

James Bay Pickleball Club Request for Dedicated Pickleball Courts City of Victoria Council Meeting

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The case for building dedicated pickleball courts in the James Bay / Fairfield community is strongly supported by the evidence:

Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the U.S. and Canada is not far behind

- The number of pickleball players increased by 40% between 2019 and 2021¹ alone and by 68% between 2015 and 2020 (from 2.5 million to 4.2 million players).²
- Locally, membership in the VRPA association grew by 33% in 12 months.

Pickleball is growing 3 times faster than tennis

- Between 2015 and 2020, pickleball participation grew by 68% while tennis grew by 20%.³

Playing pickleball yields a wide range of physical and mental health benefits that meet the City's Strategic Goal of increasing the number of people who are more active

- Those who play the game are well aware of its many benefits, not just physical health, but also the improved mental health benefits from the collegiality, social interaction, and inherent fun of the game. A recent study measuring the well-being of pickleball players before and during COVID found that those playing less pickleball were significantly more likely to report lower levels of life satisfaction during the pandemic.⁴
- Other research suggests that pickleball can enrich the lives of retirees and help them cope with the transition to retirement⁵

Pickleball is highly accessible by a wide range of people

- Pickleball has a short initial learning curve towards playability and thus can be enjoyed by almost anyone; even those who have never previously played a sport before can often keep the ball in play enough to enjoy the game. That said, there are many levels of complexity to the game that one can choose to develop and that can provide interest and challenge for years to come.
- Other than court fees, pickleball is relatively inexpensive. An initial outlay for a beginner paddle is less than \$60 and there are starter kits containing 4 paddles and 4 balls available on Amazon for as little as \$40.
- While the growth in pickleball locally has primarily been among seniors, this is not the case in the U.S. where 46% of pickleball players were under the age of 55 in 2020.⁶ To the extent that the American pickleball scene is an indication of what's to come in Canada, this suggests that the sport will continue to become more youthful and increase the demand for courts even further.

Pickleball and tennis players have been pitted against each other

- Victoria currently has 23 tennis courts and just 6 usable pickleball courts, all of which are modified tennis courts rather than dedicated pickleball courts.
- The loss of Todd Park has displaced over 1,200 hours of bookings (in 2020) onto the tennis players at Central Court.
- This make-shift approach has limited court availability for both pickleball and tennis players and means that we have been pitted against each other vying for court time. Tennis players increasingly

¹ USA Pickleball Fact and Media Sheet <https://usapickleball.org/about-us/organizational-docs/pickleball-fact-sheet/>

² Calculated from data in America's Sports & Fitness Industry Association (2021) Sports, Fitness, & Leisure Activities: Topline Participation Report <https://sportsmarketanalytics.com/getattachment/dbdf8bbf-ff09-4d41-9ac1-e529bf74aab3/PRPDF.aspx>

³ America's Sports & Fitness Industry Association (2021) Sports, Fitness, & Leisure Activities: Topline Participation Report.

⁴ Casper, Bocarro, & Lothary (2021) An examination of pickleball participation, social connections, and psychological well-being among seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic, World Leisure Journal 63(3).

⁵ Understanding pickleball as a new leisure pursuit among older adults (2018) Ryu, Yang, Kim, & Heo, Educational Gerontology: 128-138.

⁶ <https://usapickleball.org/about-us/organizational-docs/pickleball-fact-sheet/>

understand that the blame does not lie in pickleball but in the City's practice of forcing players onto their courts.

Higher and wider tennis nets are not appropriate for pickleball

- Modified tennis-to-pickleball nets reduces the height only at the very centre of the net and thus impede "dink shots," which is the essence of the game.
- Wider tennis nets preclude the ability to make shots around the ends of the court, an increasingly common practice in pickleball (called Around the Post and Ernies).

The Victoria Community is supportive of building dedicated pickleball courts

- Our petition to build dedicated courts in the Victoria received nearly 650 signatures in just over a week (supplied separately in package).
- Many petition comments included direct pleas for the Council & Mayor to 'step up' and address the shortage of courts, often referring to Victoria as lagging behind other municipalities. This sentiment is borne out with the following comparative data:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Pickleball Courts</u>
City of Victoria	92,000	6, all shared with tennis
West Shore Parks & Rec	83,000	3
North Vancouver	85,000	18
Delta Municipality	111,000	35
Vernon	40,000	12 dedicated, covered, heated
Kamloops	90,000	14, majority dedicated

- Comments on the petition and discussions with the larger population also suggest that;
 - Both pickleball and tennis players are in favour of dedicated courts since they would both benefit.
 - Non-pickleball players are also perplexed by the City's move to close Todd Park given the many mental and physical health benefits it affords to those playing the game.

Dedicated Pickleball is especially needed in the James Bay / Fairfield Communities

- Two-thirds of the total bookings at Todd Park in 2020 were for pickleball (and one-third were tennis players).
- The loss of Todd Park means that there is no pickleball available in the south of the City, including the communities of James Bay and Fairfield, two areas with the oldest populations that would benefit the most from the exercise and social well-being conferred by pickleball.
- Current court locations are not walkable for the residents of these communities.

Summary & Implications

The many benefits of pickleball to people of all ages and at all levels of athleticism is well established as is its growth. Not only is current demand unmet in the City of Victoria, but the meteorite growth in the sport strongly suggests that this gap will widen unless courts are built now.

Painting lines on tennis courts does not meet this need, makes enemies out of tennis and pickleball players, and does not permit the game of pickleball to be played as it is intended.

Dedicated pickleball courts that can be accessed on foot are needed in James Bay / Fairfield.

Beacon Hill Park Pickleball Options

After much thought, discussion, and research we have concluded that the development of courts in Beacon Hill Park is the best choice since it is walkable / bikeable for many residents of these communities, there are no (or

minimal) sounds issues, and the land is available / amenable. Though Beacon Hill Park has 3 possible sites that might be considered, as demonstrated below, Site 1 is by far the best choice since it meets the needs of sound and space (both currently and in the future) and is the least disruptive to residents and Park users.

Any of these sites would require working alongside local organizations (e.g., Friends of Beacon Hill, the Songhees Nation, James Bay Neighborhood Association).



Site 1: South West corner of the All-weather Fields along Douglas Road (#22 on Map)

This site is the most efficient and effective:

- This site is the least disruptive to the park and to neighbours--being situated back from the road with existing trees means that there would be no sound conflict.
- This site has been used for recreation in the past but is presently underutilized and therefore does not currently support the Beacon Hill Trust's aims of providing recreation.
- This is the only section of our beautiful park that is, to put it frankly, an eyesore. To the best of our knowledge, this area has looked like a gravel pit since the early 1960s when it was resurfaced.⁷
- At the same time, the field is gravel on concrete and would thus require minimal leveling and resurfacing.
- The large size of the field could also accommodate parking and there is still lots of room left to remediate the surrounding areas back to what we think might have been a meadow where the lək'wəŋən People of the Songhees Nation played games and soaked up the sun.⁸

⁷ <https://victoriaheritagefoundation.ca/HReg/JamesB/BeaconHPark.html>

⁸ <https://www.songheesnation.ca/community/l-k-ng-n-traditional-territory>

- This is the only site that could accommodate future development of additional courts.
- And it already has lighting for night-time play!

Site 2: Parks Maintenance Yard

It is our understanding that the yard is undergoing review which may bring an opportunity to fit in pickleball courts. It is unlikely, however, that this space is large enough to accommodate more than 1 or 2 courts and probably does not allow for future expansion. Furthermore, the site would likely require sound mitigation due to court proximity to Park staff.

Site 3: Un-specified grassy area west of Maintenance Buildings

This relatively unused and flat area of the park is far enough away from designated park activities that sound would not be a concern.

- Other benefits include a nearby washroom and parking.
- Since it is currently grass, however, the site would require more extensive excavation, levelling, and construction to lay a court surface.

Court Design Options and Recommendations

Number of Courts Need Now: We estimate that 6 courts would meet a current demand of roughly 300 pickleball players but that whatever is built now needs to account for future growth as the sport continues to grow in popularity among the current boomer generation and the following gen X, Y, Z, etc. In terms of land use, 6 pickleball courts equates to about 2 tennis courts.

Covered Courts: We feel that consideration should be made to designing courts that are all-weather, all-year. The addition of a cover would permit year-round play and reduce the need to develop indoor courts, which are currently not at all available in the City of Victoria.

Natural Surroundings: We envision court facilities that are embedded in natural surroundings with tall hedges running parallel to the court perimeter that would not only add aesthetic value but would assist in buffering sound and wind. An architectural rendering of this vision would aid in the community's understanding of the proposal, perhaps especially if presented alongside a picture of the site's current state.

Future Court Facility for National Tournaments: To capitalize on the growing pickleball marketplace⁹ in the long term, the Greater Victoria Region could position itself as a destination pickleball centre that can offer more outdoor play days per year than almost any other region on the country. The development of large court venue (with washroom facilities, pro shop, food services, and a minimum 12 courts) would permit tournament play and instructional camps that have the added benefit of bringing in tourism dollars.

Our request at this point is to have Council direct staff to work alongside our representatives and relevant professionals to develop a plan to build a minimum of 6 dedicated pickleball courts in the Southwest corner of Beacon Hill Park.

⁹ Pickleball is attracting sponsors and other sources of revenue. USA Pickleball has two dozen brand partners, ranging from gear-makers to an online health care market and a CBD company. Pickleball is even on the radar as a future Olympic sport; Having 70 country members with competitive players it is fast approaching the required 75 country minimum to qualify for an Olympic bid (NPR, Feb 2022).
<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/15/1080773481/as-international-participation-grows-pickleball-could-end-up-in-the-olympics>