Pickleball Pilot Study Report





healthy people healthy environment strong communities

A. SUMMARY

Over the past few years, numerous community members have reached out to Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) to request increased access to courts which support the game of pickleball. In order to assess the feasibility of meeting the pickleball demand, a pilot study was conducted. The report which follows is a brief summary of the findings from the pilot study. In summary, this report will:

- Provide background on the game of pickleball
- Describe the pilot study process
- Provide a summary of data collected during the pilot study
- Recommend next steps for supporting SPR's pickleball programming

B. INTRODUCTION

There has been an increased demand over the past few years for access to indoor and outdoor pickleball courts. In order to assess the feasibility of meeting this pickleball demand, a pilot study was initiated in early 2017. The pilot study looked at pickleball history, recreation trends, current court programming and included engagement with both tennis and pickleball advocates.

Outdoor Striping Project

As part of the pilot study, a striping project was initiated to quickly test the demand and interest in outdoor courts as well as the feasibility of tennis and pickleball being played on the same court. The striping project was implemented by dual-striping pickleball lines on outdoor tennis courts around the city. The striping project began in Summer 2017 and was completed in Fall 2017. The striping remains in place at all sites.

Before the 2017 striping project, one designated outdoor pickleball court existed within the SPR system at Maple Leaf Reservoir Park and two tennis courts (Kinnear Park and the Observatory Courts) already had dualstriping. Initially two additional sites were selected for the striping project. Following public testimony and an enthusiastic request for more sites by the pickleball community, five more courts were added as striping project sites. 11 portable nets, 48 paddles and balls were also purchased and made available at community centers close to the dual-striped courts. The striping project sites and the number of pickleball courts striped are as follows:

Location	Number of Pickleball Courts Striped	Park Maintenance District
South Park Community Center	2	Southwest
Georgetown Playfield	4	Southeast
Delridge Community Center	4	Southwest
Discovery Park	4	Central West
Miller Community Center	4	Central East
Soundview Playfield	4	Northwest
Green Lake Park (East)	2	North Central
TOTAL	24	

Pilot Striping Project Sites

Indoor Pickleball Programming

Seattle Parks and Recreation also has indoor pickleball at multiple community centers across the city. These courts have been programmed as part of Lifelong Recreation for a number of years. The establishment of free drop-in programs at community centers beginning in 2017 has led to an observable increase in attendance of drop-in pickleball. Pickleball is scheduled in many gymnasiums during both operating and non-operating hours. To maintain historic pickleball schedules, Community Centers have extended staff work schedules to monitor programs outside of operation hours without the means of recovering the cost of providing these additional hours. Beginning with the 2020 fiscal year, the Recreation Division will discontinue the practice of offering programming outside of operating hours without revenue to support Building Monitor expense.

C. BACKGROUND

History

Despite its curious name, the game of pickleball has absolutely nothing to do with pickles. Accounts vary on exactly what inspired the designation (a reference to a pickle boat or a dog named Pickles) but it's clear the name stuck.

In addition to the ambiguity surrounding the origins of the name of the game, many are unaware that pickleball started in the Seattle area. The fathers of pickleball, Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum were three Bainbridge Island dads trying to keep their children busy during the summer of 1965. They combined rules and equipment from tennis, badminton and ping pong, using a paddle for a racket and a whiffle ball, and henceforth to be known as the game of pickleball.



Since its humble beginnings in 1965, the game has been growing both nationally and internationally. In 1984, the USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) was formed to "perpetuate the growth and advancement of pickleball on a national level." The first rulebook was also published that year. By 1990, the game had spread outside of Washington and was now being played in all 50 states. In 2008, there were 420 places to play in the United

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States and Canada combined. Now, almost a decade later there are nearly 4,000 locations around the world where pickleball can be played. Additionally, the USAPA has established a grant program to assist players in creating new courts. The program has been responsible for over 1,400 new pickleball courts. Interest in pickleball has grown to support an industry of specialized equipment manufacturers and vendors, along with tournaments throughout the country where players (some sponsored) compete for cash prizes and notoriety.

