

Pickleball Advisory Group Meeting 3 Meeting Summary

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Contents

Introduction	3
Pickleball Advisory Group	3
Meetings Timeline.....	3
Meeting Purpose.....	3
Attendance	4
Summary.....	4
Meeting Minutes	6
Next Steps.....	12
Appendix A – Agenda.....	13

Introduction

This report summarizes the third Pickleball Advisory Group (PAG) meeting, which was held virtually on Wednesday, July 17, 2024, from 7 to 9 p.m. The meeting focused on discussions about outdoor pickleball courts, providing updates on current and upcoming projects, and gathering feedback from group members to inform the development and provision of outdoor facilities.

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. Their contributions are critical in advancing the development of short- and long-term plans for pickleball access across the City of Toronto. The group plays a vital role in guiding policy development and program considerations, including the design and provision of outdoor courts and the integration of pickleball into the City's broader recreation strategy.

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

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting was to:

- Review the current inventory of outdoor pickleball courts in Toronto.
- Discuss the design and development process for new courts.
- Explore potential locations for new pickleball facilities.

- Gather feedback on the minimum standards for outdoor pickleball courts, including the number of courts, distance between courts, fencing, and supporting amenities.

Attendance

PAG Members Present

- Albert B
- Annette S
- Carolyn C
- Helen G
- Jeff V
- John C
- Junior B
- Margaret J
- Mark J
- Mary Beth D
- Mike K
- Selina L

Project Staff Present

- Elijah Bawuah, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator
- Natalie DiFonzo, Program Standards & Development Officer
- Matt Bentley, Senior Project Manager, Facilities Master Plan
- Vanessa Cipriani, Policy & Project Advisor

Summary

The City of Toronto has convened the Pickleball Advisory Group (PAG) to support the ongoing development of pickleball facilities, policies, and programs across the city. The third PAG meeting, held on July 17, 2024, began with a Land Acknowledgement, an African Ancestral Acknowledgement, and a review of the code of conduct. The meeting then transitioned to updates on the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan (FMP), with a focus on the inclusion of pickleball in the city's long-term capital planning.

Key points discussed included the process for identifying locations for new outdoor pickleball courts, the integration of pickleball facilities in the City's 10-Year Capital Plan, and the ongoing Back on Track program aimed at enhancing outdoor recreation facilities. Members provided feedback on the minimum standards for outdoor courts and discussed potential locations for new courts.

Announcements included updates on newly added pickleball courts and the ongoing public consultation efforts as part of the FMP 5-Year Review and Refresh, which will consider community feedback and equity-focused approaches to facility development.

Meeting Minutes

PAG Member Question/Comment and Project Team Response

Q: There was an Action Item from the previous minutes re: permitting equity across sports. An example provided was lacrosse pays less/has permitted time that is unused. Matt, can you answer this now? OR Can this be carried over to the next meeting agenda? Thanks, Annette.

A: Will answer this question when slides are done.

5-Year Review and Refresh Slide:

Q: If the 5-year review starts this summer and goes to spring 2025, does that mean there's another delay as to what's happening with pickleball?

A: That's the timing we would be reporting to Council. Facilities are addressed annually through the capital budget. But that's when formal recommendations come through for additional courts—first half of 2025. That's the amount of time it will take. We are finalizing a consultant who will be the technical expert. There is also an extensive consultation underway to support.

Q: So my hope for a dedicated pickleball court next summer isn't possible?

A: We will talk about it. We will promote opportunities going forward. I will talk about what's in the plan now and where we're going. The original FMP did not speak a lot to pickleball (work was done 2015-2017) before pickleball exploded. The staff report that addressed this gap came through last year. Through our five-year review, we could report on different opportunities.

Q: Are these locations shareable? (Re: 10-year capital budget plan for 4 new purpose-built courts)

A: We are finalizing locations right now. We will canvas for locations later in this meeting.

C: *Matt speaking about the big court on the slide "New Pickleball Facilities in the City's 10-Year Capital Plan"*

Q: These ones that are already in the plan—you're talking about the opportunity to put things forward in this meeting. I would find it more helpful to know the places that are under consideration. If you look at things as a whole, downtown Toronto is different from other southern parts. We would like to provide valid recommendations. Definition of boundaries?

A: Happy to do that. We will have a chat with Natalie and Sandra to see if there is an opportunity to discuss. If not, we will find another way to share the information. The feedback from this group is critical.

