

Corporate Report

REPORT NUMBER 363-2023-Infrastructure, Development & Operations-Engineering & Operations

DATE

PREPARED

November 14, 2023

FILE

MEETING DATE

December 4, 2023

SUBJECT

Pickleball in the south side of the City Feasibility Report

RECOMMENDATION

WITH RESPECT to Report 363-2023-Infrastructure, Development & Operations-Engineering & Operations, we recommend that Administration move forward with further detailed planning of a dedicated outdoor Pickleball Facility at Northwood Playfield Park for inclusion into a future Parks & Open Spaces Capital budget;

AND THAT Administration support the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club in applications to external funding agencies;

AND THAT Item 2023-002-CS Thunder Bay Pickleball Club be removed from the outstanding list;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The recommendations in this report support the objectives in the Strategic Plan to “Create opportunities for equitable access to affordable recreation, culture, transportation, and quality health care across the continuum.” and to “Facilitate consistent accessible programming for lively community spaces.” by creating a dedicated pickleball facility in the south side of the City.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends a preferred south side location for public outdoor pickleball facility similar to the facility provided at Boulevard Lake.

Administration reviewed the feasibility of 'member only' booking at a public facility, and the feasibility of the provision of an indoor member only facility. It is premature to pursue an indoor facility at this time. The Fit Together Recreation and Facilities Master Plan recommends such a facility would be best incorporated into one of the Recreation Hubs as it is developed. Additionally, the Pickleball Club no longer expresses an immediate need for a Dedicated Indoor Facility.

DISCUSSION

Provision of a south side of City Outdoor Public Pickleball Facility

The Park Planning process to determine a suitable location for a south side of City Pickleball facility looked at the project through a variety of criteria.

Need – respondents to the public survey clearly indicated their support for dedicated Pickleball facilities rather than shared multi-court with tennis. Residents supported duplicating the Boulevard Lake Pickleball model. In addition, Pickleball is recognized as a growing activity enjoyed by a wide range of ages, abilities and socio-economic status and most municipalities in Canada are increasing their inventory of outdoor Pickleball courts.

Geography – Currently there are no dedicated Pickleball facilities in the south side of the City; only shared ones with tennis at Westfort Playfield Park, South Neebing Park and Confederation Park. Each of these locations have challenges to their use and further development. At Westfort Playfield Park the existing courts are in the far northwest corner of the park isolated from other support facilities and not currently accessible. Confederation Park is a small neighbourhood park with no facilities and the land is partially leased from the MTO. South Neebing Park is well outside of the urban limits of the city. Ideally a dedicated Pickleball hub for the south side of the City would be in a location central to the south side of the city area and for social equity close to areas of lower socio-economic status for ease of access by public or active transportation.

Proximity - locating a new public Pickleball facility that can take advantage of existing other recreational amenities and support facilities provides multigenerational and multi-ability opportunities for families and individuals to stay active and socialize. The presence of other existing support facilities such as parking, community centre and washrooms greatly increases the useability of the site without increased cost.

Accessibility – being able to easily access the park by multimodal transportation, be that by personal automobile, public transportation or active transportation as well as once on site being able to universally access the courts complying with AODA standards.

Asset Management – evaluating existing facilities and their current life cycles and level of service, both for individual sites and system wide, to determine if renewal and/ or

expansion is justifiable or if existing facilities can be retired or repurposed to limit expansion of infrastructure requirements.

By reviewing the above criteria, the Parks & Open Spaces Section selected 3 possible Park location options for further review and public comment: Westfort Playfield, Chapples Park and Northwood Playfield Park. These three sites were then included in the survey questions on Get Involved Thunder Bay Pickleball Survey for public feedback and comment on which of the three sites residents would prefer.

Of the 185 respondents to the survey question asking to rank their preferred location, Chapples Park received an average rank of 1.68, Northwood Playfield Park 1.97 and Westfort Playfield Park 2.31. The preferred location of Administration is at Northwood Playfield Park. The rationale for preferring this location is that it offers the most convenient multi-modal access, best connected to a surrounding densely populated neighbourhood and has a higher number of other existing amenities in close proximity such as a basketball court, splash pad, playground, soccer fields, baseball diamond, large parking lot, washrooms and youth zone facility. At the Westfort Playfield Park there is an existing tennis court area that does need to be rehabilitated, however is located in an undesirable location in the park far from the other support amenities. In addition, Westfort has been designated in the Parks & Open Spaces Section Sports Field Master Plan as a possible future baseball/ softball hub and the addition of new Pickleball Courts would be premature prior to creation of a new concept plan for the park. Similarly, Chapples Park has been identified as a sports field hub, but also the site of a possible recreation hub, so also may be premature as a location. In addition, Chapples Park is also the site of the current Thunder Bay Community Tennis Centre member only courts and the perceived optics, as well as the sound generated of an open public court facility in close proximity may not be desirable.