Player Demographics

Although pickleball started as a family activity, the game became popular among seniors. This was evident in 2008, when pickleball was introduced as a part of the National Senior Games Champion Festival. While still highly popular with seniors, according to a 2017 Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) report there are currently 3,100,000 pickleball players of all ages. A 2016 SFIA report characterized about 63% of these players as "Casual," meaning that they play 1-7 times a year, and 37% of players being "Core," meaning that they play 8 or more times a year. Pickleball has captured the attention of younger generations which is still a small but growing demographic. The game is being taught in middle and high school with instruction branching out to the college level as well.

The common format for pickleball play (20-30 minute doubles games to 11, after which opponents rotate) encourages a social experiences. In Seattle, many pickleball games, practices and matches include people of all ages. In an effort to continue the momentum of diverse interest, association players have been providing free clinics and events targeted to expose underrepresented communities to pickleball. This includes people with disabilities who are engaging in a version of the game modified to accommodate people playing in wheelchairs <u>https://www.usapa.org/wheelchair-pickleball/</u>.



D. PILOT STUDY

Community Engagement & Pilot Methodology

The striping project was implemented by adding pickleball striping to existing tennis courts. The courts were selected based upon the following criteria:

- Equitable court distribution citywide
- Existing activity
- Preventing disruption of scheduled tennis court use
- Court condition

As part of the pickleball study SPR staff engaged with both internal and external stakeholders. Multiple meetings were held with pickleball association leadership as well as SPR recreation staff. Recommendations were solicited from national and local pickleball and tennis associations to ensure



A Dual-striped tennis/pickleball court with pickleball shown in dark blue

courts were striped according to accepted standards.

Tennis courts have been successfully converted to pickleball courts while keeping the courts within United States Tennis Association (USTA) and International Tennis Federation (ITF) regulations. By USTA and ITF rules, tennis court lines must be white. Pickleball court lines can be added in a different color, so that tennis or pickleball can be played on the same court. It recommended to paint the pickleball lines in a way supported by USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) and USTA which is less distractive to tennis players. Both the USTA and the USAPA recommend that for such "blended" courts or "dual-striped" courts, the pickleball lines be within the same color family as the court surface and stop 3" before all white playing lines.

An SPR staff member designed the pickleball court layout with the intent of maximizing the amount of pickleball courts per tennis court. SPR also purchased nets, rackets and balls that could be checked out by players at no cost from nearby community centers.

Upon launching the pilot, signage was displayed at all selected sites directing tennis and pickleball players to provide feedback on the striping. Court users were encouraged to provide feedback via email and through an online survey. SPR disseminated messaging about the pilot sites via:

- Pickleball player networks
- Tennis contacts in partnership with Amy Yee Tennis Center
- Social media

E. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Online Survey

As mentioned in Section D, an online survey was created to receive input on playability and to determine if there was any conflict with tennis use. SPR received 248 responses to the survey with approximately 10% of survey responses from individuals that play both tennis and pickleball. However, we received no responses from people that exclusively play tennis. The results from the multiple choice questions of the survey are as follows:

How do you use the court?



ANSWER CHOICES	 RESPONSES 	*
✓ I play tennis	0.00%	0
 I play pickleball 	89.52%	222
 I play both tennis and pickleball 	9.27%	23
 Other (please specify) 	Responses 1.21%	3

Which courts have you been using?

Answered: 248 Skipped: 0



*Green Lake Park refers to the courts at Green Lake Park East, north of the Green Lake Community Center parking lot.

Have you checked out any pickleball equipment?

Answered: 248 Skipped: 0



How satisfied are you with the usability of the courts?



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What would you recommend to improve usability?

In addition to the multiple-choice questions, players had the opportunity to provide comments via the survey and via email. A summary of findings from the survey, emails, and discussions with key stakeholders are as follows:

Court Locations & Scheduling:

• Pickleball courts located next to community centers were the most popular; South Park Playfield, Delridge Playfield, Miller Playfield, and Green Lake Park (East). While most pickleball activity on outdoor courts happens on a drop-in basis, the courts at preference for Miller Playfield and Green Lake Park East was also reflected in 2018 and 2019 reservation data.



- Several SPR Community Centers hold indoor pickleball drop-in hours in gyms throughout the fall, winter, and spring, but in some locations these programs are suspended for the summer. This affects pickleball players who regularly play in their neighborhoods, leaving them without a nearby location to play.
- The Green Lake East site was the most popular. Despite having only two pickleball courts, players ٠ seemed to enjoy the opportunity to socialize in this active space. In comparison, Georgetown, a less active space without nearby community center, wasn't very well used even though it had 4 courts.
- In May of 2019, SMPA arranged with SPR to reserve courts at Soundview, Green Lake East, Delridge • and Miller for weekly league and drop-in times for the summer 2019 season along with a tournament day on July 4th.

General Satisfaction:

- Most pickleball players play pickleball exclusively, with a small percentage playing both tennis and ٠ pickleball.
- Most players reported satisfaction with the courts. However, it was noted that usability could be ٠ improved with well-designed striping and improved court surfacing. Access to nets has always been an issue particularly when it comes to sharing courts with tennis players or for people who want to play and don't own nets.
- There were many comments from pickleball players requesting dedicated courts.

Equipment & Court Design:

- Court conditions, striping, and access to nets show up consistently as elements that improve usability.
- While the survey indicated that the dedicated pickleball courts at Maple Leaf Reservoir Park are relatively well-used, SPR has also received feedback that it has certain drawbacks: the wall is not often used, there's a limitation to having only two courts at the location, and the courts proximity to the walking path creates opportunity for conflict between balls, players, and walkers.

Front desk staff at community centers next to dual-



A semi-permanent net at Miller Playfield

striped courts report that checking out nets is popular (especially when the weather is good) and their check-in check-out processes runs smoothly, though SMPA representatives report that net check-out policies can vary a bit between community centers. Both players and maintenance staff have also provided positive feedback about the semipermanent nets installed at Miller Playfield and Green Lake Park East courts.

- While the community centers are also equipped with paddles for check-out, staff report that this is much less common (consistent with the findings in the online survey).
- The pilot study included a number of different arrangements of striping. Those that maintain pickleball courts in the same orientation of the tennis courts (generally north-south) seem to be preferred by pickleball players. SPR staff received reports that the pickleball lines in general could be confusing for new tennis players. In some locations (notably Green Lake East), pickleball players began to add lines with tape to expand the number of courts for use in drop-in, tournament, and league play.

Initially, some of the tapes used damaged the surfacing of and left residue on the court until SPR staff asked players to use lower-adhesive tape.

Cost and Funding:

- The cost to resurface an outdoor sports court is estimated to be between \$10,000 to \$30,000 while adding the blended lines is estimated to be between \$600 to \$800 depending on the surface and condition of the existing court.
- SPR currently has a small capital program for items such as resurfacing, replacement of large equipment, and fencing. The total budget for outdoor sports courts is approximately \$100,000 per year.
- During the course of the pilot study, SMPA was awarded a grant to add semi-permanent nets at the Green Lake Park East and Miller courts for approximately \$5,000.

F. GENERAL OUTDOOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Maintain dual-striping at existing pilot sites.

Configuration of striping may change as courts are resurfaced to better meet the needs of pickleball and tennis players and per developed standards per General Outdoor Recommendation 3. Once striping is expanded, discontinue allowance for taping on courts which risks damage from adhesives.

2. Apply the following criteria to select future dual-striped courts:

- Select locations that allow for multiple pickleball courts where possible;
- Select locations near community centers or other hubs of activity, especially centers where indoor pickleball programming is limited during the summer;
- Eliminate locations where USTA matches are held (currently Amy Yee Tennis Center and Lower Woodland Park) and prioritize courts that are not scheduled for practices or other matches
- Prioritize distribution citywide with consideration to include both geographic and historic inequities; and
- Prioritize courts where work orders for graffiti or other vandalism indicate under-utilization.

3. Develop design standards for dual-striping that:

- are consistent with USTA and USAPA standards (white for tennis, color within the same family as the court color for pickleball);
- prioritize player safety in respect to proximity of courts and orientation;
- facilitates scheduling of courts for either tennis or pickleball; and
- minimally diminishes the playability of the court for tennis.

4. Continue ongoing intradepartmental and stakeholder coordination for discussion and addressing long term planning as well as keeping in tune to the needs of the community.

Include recreation (tennis, lifelong recreation) staff, planning staff, Seattle Metropolitan Pickleball Association members. See also Indoor Recommendation 6.

- 5. Include pickleball facilities into departmental asset management planning and condition assessments.
 - Pickleball courts will be included in condition assessments with other sport courts and resurfaced/repaired based on their relative condition across the system.
 - For projects that require design, project concepts will be added to the Asset Management Plan (AMP) with other known major maintenance needs and compete for funding based on how they score per the AMP criteria (facility integrity, safety, code/legal requirements, equity, etc.).
- 6. Conduct a feasibility study for improved playability and safety at the Maple Leaf Park dedicated pickleball court.
 - The study will inform whether a project should be added to SPR's Asset Management Plan and funded based on departmental priorities.

G. SITE-SPECIFIC OUTDOOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Dual-striped Sites

Based on an evaluation of all tennis courts with multiple courts and using the recommended criteria outlined in **Section F**, the following sites listed in the table below are recommended for dual-striping:

District	Current Pickleball	Current Number Recommended New Dual-Stripe			
	Courts	of Courts*	Courts*		
NW	Soundview Playfield	4	Dittor Lako Dlaufiald		
INVV	Green Lake (East)	2	Bitter Lake Playfield		
NE	Maple Leaf (dedicated)	2	Meadowbrook Playfield		
	Kinnear Park	2			
CW	Observatory Courts	1	Magnolia Playfield		
	Discovery Park	4			
CE	Miller Park	4	Garfield Playfield		
sw	Delridge Playfield	4	Walt Hundlow Dayfield		
300	South Park Playfield	2	Walt Hundley Playfield		
SE	Georgetown Playfield	4	Rainier Playfield		
TOTAL		29			

*The number and design of future dual-striped courts will be determined per standards developed per recommendation 3 above.

For those future dual-striped courts next to community centers (Garfield, Bitter Lake, Meadowbrook, Rainier and Walt Hundley), nets, balls and at least two paddles should be made available to check out.

2. Dedicated Pickleball

The following sites are recommended to be considered for dedicated pickleball sites:

- Warren G Magnuson Park (Magnuson) tennis courts OR Ravenna Park basketball courts
 - Use of the Magnuson tennis courts is provisional until implementation of the wetland portion of the Magnuson Park Master Plan.
- Maple Leaf (improvement project for existing court)

H. GENERAL INDOOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Transition the coordination of drop-in Pickleball from Lifelong Recreation to the Community Centers that offer the program. Moving schedule responsibility to the facility will create direct coordination between staff responsible for facility scheduling and the community. There would need to be a commitment to maintain the historic schedule when possible.
- 2. Establish a consistent check-in system using Quick Cards at all facilities offering Pickleball to track attendance at existing free drop in times within operating hours.
- 3. Create the means to maintain historic Pickleball drop-in schedules and to increase access to more effectively meet the needs Pickleball players of all ages and abilities. The mechanisms to achieve this recommendation include:
 - a. Adjust Community Center operating hours to include historic Pickleball schedule;
 - b. Submit a request to the Superintendent to offer a pay-to-play Pickleball pilot program;
 - c. Offer a fee-based instructional Pickleball program where the program revenue offsets the cost of Building Monitor payroll;
 - d. Coordinate a gym rental program for the Pickleball community to determine a schedule and locations where players collectively cover the room rental rate and Building Monitor payroll.
- 4. Provide an administrative structure for programming enhanced indoor Pickleball programs to include indoor tournaments and instructional classes in select sites. Include opportunities for sponsorship from the private nonprofit and for-profit businesses to support greater diversity of programs offered.
- 5. Support the Pickleball community to employ a community endorsed method to improve the distribution and communication of scheduled drop to align with the player's ability and intent. Include using Pickleball industry best practices to adopt a standard rating scale to improve classification and distribution of varying levels play during drop in programs.
- 6. Reserve a monthly meeting time between SPR staff and representatives from the greater Pickleball community as well as members of the Seattle Metropolitan Pickleball Association for issue driven engagement. See also General Outdoor Recommendation 4.

APPENDIX A: Other Studies and Resources

- Seattle Parks and Recreation 2017 Parks and Open Space Plan <u>http://www.seattle.gov/parks/about-us/policies-and-plans/2017-parks-and-open-space-plan</u>
- <u>http://www.tennisindustrymaq.com/articles/2015/11/15 pickleball and tennis can t.html</u>
- <u>https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320301682 Importance of playing pickleball for older a dults' subjective well-being A serious leisure perspective</u>
- <u>http://www.bhpioneer.com/local_news/spearfish-city-park-basketball-tennis-courts-to-be-converted-into/article_0ff47504-d2f2-11e8-a526-ff4860944777.html</u>
- 2017 Outdoor Basketball Court Inventory; this includes the equity factors <u>GIS Mapping</u> <u>http://seattlecitygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=cf30d2368e0f47429b4c5c78</u> b8cc7efa
- <u>http://www.pickleballstation.com/</u>
- <u>https://www.mateflex.com/blog/basketball-and-pickleball/</u>
- <u>https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1857664-why-is-american-tennis-dying</u>
- <u>https://www.athleticbusiness.com/recreation/emphasis-on-youth-tennis-programming-driving-participation.html</u>
- <u>https://www.usapa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019-Pickleball-Fact-Sheet.pdf</u>

APPENDIX B: Future Dual-Striping Selection Matrix

Maintenance District	Park Name * (Court, where multiple)	Number of Courts	Tennis Practice or Match Court	Race and Social Equity Index Position	Community Center on Site	Indoor Programming Limited in Summer	Total Weighted Score for All Criteria (higher score = higher priority)
	Garfield Playfield	2	practice	Second highest	Х		3.42
	Rogers Playground	2	practice	Lowest			1.92
	Madrona Playground	2	practice	Second lowest			1.92
Central East	Montlake Playfield	2	practice	Lowest	Х		1.67
	Madison Park	2	practice	Lowest			0.67
	Volunteer Park (Lower Courts)	2	practice	Lowest			0.67
	Volunteer Park (Upper Courts)	2	practice	Lowest			0.67
	Magnolia Playfield	4	no	Second lowest	Х	-	3.58
Central West	David Rodgers Park	3	no	Lowest		Х	2.50
	Magnolia Park	2	no	Lowest			1.17
	Meadowbrook Playfield	6	match	Second highest	X	X	4.50
	Ravenna Park	2	no	Middle			2.92
	Wallingford Playfield	2	no	Lowest			2.42
Northeast	University Playground	2	no	Second highest			2.17
	Froula Playground	2	practice	Second lowest			1.92
	Bryant Neighborhood Playground	2	practice	Lowest			1.67
	Laurelhurst Playfield	4	match	Lowest	Х		1.58
	Bitter Lake Playfield	4	practice	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged	Х		2.83
.	Gilman Playground	2	practice	Second lowest			1.92
Northwest	Green Lake Park (West)	2	practice	Lowest			1.67
	Woodland Park (Upper Courts)	4	match	Lowest			0.33
	Rainier Playfield	4	match	Second highest	Х	X	4.08
	Beacon Hill Playground	2	no	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged			3.42
	Jefferson Park	4	match	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged	Х		3.33
	Rainier Beach Playfield	4	match	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged	Х		3.33
Southeast	Dearborn Park	2	no	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged			3.17
	Mount Baker Park	2	no	Second highest			2.92
	Brighton Playfield	2	practice	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged			2.67
	Sam Smith Park	2	practice	Second highest			2.42
	Hutchinson Playground	2	no	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged			2.17
	Walt Hundley Playfield	2	no	Highest priority/Most disadvantaged	Х	-	4.17
Southwest	Alki Playground	2	no	Second lowest	Х		3.42
Southwest	Hiawatha Playfield	3	practice	Second lowest	Х		3.25
-	Solstice Park	6	match	Second lowest			1.75

*Per the recommendations, this list only includes banks of multiple courts where pickleball lines don't already exist and USTA matches are not held.

APPENDIX C: Indoor Drop-In Pickleball Hours Spring 2019

GEO/Day and	Time	Level of Play	Community Center (CC)	CC Operating hours	# Hours	# Hours lost
NORTHWEST			(00)		in riours	1001
Mon	11:00 a.m1:00 p.m.	All Levels	Magnolia		2	
Tue	9:30 a.m 11:30 a.m.	All Levels	Ballard		2	
Wed	6:30 p.m 8:30 p.m. (only ½ gym)	All Levels	Ballard		2	
Tue/Fri	10:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.	Advanced	Bitter Lake		6	
Thu	6:45 p.m 8:45 p.m. (starts 4/4/19)	All Levels	Bitter Lake		2	
Thu	6:00 p.m 8:45 p.m. (starts 4/4/19)	All Levels	Green Lake		1.75	
Fri	Noon - 2:00 p.m.	All Levels	Loyal Heights		2	
Sat	11:00 a.m 2:00 p.m. (starts 4/6/19 - all	All Levels	Green Lake			
	ages welcome)				2	
NORTHEAST						
Mon/Wed	10:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.	All Levels	Ravenna-Eckstein	12:30-8:30	6	6
Mon/Fri	11:00 a.m 2:00 p.m.	All Levels	<u>Northgate</u>		6	
Tue	6:00 p.m 8:00 p.m. (starts 4/2/19)	All Levels	Northgate		2	
Tue/Thu	10:00 a.m 2:00 p.m.	Recreational	Meadowbrook		8	
Wed	11:00 a.m 1:30 p.m.	All Levels	<u>Northgate</u>		2.5	
Th	9:00 a.m Noon	All Levels	Magnuson		3	
Fri	11:30 a.m 2:00 p.m.	Intermediate/Advanced	Ravenna-Eckstein	12:30-8:30	2.5	2.5
CENTRAL						
Mon	6:00 p.m 8:45 p.m.	Intermediate/Advanced	<u>IDCC</u>		1.75	
Mon	9:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.	Recreational	Miller	12-8	4	3
Wed	11:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.	All Levels	Queen Anne		2	
Fri	9:00 a.m Noon	Recreational	Miller	12-8	3	4
SOUTHWEST						
Mon	10:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	All Levels	<u>High Point</u>		1	
Mon	6:00 p.m 7:45 p.m. (starts 4/8/19)	All Levels	<u>High Point</u>		1.75	
Mon/Wed	9:30 a.m11:30 p.m.	All Levels	<u>Delridge</u>	11-8	4	4
M/W/F	10:00 a.m 1:30 p.m.	All Levels	South Park		10.5	

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GEO/Day and Time		Level of Play	Community Center (CC)	CC Operating hours	# Hours	# Hours lost
Tue/Thu	Noon - 2:00 p.m.	All Levels	Delridge		4	
Wed	10:00 a.m Noon	All Levels	High Point		2	
Fri	10:00 a.mNoon	Recreational	<u>Hiawatha</u>	12-7	2	2
SOUTHEAST						
Mon	10:00 a.m Noon	Advanced	<u>Jefferson</u>		2	
Tue/Thu	10:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.	All Levels	Rainier		6	
Tue/Thu	10:00 a.m Noon	All Levels	Yesler		4	
Wed/Fri	10:00 a.m Noon	All Levels (55+)	Van Asselt	2-8	4	4
Times may vary during Seattle Public School breaks					101.75	25.5

Community Centers W/O gym or court stripes - Alki, Laurelhurst, Lake City

Community Centers with NO Pickleball drop in - Garfield, Rainier Beach, Montlake