

Pickleball Advisory Group Meeting 4

Meeting Summary

September 17, 2024

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Introduction

This report summarizes the fourth Pickleball Advisory Group (PAG) meeting, which was held virtually on Wednesday, September 11, from 7 to 9 p.m. The meeting focused on discussions about permits for pickleball, it provided the policy context for facility booking and gathered feedback from group members to inform future strategies for permit access at new and existing locations.

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
- September 11, 2024 – Permits – **We're here**
- October 23, 2024 – Supporting Pickleball
- November 27, 2024 – Year End Review

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting was to:

- Review the permit process for outdoor Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities
- Review policies that govern the permit process, including the Permit Allocation Policy
- Share council approved fees for dry pads
- Receive feedback on permit fees and how to best distribute access to existing and new spaces

Attendance

PAG Members Present

- Beckie S
- Carolyn C
- Helen G
- Mary Beth D
- Sid I

Project Staff Present

- Elijah Bawuah, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator
- Natalie DiFonzo, Program Standards & Development Officer

- Sandra McCallum, Manager Community Recreation
- Kevin Carr, Manager Client and Business Services
- Jen Ciavoliello, Operations Support Officer
- Titti Dunn, Supervisor Client and Business Services
- Vanessa Cipriani, Planner

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 fourth PAG meeting, held on September 11, 2024, began with a Land Acknowledgement, an African Ancestral Acknowledgement, and a review of the code of conduct. In response to feedback received from committee members, City Staff will commit to adjusting the administrative and communication process with the PAG to better address their needs. The meeting then transitioned to the agenda topic for the evening, permits. There was strong focus given to permit processes and considerations at outdoor facilities.

The speaker began by acknowledging the development of interest in pickleball, as evident through the rapid growth of pickleball permits in the last two years. The subject matter experts then spoke about council approved permit fees and confirmed that fees are based on the facility being booked, and not the specific sport being played.

The policies that govern permits and outdoor spaces was addresses to provide context. The Permit Allocation Policy was then shared to provide context for the permit process and issuance queue for community groups. Municipal Code Chapter 608 regarding parks also identifies the Cities responsibility to oversee park spaces and amenities. Information was then shared on how to book a permit for pickleball, either online or over

Following the presentation, the meeting then shifted to the Miro Board application to collect feedback from members on permit processes and considerations for new and existing pickleball facilities.

An opportunity to share updates and announcements was offered, and a reminder for the next meeting date was provided. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Meeting Minutes

Legend

A: Answer

C: Comment

Q: Question

R: Response

How to Obtain a Permit Slide:

Q: Can you confirm that Pickleball is a sport listed on the online drop-down menu?

A: It is an activity type, it is bookable under courts. It is not the most intuitive system. When you select courts, there are 4 locations that come up (listed), all in different quadrants of the city. When you select one of those locations you will see a listing of their availability. As you move through the process, you will get an opportunity to select your activity, whether it is pickleball or tennis. You can then finalize your booking.

Q: Those are all tennis courts; we don't play pickleball on tennis courts. We play on Kew Rink, Dieppe Rink. I dispute that they are courts, they are lines on a hockey rink, they are not courts. So I'd like that this discrepancy be made that these are not pickleball courts. I know the city calls them pickleball courts. They're lines on a hockey rink. Dieppe Park and Kew Rink are not even in the system. Ashbridge's and Birchmount are tennis courts. Your inventory of pickleball courts is not in the list of bookable pickleball locations.

A: I'll respond to that. The locations there do have pickleball lines on those tennis courts are those are the assets that are bookable.

C: Nobody plays pickleball on those. They are tennis courts. Pickleball is played where there are four or five courts. Like at Ramsden there are multiple courts. At Kew and Dieppe we play pickleball. You are adding the city goes on and on about having 78 pickleball courts, those courts are not in your bookable permit database.

A: They are, well they are through staff. Those locations can be booked by staff.

C: So that counts on a staff person answering the phone and dealing with us.

A: Yes, which we have many staff available in our contact centre Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. if you call that phone number you will get a staff person.

Q: I just want to clarify, that is under the permit area. But at one point I understood that it is simply a situation that the city is now booking pickleball to play on these four locations. I thought that was more for individual play. I'm confused because I see it under permits, but I see it more as a program. Bookable courts, but not necessarily thinking about it as a permit for organizations. So you're saying that's for individuals and associations? Just to clarify again, I haven't revisited it for a little while, so what were we talking about on that last screen about those courts?

A: On the previous screen the question was about the courts that are bookable online and she was highlighting that these are not representative of the Kew Gardens, Jimmie Simpson, or Ramsden, where the bulk of play is taking place. But what I was pointing out was just that there are courts that are dual lined for tennis and pickleball at these four locations that are online. So just highlighting that for the other locations, contacting through a staff to seek a permit will get you a wider variety of spaces that can be considered.

Q: Ok, so the purpose of this dropdown and this section in your city programming is, I was trying to understand a year ago, that it was really meant for individuals wanting to book courts, like booking a tennis court or trying to book pickleball play on tennis courts. I agree, I thought that was more a system for individuals to play on courts versus under a permit program. Maybe I misunderstood. So remember, I haven't revisited this since last year. There's been no need. But is that true? Is it more like we can book a court to play on as an individual, not as a permit? That's what I am trying to clarify.

A: Sorry, I am not sure I am following.

Q: On your drop-down menu, is this for permit applications or just for people saying I want to book and play on a court, say over in Mimico or Birchmount, these locations. The purpose of bringing this about a year ago, I thought was for public individuals that they could play, book a tennis court for an hour or they could book to play pickleball on a tennis court in four locations. I am just trying to clarify. That was my understanding and I am not sure why it would fall under a permit discussion tonight, and I could be wrong. So do you see what I'm saying? Is this for individuals or are you saying it's a permit application here online.

A: These are permits, they are essentially the same thing. Booking the space online, the process online is to obtain a permit. So as you said, you're at you know, Park Lawn, you want to reserve a space to play pickleball for one hour, this is an alternative process for you to follow, that people can follow to book that space. So they're one in the same thing. Whether you book online or you book through a staff, the mechanism is the same or the output is the same, that you are obtaining a permit.

C: Ok, even if you just played once in a week, in a year, you are obtaining a permit to play an hour or whatever it is there on a specific day. That's the way you look at it. And you see, I guess I find that I'm just going to give you feedback that I find that's where a little confusion for me occurs because I don't see somebody booking an individual court, be it tennis or pickleball on a tennis court, to be a permit thing. I see it as booking to play, like any kind of sport situation. It's just interesting how the city has put this there. I see it more that it is different than something where you're booking to play as an organization and acquire a permit and all of the paperwork and stuff that goes with it. To me, I feel that this part should be somewhere else in the city site to book a tennis court or book to play pickleball on a court. I see that as different than what we're really, I thought, talking about here tonight about permits. How I saw it a year ago when it came out and how I still see it quite frankly, different from 'hey, I want to book a permit for my organization, and here's a specific time or day', but it's larger than just individuals going to play on a court for 1 hour on a specific time or a week or once a year.

A: I think that insight is helpful. All feedback is helpful feedback. Recognizing as well, this has been a journey. As you're reflecting, where we started a year or 18 months ago, and where we want to go in the next 12 or 18 months, this is a journey. No one on the city side is going to say that we have a perfect process, that we have it all figured out. That's entirely the point of have this group together and doing this consultation so that we can make a better process, a better experience, a better product.

Q: Will the City be adding the inventory of pickleball courts to the online inventory e.g. Dieppe Park rink with lines

A: Those locations are listed viewable on our [Parks and Community Recreation Centres map](#).

You can filter locations by Pickleball and it will show the locations on the map, with a listing below the map.

Q: Will there be priority access for permits for not-for-profit versus for profit organizations? Is that going to be a distinction, is it currently and will it be going forward?

A: Yes, that is addressed in the permit allocation policy. Not-for-profit organizations are considered before for-profit organizations when there is demand for the same space.

Q: Would somebody who had a permit one year have priority in subsequent years?

A: The general answer is yes. We are trying to balance the interests and the needs of the community, and we're always up against the wall of doing that. It's a current feature of our procedural approach when it comes to scheduling, and it has benefits to organizations like all of yours. Where it becomes problematic is trying to figure out the balance and the use of that schedule where there is competition, where somebody wants to grow or expand. It is one of our biggest challenges in managing facilities. It's a principle that we follow and try to return people to space where they have historically permitted, but we recognize it isn't always possible.

C: I hear everyone's shared frustrations, and I share those frustrations too, with how difficult it is to establish organizations that enable you to serve the constituents that you have in your clubs. The City of Toronto's website is not particularly designed to address the issues of pickleball by itself, it's designed to support a range of different issues. However, this does provide the city motivation to be able to clarify and upgrade and increase the ability, the communication and messaging on the website, but also the courts themselves. Also, thinking about fees, it always comes at a cost to those who can't afford it. The city obviously has dual purpose, it's not simple just for the people who can afford it, but for the broad demographics and the whole spectrum. The city's hands are tied, if you want to change something you have to go to city council and lobby for it to get the legislation changed or adapt to bring in youth pickleball.

C: I have no problem with kids programming and kids playing. What I have a problem with is limited city inventory sitting empty.

C: People want just an hour or two to play with their friends. We encouraged people who have never played to come during non-prime times. Prime time is 5:30-8:30, but those after school hours are great for those who want to play with their friends and give it a try. We tell people they can play, but we serve as many people as we can, and they all want to play during prime time. The hardest thing to do in this new environment, Toronto, was to be strong and firm that we serve all. We do have levels, but we also need time for youth, but youth can be scheduled at times that are non-prime. Evening

prime time, we don't have enough facilities to support that time. It is not the highest and best use of that time. I thought the city was going to put smaller courts online to be booked for individuals, not organized groups for 8 or 12 or 16 people. There is a need for people to be able to go out and book a time to play with their own family. It should be occasional, and those are best suited to the smaller courts.

C: I also want to talk about signage. It was so hard to explain the city permit policy to people because signage would happen very late on the parks buildings and we were constantly having to explain policy. I was hoping we would see a lot more signage and I know that's a parks department, but this is one of these things, storage, signage, what can we do to make pickleball work? Permit groups should not have to explain policy. Its not fair to the public and its not fair to the groups.

Miro Board

[Miro Board Discussion PAG #4](#)

Q: How many people on this call book permits?

Three people raised their hands

C: I just want to say for the record that some of the key people who book permits could not attend tonight and we asked for this meeting to be moved and it was denied. So you're getting limited responses from a handful of us that are available.

R: I think to respond to that, to the folks who are missing today, we can discuss before doing so, but potentially an idea could be included these questions in an e-mail following the meeting and getting those folks to respond by e-mail

A total of four questions were prepared to facilitate a discussion regarding pickleball permits with PAG members.

Question 1: Should there be a percentage of time dedicated to each type of play?

Answers:

- Groups would want a minimum of two hours
- Two hours (start losing folks after 1.5 hours)
- 90 minutes to two hours
- Consideration placed more on available locations to play
- Existing pickleball clubs recognize the importance of time necessary for public access to play
- We need to make sure everyone can play. Permits are a good way for people to be part of a community and keep the courts in good shape too

Discussion:

Q: What is the nature of this question? Is this for your court booking system we were just discussing?

A: There are a few interpretations of this question. The spirit of this question is, for example, Ramsden, has an overall amount of time. Say it's twelve hours of court time per day, what is the appropriate dissection of those twelve hours per day. What is the time between open play where anyone can walk in with a net and play for an hour or whatever it is, versus somebody who wants to book the space under a permit for two hours, and a drop-in program that might be there for another two-hour segment of time. In trying to determine how assets should be considered, is there an ideal dissection of time? The other interpretation of this question is valid as well, where you are saying two hours as a minimum booking block is what you guys need.

C: I play at a private club as well, and the maximum you can book in a day is two hours. I think within a region, there needs to be a mix of drop-in play and permitted play where you're a member of an association. It's the balance across the region of opportunity, not just one venue. It's not just about one venues breakdown during the day.

C: This is such an open ended question. I like more specific questions and I like context. What I find with these meetings, for month after month, we come in with these simple questions and there not enough context, we can't give a very good, informed discussion.

C: For several years, I have written extensively about why is it we aren't creating regional centres, larger centres with dedicated pickleball courts. Are these questions being asked to determine programming at that new type of facility, or is it the current type of facility we're talking about?. A lot of teaching happens beyond the city's ability to do learn to play. There has to be public time and time for associations. We recognize that there's public time needed for those that can't or won't join a club, flexibility for the public, but you can allow more time. You can allow a lot of good time to associations and their programming, and good time for the public as well too. So it becomes more location specific, when you're dealing with a lot of little courts dotted around the city. You have to look at the scarcity, we might look at the time differently on those small courts than if we're looking at larger dedicated courts.

C: Type of play is really important and as an organizer of these types of events, it depends on the level of play. So there are more nuances than just the generalization of the question.

Question 2: Should new fees be proposed at our next budget cycle?

Answers:

- City should better organize their pickleball courts before raising fees. Courts need to be more accessible, quality improved, etc., before fees are increased/charged
- How will fees differ per court? Will courts of different quality or ones located at dedicated facilities be priced differently?
- Preference is not raising fees
- How will the city approach fees for "pickleball facilities" that were not originally built as a pickleball court? There should be careful consideration placed on pricing so folks are paying for the quality they are getting

Discussion:

C: To provide some context, we presented the fee's earlier, which are facility fees. The majority of courts have been painted on dry pads. Under the fees framework that we have available, we permit those courts at the outdoor dry pad fee. That is foundationally one of the reasons why we do not have a per court fee. You can't just permit one court at a multi court facility. You have to permit all of the courts because you are permitting the facility.

C: The city should not raise fees until it gets organized on pickleball courts. We are behind every other municipality, and when the city says pickleball courts, these are not pickleball courts. These are lines on hockey rinks, these are lines on dry pads and parking lots. The city has other things to worry about than changing the fees at this point.

C: Right now you're charging pickleball fees for pickleball courts, but not providing a pickleball facility.

Q: What are provided with fees? There isn't a policy about permitting and having storage. There is nothing written about storage for clubs. It seems to be an ad hoc situation, with each place, each arena, each permit person. People are wondering why they don't have access to storage, and it is a fight to be able to get storage and get access. Some groups get access to storage and some do not. It creates a situation of inequity, and I'm just wondering when you talk about fee's, we should be looking at the context. I don't feel we should be paying more money for hockey rinks until we have better drainage, because we're paying enough and there is a lot of unused time.

A: Our parks team is looking at the issue of storage, it's a huge consideration, and it does have an impact on permits going forward.

Q: Can you add to the permit process a drop-down question that says 'do you require storage' so that it is addressed on the initial permit when you are applying for it? Not that you are guaranteeing storage, but you're just asking the question so you can start to flag the people who do require storage.

A: We have made a note of that and we will pass the feedback onto the team that is looking into the storage question.

C: We need to discuss signage. If you are going to have multi use courts, its up to the permit holders to take time talking to the general public and trying to explain to them why we have a right to be there and why we have to refuse them entry on this space. And then also the people who have booked on playtime, and no one understanding they only have access up to 30 minutes for a court if it's not permitted. No one understands what's going on because there is no signage. If you're going to split up how the space is permitted, we need some sort of way to communicate to the public for that there is an official policy out there in an obvious way.

Question 3: What barriers would be addressed by structuring fees differently?

Answers:

- Bigger issues than fees. More attention should be placed on improving public access to permit officers, and access to online permitting system
- More structure is required to make it easier for folks to access organized play
- There are concerns with those who pay for permits and those who use courts without obtaining one
- There are groups who are not using courts during their permitting time, which could be better used by folks available to play

Discussion:

C: Fees are not your big issue. We need to talk about getting a hold of your permit officers, getting a timely response from your permit officers. I know they have a lot on the go, but I wouldn't touch fees until you're providing proper pickleball facilities and you have the infrastructure, fees are not your problem. You're making money now that you weren't making two years ago. That first summer we played, there was no pickleball drop down, there was no pickleball fee. You're now making a ton of money off us.

C: I don't think the fees need to change. I don't want to see increases, there is a lot to provide to members in terms of teaching and organized sport competition, just the things that really develop the sport further, on public guest facilities. We're not talking about private clubs. I could choose to join a private club and pay a lot for it. My concern is to keep it reasonable. When there are not a lot of associations, people who want to play are forced to join private clubs and have to pay high fees, even just to learn. It's a lot of money for people to come to learn something that our associations and our memberships provide for a lot less money. The city isn't in the business of intermediate and advanced play, when people want to go up a level there isn't a structure for it. We also have a real problem when people permit and pay associations and then they see come else using the public courts, there is also no policing of permits. That is not a great experience for people who permit. This didn't happen before when we had more time, we had a lot of time and we had play in different levels for everyone and free lessons. When you open up a court too much, and there isn't enough time for organized play through permits, this is what happens. Wilful advertising on the main platform is just showing that when you don't provide organized opportunities, that's what happens. You're asking the public to pay a lot of money to play on our public parks. Advertised private instruction is not meant to happen, and there is no other way to learn.

C: I would love to see permit officers spending more time monitoring our spaces that we book. There are groups who have a lot of time booked and are never there. And I know they are paying a fraction of the fees we pay.

Q: Is there really a difference in what other sports are paying? Why is that?

A: Essentially the structure is because it is a facility fee. So, the outdoor dry pads, the council approved fee for children and youth, is I believe \$0. If you have a group of children that plays ball hockey using a dry pad, they're going to permitting that space at a council approved fee which in this case is a \$0 fee. If it is an adult ball hockey group, they would pay exactly what you guys are paying. It is nothing to do with what sport it is, it's the fees structure that was set and approved by council for that particular type of facility.

C: They do not use a lot of their permitted time. I would take their unused time if I could.

Question 4: Is the formation of new clubs an important consideration?

Answers:

- There is a need for more pickleball courts that are dedicated to the sport and build for pickleball play specifically
- There is a difference between a club and an association
- Organizing teams of clubs are usually volunteering their time.
- I do believe the club model can work but it is not right if one club controls it. It needs to be organized in a way that more than one club controls it, so it is fair for all community members

Discussion:

C: There is more to come, the sport is evolving. We're all volunteers, I don't get paid to do this, and neither does anybody on my executive. We have brought thousands of people into this sport. The city will catch up with us at some point. There are more clubs and organizations to come after us, we are just paving the way. The pace is painfully slow compared to other municipalities.

Q: When you ask this question, do you mean similar to tennis clubs? What does the word 'club' mean? When I hear club it is a little different than an association, and I do feel that has whether here or another city, there has to be a situation where there are clubs for the public to play in. I don't know the city's view of long time tennis clubs, lease agreements and all that. They do serve a purpose. Over the years, tennis had membership at clubs to play tennis, and yet it is not a high end private club. I do feel the city should provide a type of facility that provide that same type of format we see in tennis. There are costs involved in all of that though.

A: I think your response is interesting and helpful. I think one of the things you are pointing out is there is a difference between a club and an association. So in the context of the tennis clubs, the way the city's tennis clubs work is that they're tied to a specific location and they have an arrangement where they are responsible for managing the membership and upkeep of the location, fundraising, and some degree of capital investment. I am trying to stay a little neutral here, but I think we're a long ways from having a critical mass of dedicated sufficient facilities where we would be thinking about that kind of club model. I am hearing there is value in being an organized group or an association that is playing a role in organizing that intermediate and advanced level of play, and bringing people together who want to be apart of a community.

C: I agree with that, but I would include beginner as well.

C: It seems logical to me that you would do the tennis club approach, working with somebody to do something like that, in pickleball spaces. Perhaps modernize the concept, but I was just thinking in terms of clubs, wouldn't it be nice if you could go and manage that space and just go participate and be a member and have this perpetual access.

Additional Miro Board Discussion:

Q: Will there be priority access for permits for not-for-profit versus for profit organizations? Is that going to be a distinction, is it currently and will it be going forward?

A: Yes, that is addressed in the permit allocation policy. Not-for-profit organizations are considered before for-profit organizations when there is demand for the same space.

Q: Would somebody who had a permit one year have priority in subsequent years?

A: The general answer is yes. We are trying to balance the interests and the needs of the community, and we're always up against the wall of doing that. It's a current feature of our procedural approach when it comes to scheduling, and it has benefits to organizations like all of yours. Where it becomes problematic is trying to figure out the balance and the use of that schedule where there is competition, where somebody wants to grow or expand. It is one of our biggest challenges in managing facilities. It's a principle that we follow and try to return people to space where they have historically permitted, but we recognize it isn't always possible.

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need time for youth, but youth can be schedule at times that are non-prime. Evening prime time, we don't have enough facilities to support that time. It is not the highest and best use of that time. I thought the city was going to put smaller courts online to be booked for individuals, not organized groups for 8 or 12 or 16 people. There is a need for people to be able to go out and book a time to play with their own family. It should be occasional, and those are best suited to the smaller courts.

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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, October 23, 2024, at 7 p.m., focusing on the supporting pickleball.

Appendix A – Agenda

Pickleball Advisory Group Meeting 4

Date: Wednesday, September 11, 2024

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

Location: Virtual Meeting (Webex)

7:00 p.m. Welcome and Introductions

7:10 p.m. Land and African Ancestral Acknowledgements

7:20 p.m. Code of Conduct

7:25 p.m. Pickleball Permits

8:00 p.m. Discussion

8:50 p.m. Updates and Announcements

8:55 p.m. Next Steps and Closing Remarks

9:00 p.m. Adjourn

Appendix B – Post Meeting Communication

To: All PAG Members

From: Pickleball@toronto.ca

Date: Friday, September 13, 2024 3:03 p.m.

Subject: PAG#4 - Follow-up Questions

Hello Pickleball Advisory Group,

Thank you for joining us this week to discuss pickleball permits.

Similar questions to those below were presented and discussed at the meeting on Wednesday evening. We wanted to invite those of you that were not able to attend to share some feedback on these questions, as they relate to pickleball permits.

Q1: Should there be a percentage of time dedicated to each type of play? (public open play, permits, and PF&R programs)

Q2: Should single court fees be proposed at the next budget cycle?

Q3: What barriers would be addressed by structuring fees differently?

Q4: Is the club model (similar to tennis*) an important consideration for pickleball?

*The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division supports Community Tennis Clubs as partners in the delivery of tennis programming across the City.

The Policy for Outdoor Community Tennis Club Operations governs the establishment, operations and dissolution of Community Tennis Clubs using City of Toronto outdoor tennis courts.

Please contact us for more information on Community Tennis Clubs if required.

Your responses will be shared with the internal project team, including the subject matter experts from our Client & Business Services branch.

Thank you,
Pickleball Advisory Group – Project Team
Parks, Forestry & Recreation
Pickleball@toronto.ca