Provision of Member Only Booking of Public Outdoor Pickleball Courts

For the 2023 season, the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club booked all four of the Boulevard Lake Dedicated Pickleball courts Monday and Wednesday 4-9pm, Friday 4-6pm and Saturday 9:30-1:30 for member only club programming. In the Get Involved Thunder Bay Pickleball Survey respondents indicated that 50.4% played outdoors most often weekdays from 8am-4pm, 23.2% weekday evenings 6:30-9pm, 11% weekday early evening 4-6:30pm, 8% weekend mornings and 3.2% weekend afternoons. Over the course of the summer there were some complaints from members of the public that some of the members only booking times were during prime playing time, especially weekday evenings from 6:30-9pm. Complainants also observed that not all courts were being utilized during the booked time, yet the public was not allowed to use them and they felt they should be allowed to. The public is often unaware that booking of the courts requires insurance and the Club is liable for participants during a booked time. When members of the Pickleball Club play during the members only booking time, they are insured through the Club, while there is a potential liability for the Club if they allowed uninsured non-members to play during that time.

The Parks & Open Space Planning Unit did undertake random observations on-site for utilization during booked time over 10 random days and found generally there were frequent times when only 2 or 3 of the 4 courts were being utilized during a booked time.

In the public response to the Get Involved Thunder Bay Pickleball Survey there were 51.5% in support and 48.5% against allowing private booking. 66.3% supported only allowing 2 of 4 courts to be booked leaving 2 courts open to the public at all times. 75.5% supported not allowing booking on certain days or times. In addition, there were several comments in the survey responses that either no times should be allowed to be booked, or it should also be open to other groups to be able to book, not just the Pickleball Club, in fairness to all. As a result of the Survey feedback, Administration is recommending continuing to trial private booking at the Boulevard Lake Courts for the 2024 season with two changes. The first, reducing the number of courts that can be booked weekday evenings from 4 to 2 keeping 2 public courts open the entire evening. For Saturday morning no change is proposed. The second change would be to allow 2 of the 4 courts to be booked by other groups Tuesday and Thursday mornings or Sunday afternoon provided they have the requisite liability insurance in place. Administration will work with the Pickleball Club to develop a schedule of member only booking times to maximize public access during peak times and minimize impact to the club programming for trial during the 2024 season at Boulevard Lake Park.

Provision of Indoor Pickleball Courts

80.2% of respondents to the Get Involved Thunder Bay Pickleball Survey indicated they play both indoor and outdoor, while 4.4% indicated they play exclusively indoor. This appears to indicate strong support for a dedicated indoor Pickleball Facility. If an indoor facility were to be built, 49.4% of respondents preferred the Delany/ Chapples area and 52.8% preferred it would be part of a shared facility.

The Thunder Bay Pickleball Club has indicated to the Parks & Open Spaces Section that they are no longer pursuing an indoor dedicated Pickleball facility at this time due to agreements in place to utilize other existing gymnasium space. In addition, in discussions with the Recreation and Culture Division an indoor Pickleball Facility would be a facility that could be part of a future south side recreation hub as identified in the Fit Together Recreation and Facilities Master Plan. This Plan is also scheduled to be updated and as such, planning for a stand alone Pickleball facility at this time would be premature.

CONSULTATION

The Parks & Open Spaces Section has met with the executive of the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club on two separate occasions on March 1 and April 24, 2023, to discuss their vision of the future of Pickleball in Thunder Bay.

The Parks & Open Spaces Section worked with the Infrastructure, Development and Operations Communications Officer to develop a public engagement survey for the Get Involved Thunder Bay on-line portal. The “Have your say on Dedicated Pickleball Courts” survey was posted November 6, 2023, and closed on November 13, 2023. In total 197 members of the public responded to the survey. The results can be found in the attachment section and have been summarized in relevant sections of this report.

The Parks & Open Spaces Section met with Recreation and Culture Division staff to discuss how both indoor and outdoor Pickleball facilities were or were not part of the Fit Together Recreation and Facilities Master Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no direct, immediate financial implications associated with this report.

The Parks & Open Spaces Section will put forward the construction of a new Pickleball facility at Northwood Park as part of a future Capital Budget utilizing the existing Parks & Open Space Section budget envelope. Currently this is not anticipated within the projected 3-year Capital Forecast, however, could be accelerated if the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club is successful in securing external funding to assist with the capital costs.

For the information of Council, the Boulevard Lake Pickleball and Tennis Facility cost was approximately \$400,000 in 2020 and features 4 Pickleball courts and 2 tennis courts.

CONCLUSION

Based on consultation with the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club and respondents to the Get Involved Thunder Bay Pickleball Survey, Administration is recommending a new dedicated Pickleball facility similar to that at Boulevard Lake be located at Northwood Playfield Park. The project is to be included in a future Parks & Open Space Section Capital Budget.

Administration will continue to work with the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club to develop a schedule of member only booking times to maximize public access during peak times while minimizing impact to the Club programming.

It is premature to pursue an indoor facility at this time. The Fit Together Recreation and Facilities Master Plan recommends such a facility would be best incorporated into one of the Recreation Hubs as it is developed. Additionally, the Pickleball Club no longer expresses an immediate need for a Dedicated Indoor Facility.

BACKGROUND

Currently the Parks & Open Spaces Section maintains a variety of outdoor public pickleball facilities in parks across the city. There are three different types of facilities:

- 1) Four Dedicated Outdoor Pickleball Courts (using permanent pickleball nets with painted lines) located at Boulevard Lake Park.
- 2) Multi-use Outdoor Tennis/Pickleball Courts (using tennis nets with both tennis AND pickleball lines) located in the following parks:
 1. Boulevard Lake – 1 court
 2. County Park – 2 courts
 3. Oliver Road – 1 court
 4. South Neebing – 2 courts
 5. Westfort Playfield – 3 courts
 6. Confederation – 1 court
- 3) One Outdoor Pickleball Lined Court (with only painted lines on asphalt - no net) located at West End Park.

During the spring of 2023 members of the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club, a not-for-profit organization, approached the Parks & Open Space Planning Unit requesting to meet to discuss the future of Pickleball in the City. Two meetings took place, the first on March 1 and the second April 24, 2023. The Club had previously worked with the Parks & Open Space Planning Unit since the completion of the Boulevard Lake dedicated Pickleball Courts to secure 'member only' court bookings for Club programming. The Club's membership had grown substantially over the previous year, and they felt there was the need in the City for more dedicated Pickleball facilities, especially in the south side of the City to accommodate demand. The Club also had aspirations for the City to be able to host major tournaments that require 6-8 courts, ideally in one location, as well as an indoor dedicated central facility as currently they play in a variety of indoor gymnasiums across the city. The desire for outdoor courts was envisioned by the Club as a partnership between the City and the Pickleball Club for half public courts and half member only courts, while for an indoor facility it was desired to be a member only facility.

At the June 6, 2023 Committee of the Whole Meeting the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club presented a deputation letting Council Members know of the Club's aspirations and the rising popularity of Pickleball. At this meeting City Council directed Administration to Report back on the feasibility of creating a Pickleball facility at Northwood Park.

To fulfill this request the Parks & Open Spaces Section engaged with the general public and pickleball players through a Get Involved Thunder Bay Pickleball Survey, had further discussions with the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club and consulted with the Recreation and Culture Division on how the future of Pickleball can be coordinated with the Fit Together Recreation and Facilities Master Plan.

November 3, 2023, the Thunder Bay Pickleball Club informed the Parks & Open Spaces Section that they no longer have immediate aspirations to create their own dedicated indoor Pickleball facility as they have secured enough indoor space for the foreseeable

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future, or their own dedicated 8 court public/ member only facility. The Club is now happy to support a City maintained facility similar to Boulevard Lake in the south side of the City and request dedicated times on the courts for Club programming.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Attachment A: Project Report – Get Involved Thunder Bay have your say on Dedicated Pickleball Courts

REPORT PREPARED BY

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REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Kerri Marshall, General Manager - Infrastructure and Operations

Date (11/23/2023)