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Town of Aurora

General Committee Report

No. CMS23-016

Subject: Pickleball Opportunities - 2023

Prepared by: Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services

Department: Community Services

Date: April 18, 2023

Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS23-016 be received; and
2. That the Sports Field and Park Use Policy be amended to reflect the proposed alternative use for dedicated outdoor pickleball courts; and
3. That Council approve OPTION 1B and OPTION 2 for implementation and to be funded from operating budget.

Executive Summary

The sport of pickleball has become the fastest growing sport in North America and is identified as one of the priorities in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update. Council recently provided direction to explore immediate opportunities that can be realized this coming summer while a long-range plan is being developed. This report summarizes some opportunities that can be implemented immediately while other options proposed will require Council direction.

- Short and long-term options will be considered with the goal of increasing pickleball opportunities within Aurora.
- An evaluation criterion was used to summarize possible pickleball options for implementation in 2023.
- There are pickleball opportunities that can be immediately implemented and managed within the operating budget for summer 2023.

- There are pickleball opportunities that can be implemented for summer 2023 but require Council direction due to a change in service level or additional funding.
- Parking lot use for temporary pickleball courts is not ideal due to either a lack of vacant sites and cost to prepare site for safe and functional use.
- Future and long-range planning has already begun and will be brought forward to Council in time for 2024 Capital budget.

Background

Short and long-term options will be considered with the goal of increasing pickleball opportunities within Aurora.

With the remarkable rise in popularity, the growth of pickleball has become unprecedented across North America. Municipalities everywhere are quickly trying to respond to the requests from the community to increase opportunities to play this social and multigenerational sport. In response, Council recently passed the following motion:

1. Now Therefore Be It Hereby Resolved That staff report back with possible creative opportunities to increase Pickleball courts for the 2023 summer season; and
2. Be It Further Resolved That staff report back with a future Pickleball development plan with recommendations and future budget considerations through the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

With the Parks and Recreation Master Plan update wrapping up over the next couple of months, the second recommendation will be addressed in time for the 2024 capital budget deliberations.

As for the first recommendation (2023 opportunities), staff have utilized comments from pickleball participants, Council input, consultant feedback, and results from other municipal experiences to guide preparation of a summary of options. Taken into consideration are the pickleball programs and facilities that the Town currently has to offer and ways that could increase pickleball opportunities.

Analysis

An evaluation criterion was used to summarize possible pickleball options for implementation in 2023

Based on feedback from pickleball participants, consultant feedback and experiences from other municipalities, staff considered the following in their assessment of options:

- Low cost – with the 2023 budget already approved/passed, staff attempted to consider options for 2023 that could be covered through operating funds or require minimal capital investment.
- Utilize existing (repurpose) assets – new assets are a larger capital investment and require a longer planning phase
- Ease of implementation – consider if the option can be achieved in time for summer 2023
- Site considerations:
 - Municipally owned land – for an immediate option, this is the best way to achieve a quick solution. Private partnerships could be considered in the long-term solutions.
 - Municipal parking lots for pop-up courts – consider site conditions, availability or disruption to other user groups.
 - Distance from residential homes – pickleball is known to be a noisy sport (racket/ball and social game)
 - Lighting – extended playing time.
 - Parking – within vicinity
 - Shade – structures or tree cover
 - Seating – for spectators or participants waiting for their turn.
 - Washrooms – within vicinity
 - Multi-court options – preference is to provide multi-court pickleball site to enhance social game and possibly a small tournament.
 - Operational use – amend sport/court use policy to accommodate pickleball style of play (i.e., add paddle rack system)
- Level of disruption of other court sports
 - tennis and pickleball could share more courts but this is not ideal for either sport, offering dedicated courts is the preference.
 - reallocate tennis courts as pickleball courts – although this benefits pickleball, it would reduce tennis service level.
- Indoor options – review current schedule, find ways to increase opportunities.

During the evaluation of each immediate option, all the above were considered to provide the most favourable approach. However, there isn't one perfect solution without building a new pickleball facility where each of these criteria could be considered effectively through the design process. Therefore, in some cases, a decision of Council is needed to either adjust a service level or add funding.

There are pickleball opportunities that can be immediately implemented and managed within the operating budget for summer 2023

The Recreation Services team quickly reviewed programming options while creatively using existing facilities during their 'downtime'. All these options can be implemented immediately without requiring Council direction.

- Additional program hours are being added to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex drop-in schedule.
- During 'ice-out' phase at the SARC and ACC, staff are adding pickleball courts to the concrete pads.
- A full schedule of availability will be issued and commence shortly.
- These additional indoor pickleball opportunities will be subject to the approved drop-in fees for such activities.
- Equipment is portable for ease of set up/takedown by staff

Where	Existing	New Additions
Town – AFLC* (3 courts)		
Beginner	24hrs/wk	
Intermediate	12hrs/wk	
Learn to Play	9hrs/wk	
Drop In (18+ or Family)	7.5hrs/wk	10.5hrs/wk
Aurora Seniors - ASC		
West McKenzie (1 court)	13hrs/wk	
AFLC (3 courts)	18hrs/wk	4.5hrs/wk
SARC* – Arena Floor - April 19-May 12 (4 courts)		
Drop In - Beginner		18hrs/wk
Drop In - Intermediate		18hrs/wk
Drop In – Advanced		18hrs/wk

ACC* – Arena Floor - May 24-July 28 (4 courts)		
Drop In - Beginner		12hrs/wk
Drop In - Intermediate		12hrs/wk
Drop In - Advanced		12hrs/wk

*AFLC – Aurora Family Leisure Complex, ASC – Aurora Seniors Centre, ACC – Aurora Community Centre

Also, staff are organizing a pickleball tournament in July at the ACC which will include three divisions (Men’s/Women’s/Mixed) resulting in 32 players per division. Details to be issued soon. There will be an entry fee per person as well as prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place. This initiative aligns with our Sport Tourism Strategy.

These additional opportunities will result in minimal operating costs for equipment which will be partially covered through the Seniors Living Centre Grant and existing operating budgets.

There are pickleball opportunities that can be implemented for summer 2023 but require Council direction due to a change in service level or additional funding.

REALLOCATE existing Courts by way of various Options

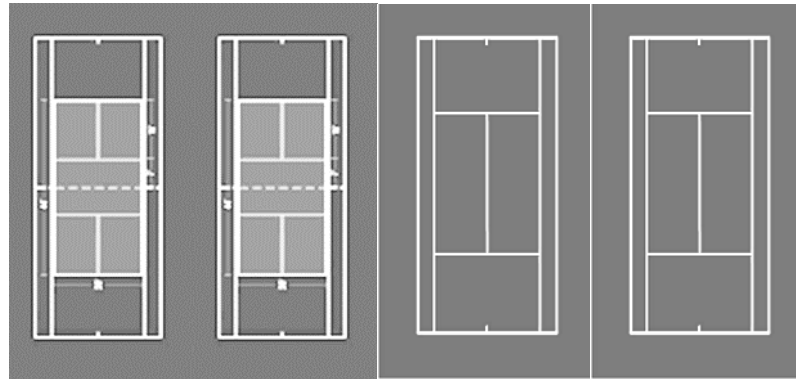
Upon review of all existing pickleball courts and tennis courts, staff considered the priorities and criteria noted above and determined that the options below are the most favourable for implementation this summer of 2023. In all cases, they require Council direction as there is a service level change and funding allocation required to complete the project.

OPTION 1A – Fleury Park – Add pickleball lines to 2 tennis courts enabling pickleball to be played at this location. Approximate cost is \$1,500 to install painted lines.

PROS > site has parking, washrooms, lights, centrally located near Aurora’s core, this would be a quick solution by adding 2 pickleball courts to the overall supply of pickleball. Increases pickleball court service level by 2 courts, while maintaining tennis court service level. With 2 of the courts regularly permitted by a Tennis provider, the 2 remaining courts will offer the least disruption to regular play for pickleball

CONS > Sharing courts is not ideal for either sport as they will need to compete for court time, tennis net height is not accurate for the game of pickleball and located near residential homes (sound of pickleball could be an issue).

Figure 1: demonstrates the addition of pickleball on 2 of the 4 courts

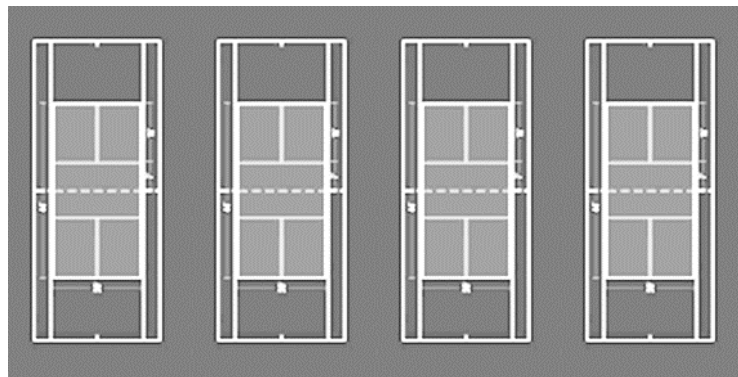


OPTION 1B – Fleury Park – Add pickleball lines to all 4 tennis courts enabling pickleball to be played at this location. Approximate cost is \$ 3,000 to install painted lines.

PROS > site has parking, washrooms, lights, centrally located near Aurora’s core, this would be a quick solution by adding up to 4 pickleball courts to the overall supply of pickleball. Larger groups could gather at one site. Increases pickleball court service level by 4 courts.

CONS > Sharing courts is not ideal for either sport as they will need to compete for court time, tennis net height is not accurate for the game of pickleball and located near residential homes (sound of pickleball could be an issue). With 2 of the courts regularly permitted by a Tennis provider, access for pickleball will be primarily on 2 of the 4 courts even though the lines are on 4 of the courts.

Figure 2: demonstrates the addition of pickleball on all 4 courts



OPTION 2 - DEDICATE COURT TIME on Norm Weller and Fleury (if Option 1A or 1B are approved to add pickleball lines).

Consider dedicated court times on shared courts (April – October):

PROS > no cost to implement other than minor cost for signage, promoting a schedule for use may help manage the competing interests assuming patrons adhere to the posted schedule. On the hour rotation could stay in place during tennis use and the paddle rack method could be in place during pickleball use.

CONS > difficult to find a schedule that suits all participants, most would want prime time and weekend spots. Therefore, promoted schedule may not always work with the participants availability.

Staff are concerned with how successful this would be as this would strictly be based on the honour system. However, it is worth implementing on a trial basis for summer 2023. Staff would recommend this revamped schedule (dedicated court times) is implemented on Fleury and Norm Weller only as a pilot for this summer.

If at any time, this becomes unmanageable or results in significant complaints, we could revert to first-come-first and remove the dedicated court times.

At this point, staff have drafted a possible schedule assuming Council approves Option 1A or 1B taking into consideration a set of 3-hour blocks alternating between Tennis and Pickleball with a mix of evenings and mornings at both locations and to avoid Norm Weller during school days due to lack of parking. Once a decision is made, staff will firm up a schedule to post at each site and initiate public communication to share the information.

All other shared tennis/pickleball courts will be on a first come-first service basis.

AMEND Sports Field and Park Use Policy

Amend section 7.19 of the Sports Field and Park Use Policy which currently states that *“Drop-in play at all tennis and/or pickleball courts shall be on a first-come-first-serve basis, with a mandatory requirement that the court(s) be vacated every hour, on the hour to allow the next person(s) in line to play.”* This format does not suit the rotation for pickleball. An amendment to this section could be:

- AMEND - “Drop-in play at all dedicated tennis ~~and/or pickle ball~~ courts shall be on a first-come-first-serve basis, with a mandatory requirement that the court(s) be vacated every hour, on the hour to allow the next person(s) in line to play.”

- ADD NEW - “Drop-in play at all dedicated pickleball courts shall be on a first-come-first-serve basis, with a mandatory requirement that the paddle method is used to allow the next player(s) in line to play.”
- ADD NEW - “Drop-in play at all shared tennis/pickleball courts shall be on a first-come-first-serve basis, utilizing the paddle method for pickleball and on the hour for tennis.”

As for the dedicated pickleball courts or courts with dedicated court time (proposed in OPTION 2), the recommended rotation includes the use of a ‘paddle rack’ method for pickleball players whereby players simply add their paddle to a rack (mounted on the fence) signifying their next in line to play. When the game is complete (usually 11 rounds), they will be rotated in to play. This paddle rack method can be added to all pickleball locations. For all tennis locations, on-the-hour method can be used.

Staff are in support of this amendment and recommend approval to implement for summer 2023. Cost of signage will be covered through operating.

Parking lot use for temporary pickleball courts is not ideal due to either a lack of vacant sites and cost to prepare site for safe and functional use.

Municipal parking lots were taken into consideration for a temporary use, however, upon review, staff have determined that there is not enough or consistent vacant municipal lots that could be removed for an entire season to accommodate pickleball courts. Often the municipal lots are required to support field and/or recreation centre uses during peak periods, suggesting that any removal of parking spaces would have a negative impact on the regular users of the facilities the parking lot serves.

It was also determined that most parking lots have been designed with a natural slope for water run-off and therefore it would be difficult to find a suitably level playing surface without significant capital investment to level the parking lot. All the Town’s parking lots are at different stages of lifespan and may not provide suitable surface conditions even if they are more level; maintenance or surface treatment is likely required at a minimum to ensure safe play.

In addition, the site would need to be lined, nets installed and for proper security/safety of the court area, perimeter fencing would need to be installed.

For these reasons, staff would not recommend using municipal parking lots for temporary pickleball courts.

If private/commercial parking lots are to be considered, this would require direction from Council for staff to investigate the options due to the nature of cost and liability.

Future and long-range planning has already begun and will be brought forward to Council in time for 2024 Capital budget.

During the discussions and evaluation of short-term options, staff have begun to identify long-range options. Much more work is needed to fully assess opportunities, determine implementation plan, confirm cost estimates, and have opportunities for additional consultation with user groups. Throughout the discussions and planning, the results of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will help guide the best solutions for both tennis and pickleball. Considerations for both sports are necessary, and a balancing of resources is also important to achieve the best results. It will be important to consult with tennis participants, especially if there are any potential permanent retrofits to existing tennis courts.

Based on the previous master plan, Parks division has already included a placeholder in the 10-year capital plan scheduled for 2024 for \$200,000 for multi-use court improvements/upgrades. This could include surface upgrades/fencing and/or repurposing.

Also, within the current 10-year capital plan, Thomas Coates pickleball courts are due for resurfacing in 2025, this will address surface/water concerns expressed by participants.

These placeholders and the long-range plan will be considered as staff work through options for the 2024 budget process.

Advisory Committee Review

Council determined that the 2023 pickleball opportunities did not need to go to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, however, the long-term plans will be shared with the Committee for their input.

Legal Considerations

None.

Financial Implications

As the above Pickleball proposals represent a nominal cost to enhance existing facilities, these costs will be covered through operating budget. Long term plans which have a financial investment will be presented at an upcoming budget for consideration.

Communications Considerations

The Town will inform the public of new pickleball opportunities in 2023, as well as future opportunities, through the Town's normal communications channels. If recommendations are approved, communication will be issued to local residents directly abutting the properties informing them of the change in service level at Norm Weller Park and Fleury Park.

Climate Change Considerations

The recommendations from this report do not impact greenhouse gas emissions or impact climate change adaptation.

Link to Strategic Plan

The proposed pickleball opportunities supports the following Strategic Plan goals and key objectives:

Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Invest in sustainable infrastructure
- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Encourage an active and healthy lifestyle
- Strengthening the fabric of our community

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

1. Council may provide further direction on Option 1B and 2.
2. Council may direct staff to consider other options.

Conclusions

With the growth of pickleball reaching incredible numbers, it is important for Aurora to work with our residents to meet the growing demand. There will certainly be long-term recommendations to support future growth but there is an immediate need to address the current state of the sport. The recommendation in this report moves the bar forward in supporting the pickleball community but there is still more work to be done.

Staff are confident that any of the Options outlined above can be implemented by the May 30, 2023, or before.

Attachments

None

Previous Reports

None

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on March 30, 2023

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer