeting, which was held virtually on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, from 7 to 9 p.m.

Visit the [project webpage](#) for more information.

## Pickleball Advisory Group

Members of the PAG offer their perspectives, guidance and advice to the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) Division. They support and advance the short- and long-term plans for more pickleball access across the City of Toronto for all ages, and help guide policy and program considerations, such as pickleball programming, permitting and court provision.

## Meetings Timeline

The following are topics that will be focused on for the six planned PAG meetings. Dates are tentative, and members will be given at least a one- to two-week notice in advance of a meeting date:

- May 15, 2024 – Welcome & Work Planning – **We're here**
- June 12, 2024 – Programs
- July 17, 2024 – Outdoor Courts
- September 11, 2024 – Permits
- October 23, 2024 – Supporting Pickleball
- November 27, 2024 – Year End Review

## Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting was to:

- Welcome and introduce PAG members and the project staff
- Present a draft Terms of Reference for review
- Highlight key agenda topics based on application responses
- Establish a work plan and meeting schedule
- Provide policy context for pickleball play

## Attendance

### PAG Members Present

- Albert B
- Annette S
- Carolyn C
- Daniella C
- Ed M
- Helen G
- Jeff V
- John C
- Junior B
- Karl M
- Katherine R
- Maria L
- Mary Beth D
- Mike K
- Sara M
- Selina L
- Sharon C
- Sid I

### Project Staff Present

- Elijah Bawuah, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator
- Sandra McCallum, Manager, Community Recreation Toronto East York
- Natalie DiFonzo, Program Standards & Development Officer
- Kevin Carr, Manager Client Services
- Matt Bentley, Senior Project Manager, Facilities Master Plan
- Vanessa Cipriani, Policy & Project Advisor
- Kelly Murphy, Manager Policy Development Unit

## Summary

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The City of Toronto has established a Pickleball Advisory Group (PAG) to support the development of the sport, and to guide policy and procedure-related considerations, such as programming, permitting and court provision. The goal is to expand pickleball access across the city for players of all ages.

The first PAG meeting, held on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, opened with a Land Acknowledgement, an African Ancestral Acknowledgement and a review of the codes of conduct. The meeting proceeded with introductions of the PFR project staff and an explanation of the process for PAG members to share announcements at future PAG meetings. Context was provided of how the PAG was built, including outreach efforts to not-for-profit pickleball clubs and resident community players. PAG members were then invited to introduce themselves and their club (if applicable).

Sandra McCallum, City of Toronto, presented a draft Terms of Reference, summarized several issues identified by PAG members, provided an overview of four key agenda topics and the upcoming meeting schedule, and highlighted relevant City of Toronto policies for pickleball play.

Following the presentation, PAG members had the opportunity to ask the project staff questions or to make comments. A major theme that emerged in the ensuing conversation was the urgent need to address increasing demand for pickleball courts as the sport continues to grow in popularity. There was a desire for more money to be allocated to pickleball projects in the Capital Budget. Members specifically expressed their interest in new dedicated pickleball courts, both indoors and outdoors.

Concerns were raised about the time involved in designing and constructing new facilities, especially in relation to expanding capacity and easing pressure on existing courts in the short-term. Suggestions for accelerating the process included the pursuit of external partnerships and the replication of previous projects. Some members inquired about the possibility of updating the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan to incorporate a greater focus on pickleball.

Throughout the discussion, members also highlighted the need for improved communication from the City about policies related to pickleball play and permits. There was agreement that additional on-site signage at courts would be helpful. Members further identified the need for an accessible, centralized booking and reservation system for pickleball facilities to minimize confusion and conflict.

Overall, the feedback received from PAG members underscores the need to expand pickleball access and to improve communication of key policies and information.

## Meeting Minutes

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**Q:** Has the City of Toronto set a budget for pickleball, or is that a work in progress? As a follow-up to that question, has the City hired outside consultants to follow a construction model for outdoor courts?

- *We have not hired a consultant. We are hoping to gather feedback from this group about how we should move forward and what our long-term plan should be.*
- *To answer the first question, the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan initially identified the need for additional tennis courts across the city when it was*

*worked on between 2015 and 2017. It identified the opportunity for pickleball lining, which we know has its challenges, as well as for potential conversions. There was money identified in the Capital Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation for what was initially new tennis courts across the city. What changed with the pickleball strategy was Council direction to look at the potential for dedicated pickleball projects moving forward.*

- There are some projects that are underway. For instance, there is a new facility that is being constructed in Centennial Park in Etobicoke. When the facility construction is done, it would involve a professional landscape architect and designer who would use standards for their work.*
- We heard very clearly that, ideally, dedicated pickleball courts are the preference. While the lining has been helpful in the short term to meet some demand, we are figuring out how to advance dedicated courts, so we will be providing updates on that over time.*

**Q:** A lot of the work for the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan was done in 2015 and 2016. Because pickleball is a growing sport, I am concerned that what is in the Master Plan, which spans 20 years, is not enough. Is there an ability to adjust the Master Plan? You said the Master Plan was approved by City Council – how do we work with that?

- There is a meeting as part of the schedule dedicated to discussing the Facilities Master Plan. We are completing a reassessment of the plan this year. We know that we did not recommend enough courts in the original Facilities Master Plan, so there is already an expectation that the updated Facilities Master Plan will respond more to pickleball. This group is perfectly positioned to have direct input on that work. There will also be broader public engagement outside of this group as part of the five-year review process, so there will be many opportunities for residents and players to provide input.*

**Q:** I was at the City Hall meeting a year ago where we worked with the councillors to get this advisory group in place. My concern is that it has taken a year to get this group together and to meet. Many of the people here are on the front lines managing this sport. I do not know if anyone else shares my frustration, but why is this process taking so long?

- It took time to scope and organize this group. Now that we are here, I am optimistic that the process will accelerate.*
- In relation to facility planning, there are constraints on the construction of new courts based on the money available and timing. New courts will come but, in the meantime, we have started to expand capacity through court conversions. We continue to look at opportunities for lining and court conversions. For instance, we are currently doing a survey of existing outdoor courts at a park in Etobicoke. We are aware of the need for more dedicated courts. It is a priority for us and for*

*City Council. We will do as much as possible on the planning side to advance as many courts as we can.*

- We speak to players in the city every day. We understand how high demand is and how quickly it is growing. It is taking some time for us to catch up to the demand, but we are in a good position. The upcoming five-year review of the Facilities Master Plan will implement the recommendations from this group's work. We also have Council direction to incorporate pickleball into dedicated tennis projects, which was not the case before.*

**Q:** Over the last three years, the outdoor season has been the key time for pickleball. It is a big project to overhaul a rink, and we are in the midst of that at Ramsden Park. We are closed next year instead of this year. We are working around this issue, but the question remains: where do we play next year when Ramsden Park will be closed? We had 1,400 registered members last year. We are not adding registrations nor are we permitting as a group this year. We will be back once we have a new facility. In the meantime, we are still receiving questions and requests from players who want to play that we cannot fulfill. We are seeing changes in the permit policy that we were not aware of. That lack of communication is concerning. There was direction by City Council last June to reallocate the budget for some tennis programs to two or three dedicated pickleball courts. What is the progress on those courts? Are there recommendations concerning pickleball play or the pickleball budget that have been put forward to City Council for this June? We as a group do not currently have access to information about new courts that are open or forthcoming. That information needs to be communicated to us so that we can communicate it to other players across the city. Many of us have asked the City of Toronto about having an online platform that automates and simplifies the facility permit process. I have two questions - Where can players go online to find out when a rink or facility is open and available? And, is there any progress on an online platform for permits?

- A capital improvement project has been announced at Ramsden Park. An extensive rehabilitation is planned for the outdoor rink. The work has been tendered, and we are well into the design phase. We expected the work to start this spring. However, it was identified from the detailed project schedule that the work would run into the outdoor rink season if it followed the current timeline and started in mid to late summer. The decision was taken to complete the design work this summer and to start the project work after the closure of the outdoor rink next year. The rink would then be open again in time for the 2025-2026 outdoor season. Where permit users and pickleball players would be relocated from Ramsden Park is a question we do not have a response to yet, but we can provide an interim update at our next meeting.*
- There is nothing regarding the budget at this moment. The next budget will be presented to City Council for review at the beginning of next year. We will not start compiling that budget until later this year.*



- *Although we have planned specific topics for these meetings that we want to discuss in detail, we can allot time at every meeting to provide updates on all areas as they occur. For example, if there are any capital, technological or policy advancements, we will make sure that everybody is in the know. There will also be time allotted for folks to share announcements from their own organizations at future meetings.*
- *There is a project underway to replace our registration and booking system. We do not have details at this point about timing. The popularity of PlayTime Scheduler is an indication of a gap that we take seriously and that we note needs to be addressed.*

**Q:** It seems odd that we are scheduling a meeting on outdoor courts in July and that indoor courts are not on the agenda at all. Why not prioritize indoor courts if we must work with the current timeline so that we can solve some of the challenges associated with indoor courts in time for the winter?

- *We will be incorporating indoor courts and indoor play into the Programs meeting and the Permits meeting.*

**Q:** You mentioned that there is not yet a budget with money allocated for pickleball. Leasing land to businesspeople who are interested in providing affordable community facilities may expedite the construction process. Are you considering outside people building facilities for the City?

- *There is some history of partnerships with tennis but not necessarily to build facilities outright. Third-party, non-profit organizations have provided infrastructure over time in a long-term agreement.*
- *We want to be creative. The goal is to increase the number of courts as quickly as possible. From a capital perspective, constructing a new court takes time. It is typically a two-year process: one year for design and one year for construction. Our advantage is that the City Council budget approval process occurs annually. There are opportunities for new priorities to emerge.*
- *We continue to look at court conversions. If there are higher provisions of tennis courts in an area of the city, taking a few existing tennis courts and exploring the creation of multiple courts is something that could be done in the short-term to advance play.*
- *The challenge is ensuring that partnerships are non-profit. We do not tend to prioritize partnerships with private operators on public parkland. We try to work with partners through Community Access Agreements to provide affordable or free access to the public.*

**Q:** Will the meetings focus on outdoor courts or indoor courts, or both?

- *Outdoor courts and indoor courts are operated differently within our structure, so we will cover both under the appropriate areas. Indoor courts will be discussed in relation to programming and to permits.*

**Q:** According to the City website, there is one dedicated pickleball court in Toronto at Banbury Park. How did the court happen, and can the process be repeated?

- *We will have to ask the specific district to find out the history of how the court was installed. We do not know the origin of the pickleball court at Banbury, but the opportunity exists for these situations to be replicated. In Councillor Colle's ward, we were able to line two outdoor pickleball courts at a future park planned for 20 Castlefield Avenue in a few years. In other jurisdictions, portions of parking lots have been identified for the sport. At Valleyfield Park in Etobicoke, we permanently converted an outdoor rink with a dedicated tennis court into five outdoor pickleball courts. We are looking at any opportunities to advance where it makes sense and to help address the demand for pickleball.*

**Q:** Can we push the meetings forward and move faster?

- *We will have to see if we can rearrange the schedule. We are making sure that we have relevant Subject Matter Experts at the table for each of the topics we will be discussing. We have already scheduled these meetings with some of our staff, so we would need to reconvene and check availability.*

**C:** We are going to need more indoor courts. Adding lines to outdoor tennis courts is a good short-term solution for the spring and summer seasons only.

**Q:** Pickleball players do not know what the City of Toronto's policies are regarding outdoor rink or outdoor court use, permits and shared facilities. There is no signage. How quickly can we pursue installing signage at pickleball locations, especially those serving large populations?

- *That is helpful feedback. We will bring the question to the Parks team. Outdoor signage generally rests with them, so we will work on this collaboratively.*

**C:** PlayTime Scheduler is an app that shows all the pickleball courts available in Toronto. People use it to book courts, but PlayTime Scheduler is not a City of Toronto app. Signage is needed to clarify that PlayTime Scheduler is not affiliated with the City of Toronto and that a booking through the app does not give you priority access to a court.

- *Thank you for identifying the issue. PlayTime Scheduler is not a booking or a reservation system that the City of Toronto recognizes. We will need to discuss as a team to see what an appropriate solution would look like. We will take the suggestion about signage into consideration.*

**Q:** Has the By-law for the racquet court sign on slide 30 been passed, and will it be enforced this summer?

- *The Parks By-law racquet court sign is an existing sign that we have. We will chat with the Parks team to see if the sign can be put up at more locations. If there are locations that need signage, you can let us know.*

**Q:** How do court reservations work when pickleball players and tennis players are sharing courts? Are lines added?

- *Courts with pickleball lining follow the same rules that apply to tennis courts such as 30 minutes for play. The general rule of thumb is that people are respectful of others in the use of non-permitted and shared facilities. The comments made this evening about signage and peg boards are helpful. We will use that feedback to come up with some solutions.*

**C:** PlayTime Scheduler was helpful in forming our community, as there were no other ways to connect with pickleball players in Toronto. It is a good tool that is still used by many people. The challenges of organizing play on PlayTime Scheduler prompted us to get permits for pickleball. I love the idea of putting up signage. As most pickleball players bring their own net to outdoor courts, the process of setting up and taking down the net within the 30-minute window for play is not simple.

- *Thank you, that is helpful feedback. We are hearing that communication is key for any future tool that the City develops for booking courts.*
- *We want to make space at these meetings for you to not only provide feedback but to also advise on potential solutions. There are subtle but important ways in which the pickleball experience is different from the tennis experience. We will need to work together to find solutions that are appropriate for the game.*

**Q:** Why are there only four available locations for pickleball on the City of Toronto's Parks and Recreation online booking portal? I called an agent for more information, and I was told that I had to talk to a specific person. I tried calling the person several times. I have not received an answer, and their mailbox is full. This does not seem to be a prudent or effective process.

**C:** It is difficult to keep within the 30-minute limit for play when you bring your own net. Do you expect everyone to play together when the courts are busy or full? The issue is that people will show up whether they are aware of PlayTime Scheduler or not. The other issue is that the PlayTime Scheduler app appears to be linked to the City of Toronto, which is confusing for folks. Perhaps we can discuss as a group how we can indicate to players that there is no link between PlayTime Scheduler and the City of Toronto.

**C:** As a point of clarification, PlayTime Scheduler specifically says that it is not a booking system for courts. It is only a system for organizing groups of players.

## Next Steps

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Meeting notes and a draft Terms of Reference will be e-mailed to members for review and approval at the next PAG meeting.

The second PAG meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 12, 2024, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Subject Matter Experts will be present to help answer questions related to programs.

Upon conclusion of the meeting, project staff thanked all PAG members for their willingness to participate and their feedback. Project staff also expressed excitement at the opportunity to continue discussion and collaboration at the meetings ahead.

# Appendix A – Agenda

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## Pickleball Advisory Group Meeting 1

Date: Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Time: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Location: Virtual Meeting (Webex)

| Time      | Agenda Item   |
|-----------|---|
| 7:00 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agenda</li><li>• Land Acknowledgement</li><li>• African Ancestral Acknowledgement</li><li>• Code of Conduct</li></ul>   |
| 7:10 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcome and Introductions<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Parks, Forestry &amp; Recreation Staff</li><li>○ Pickleball Advisory Group Members</li></ul></li></ul>       |
| 7:20 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Updates and Announcements</li></ul>   |
| 7:25 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building the Advisory Group<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Not for Profit Pickleball Clubs</li><li>○ Resident Community Recreation Player Members</li></ul></li></ul> |
| 7:50 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drafting a Terms of Reference</li></ul>   |
| 7:55 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Setting the Agenda<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Key Agenda Topics</li><li>○ Proposed Agenda and Schedule</li><li>○ Proposed Meeting Dates</li></ul></li></ul>       |
| 8:00 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policy and Program Context</li></ul>  |
| 8:55 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Next Steps and Closing Remarks</li></ul>  |
| 9:00 p.m. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adjourn</li></ul>   |