Q: Boundaries is a great question.

A: The district boundaries are aligned with the City's community council districts. Here is the link: [Community Council Area Profiles – City of Toronto](#).

Q: If you were doing an equal amount of courts (four pickleball for four tennis), per capita per person court time, does it make more sense to have more pickleball courts than tennis courts because tennis has longer games, and fewer people can have access? Pickleball games have higher turnover, higher access.

A: There is no prescription on these courts. The participation is an interesting element, and we have noted it. We see how many people can play at a time, and those waiting. We did not include that in the original FMP, but we have since noted it. No one at the time of the FMP was fully aware of what was coming. The other thing to keep in mind is we have hundreds of tennis courts across the city. If a suitable location came forward that had a high number of tennis courts, we would be much better off to put in more pickleball courts without removing access to tennis. It is a balancing act. The public consultation will show a significant number of people who don't have access to pickleball like tennis.

Q: Drainage—when you do all the studies, I do want to talk about drainage, and a flat court won't dry as quickly. Even if it doesn't have a little bit of an angle, it will hold water.

A: Back on Track reinvestments will support drainage systems and help with water on courts. That is something that is considered. As someone who has played tennis at Jimmie Simpson, it is more than a 3% grade—there's a competitive advantage to being on one side of the court. Part of the feedback is to get feedback on courts. Dieppe we know is particularly challenging.

Q: I'm in East York. There are not 78 pickleball courts in East York.

A: These are lines, not dedicated courts. Toronto East York includes Toronto.

C: *That's a hockey rink with lines; let's not stretch it here.*

R: This doesn't get into the concept of dedicated courts. That's where we are headed with the 5-year review, but here we are just highlighting opportunities to play. A unique

piece we discovered from our work on this is most courts in Scarborough are club courts; we want to expand public access.

C: *People are flooding to private clubs. Pickleball is becoming a rich people sport because you need to play for a club. We are second fiddle to everyone else.*

C: *This chart needs a better title.*

R: Fair enough.

Q: Water has been an issue at Otter Creek Rink.

A: Noted.

Q: We are paying for permits at venues that are rained out or unusable due to poor drainage. How do we get reimbursed for these repeated occurrences? Almost 50% of the bookings.

A: Will answer permit questions at the end of the outdoor courts section.

Q: When you consider 1-2 courts versus 3+, have you looked at proximity to parking and transit?

A: Parking and transit access is one of the factors we use to evaluate a park. Larger courts would require washrooms, water fountains, parking, and transit accessibility.

C: *I would think larger court complexes would be preferred for a gathering spot, as long as there is transit access.*

C: *Levels of play is also a challenge. With more courts, we have more ability to self-select and have beginner and advanced courts.*

C: *There are merits in both. The city wants us to bike around and not be driving everywhere. If everyone is managing with the PlayTime Scheduler, it allows you to meet up with a group and the level can be prescribed or set.*

C: *Taking tennis courts from tennis players might be an issue.*

C: *Talking about shared tennis/pickleball locations, or dedicated spaces as well?*

R: It is fair to say this will influence both. The 5-year review will be informed by this group as well. We want stakeholder feedback that supports the work we do. The ones in the current capital plan are converting tennis courts to shared spaces.

C: *When new courts open up, they get a lot of heavy use. I can also look at it from the point of view that when you only have 1 or 2 courts, you never have the opportunity to develop the sport of pickleball. In the meantime, while we're trying to improve what we*

have and work within our budget, we can't develop because permitters will want big courts, but individuals may want smaller court complexes. I would say both large and small complexes.

R: Helpful feedback. The one thing that more courts give you is a variety or more ways to play the sport. Larger space has more versatility—can permit and have open play.

C: *I've played in St. Thomas, a small town of 38,000 (plus surrounding rural area) in Southwest Ontario. They have 8 dedicated pickleball courts right beside 6 dedicated tennis courts. The pickleball courts were all full with people waiting—only 1 tennis court was full.*

C: *Shelter and the rain situation. If there are any possibilities of having covered courts—is this in consideration?*

R: I think that will lead nicely into the next chat.

C: *Castlefield is great, but the slant on it is crazy—but you get used to it. Who has been adding the seating?*

R: Parks has been adding the seating. This was an example of a park we were not planning on developing, but this is an example of what we could do. There has to be a way to make opportunities more transparent.

C: *Sunnybrook Park—there are hundreds of acres of land that would be fantastic to put any facility in.*

R: We will leave it open for more feedback after the meeting because I'm sure they will come to you later.

C: *Portlands and Villiers Island—so much land here. Also Downsview and other scenic grounds. With the number of people that will be living in Portland, is this part of the thing we should think about contributing? I don't want to be redundant—has this already been considered?*

R: We can provide an update specifically on Portlands—a lot of the work is being led by Waterfront Toronto. However, we have constantly been in the loop with them. The development of the Portlands is going to take a long time.

Comment:

I am all around Downsview too. I think it is federal land?

A: Yes, it is, but there is also a secondary plan in place. Federal land does have activations in place, but we have a plan for parks in Downsview more to the east side that will have upwards of 10 parks within it. We will put Downsview in with Exhibition and Portlands (check third place)—non-city lands but we have some influence.

Comment:

There is open land there now in Downsview; we don't want to wait thirty years.

A: We will commit to following up with our staff involved in Downsview now. They have

been more entrepreneurial than city parks tend to be. They are willing to do those types of partnerships.

Comment:

Check out NaplesPickleballCenter.info for a comparison. A complex of 64 pickleball courts. Lots of programs as well.

Discussion on Minimum Standards:

Q: What are the minimum standards you would like to see on outdoor courts? (Number of courts, distance between courts, fencing, supporting amenities, signage) and potential roof?

C: *Multiple courts—at least 4, if not 6 or 8. With many small complexes, there is no organized play. Central Park in New York has converted an ice rink to a pickleball court all summer; permits can be done, new flooring is rolled out.*

R: I have spoken with the company that did that work.

C: *I've played in Sarnia, which has 6 dedicated pickleball courts with shorter walls, shaded seating area, etc.*

C: *Agree, a very minimum of 4 courts. That's organized sports—anything less can't be organized. It's also a cost thing—paying to play on fewer courts makes the cost more.*

R: It's not fair that pickleball players are lugging nets all over the city, but there are posts for tennis.

C: *Where people are not bringing nets, it's different parameters than people who are. And that's why we need storage.*

C: *When there are no fences between the courts, it gets very little play because the balls go into the courts. Lost opportunity.*

C: *Courts can be side by side, but not one in front of the other. There should be some space between courts—take a look at Dieppe; it's perfect.*

Q: We are playing on an ice rink—a facility meant to hold water, not release it. We don't get refunded when it rains.

A: I will personally take that on.

Q: When a group is paying a nominal fee, under \$50—there is no incentive for them to release time. Can we request a meeting with Kevin?

A: Matt will take this back to Kevin and try to schedule a meeting.

C: *I am disappointed—I was expecting specifics on permits. I want slides and numbers. Are seniors less than children? Why do seniors have to pay, and children don't?*

R: We will send out the permit allocation policy to the group.

C: *We don't even have the minutes from last meeting, just so you know.*

C: *The fee schedule is online. What's more important for me is let's get the courts and worry about the fee later. I think the fees are very reasonable. I want to know when and where these courts are going to be available for permit before I worry about fees.*

R: Off-topic question about permits—are cricket events allowed to be booked on the ice rinks that have pickleball lines? The reason why I ask is because we noticed the pickleball lines were a bit destroyed after those individuals came off the rink.

C: *I specifically asked that permits be addressed in this meeting regarding the inequity in fees between groups. I am asking for transparency.*

C: *There is transparency—even the permit asks what group you are supporting. It's possible groups are being dishonest about who they support.*

R: We will send out information about fee schedules and permit allocation ASAP and try to schedule something with Kevin.

Next Steps

- The PAG members are encouraged to provide any additional feedback on outdoor pickleball court standards and potential locations via email to pickleball@toronto.ca.
- The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 11, 2024, at 7 p.m., focusing on the Permits topic.

Appendix A – Agenda

Pickleball Advisory Group Meeting 3

Date: Wednesday, July 17, 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">• Welcome and Introductions
7:10 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land and African Ancestral Acknowledgements
7:20 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Code of Conduct
7:25 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan (FMP)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ FMP 5 Year Review and Refresh○ Current and future inventory of outdoor courts○ Back on Track program
8:20 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Locations for consideration○ Minimum standards for new builds
8:50 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updates and Announcements
8:55 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Next Steps and Closing Remarks
9:00 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjourn