



PICKLEBALL AND TENNIS



A SOLUTION THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF BOTH SPORTS

November 14, 2021

Tennis and Pickleball are different sports that have very different needs. A common response to the problem of inadequate pickleball facilities is to add pickleball lines to tennis courts. However, this attempted solution hasn't worked out well for either sport and has often led to on-going frustration and conflict. Tennis BC and Pickleball BC have worked collaboratively over the past year to analyze the issues, research best practices, and produce a recommendation for municipalities across the province.

Our joint recommendation is to build dedicated pickleball courts.

BACKGROUND

Pickleball has been around since 1965, but has exploded in popularity in recent years. Tennis in Canada is also experiencing tremendous growth, led by Canadian tennis players' continuing success on the world stage. The two sports have some minor similarities, but are fundamentally very different, having different court sizes, net heights, net widths, and using different balls, racquets/paddles, and scoring systems.

A *dedicated pickleball court* is a court lined exclusively for pickleball with permanent pickleball posts and a regulation pickleball net. Municipalities' recreational plans typically have a tennis court-to-population ratio. However, many BC municipalities have few, or no, dedicated pickleball courts. In communities lacking dedicated pickleball courts, pickleball is played on public tennis courts. Either the municipality has added pickleball lines to some of their public tennis courts, or the pickleball players themselves, chalk or tape their lines on public tennis courts. This has led to extreme pressure on these tennis courts, and on local governments to provide pickleball courts to meet the growing needs of the pickleball community.

WHY PICKLEBALL HUBS WORK

A *pickleball hub* is a group of dedicated pickleball courts. Pickleball is a highly social activity. Its players enjoy gathering in groups and playing lots of games with different partners and opponents. Pickleball hubs are easy to build because 8 pickleball courts have a footprint similar to that of 2 tennis courts.



Countless research findings espouse the exceptional physical and mental health benefits of racquet sports. Many BC municipalities recognize the value that a pickleball hub brings to their community. Purpose built pickleball courts with permanent nets and proper playing surfaces make playing pickleball in these communities very attractive to local and out of town players. A hub provides the opportunity for tournaments and the economic benefits they bring. Many BC communities have popular

pickleball hubs. These include (# of courts): Chemainus (6), Penticton (6), West Kelowna (12), Kelowna (12,4), Vernon (12 indoor), Cranbrook (8), Prince George (6) North Saanich (4), North Vancouver (5), Delta (8,4,3), Terrace (4), and Christina Lake (6). The critical message here is that a single hub can have a positive impact on a community.

ISSUES WITH DUAL-PURPOSE COURTS

Different Courts

Some BC municipalities have added pickleball court lines to a number of their tennis courts, expecting pickleball players to simply use the tennis net. Because a tennis net is higher than a pickleball net, pickleball players will sometimes hang heavy objects on the nets to lower them. Other players bring tools to lower the net. Tennis nets are not designed to be repeatedly lowered and raised. This practice damages the nets, significantly increasing the capital costs for municipalities to maintain these courts. A tennis net is also wider than a pickleball net. Having to play with nets that are too high and too wide would be unsatisfactory for anyone playing any sport that involves a net.

Different Sports

Tennis players usually play multiple sets, each lasting about half an hour. If others are waiting, players must limit their time on public courts to 30 minutes or one set and then wait their turn to return to the court. Pickleball games are played to 11 points, which usually takes much less time than a set of tennis. Players typically rotate on and off the court over a couple of hours. When courts are being shared by the two sports, this difference in usage has led to heated conflict, and animosity between the tennis and pickleball participants.

Municipal tennis courts have been purpose built for tennis. They are often located in urban parks in residential areas. The sound of

pickleball play is “sharper”, and travels farther, than the sound of tennis play. Also, pickleball players tend to organize games for larger groups of players than tennis players do. Thus, the proximity of tennis courts to surrounding residences, and the amount of parking provided at tennis courts, may both be inappropriate for pickleball play.



Painting pickleball lines on tennis courts creates two dissatisfied sports groups, and the resulting conflict inevitably ends up at City Hall. If the dual-purpose courts are poorly located then neighbourhood complaints also ensue. Building pickleball hubs in suitable locations, and then removing pickleball lines from tennis courts, allows both sports to be enjoyed without complaints from either group or from neighbours.

Under no circumstance are we advocating for the loss of pickleball courts. Where pickleball courts have already been added to a tennis court(s), this situation should remain until dedicated pickleball courts have been built.

ADVANTAGES OF PICKLEBALL HUBS

Pickleball BC and Tennis BC are both advocating for pickleball hubs as the best long-term solution for municipalities with large or avid pickleball communities.

- Provides a multi-court facility without requiring a large parcel of land
- Eliminates conflict with tennis players on shared courts
- Provides pickleball players with proper courts and nets
- Provides a centralized location for recreational and tournament play

- Enhances a community's appeal as a potential home or vacation destination
- Relieves the pressure on tennis courts
- Reduces or eliminates ongoing costs to repair damaged nets



Sport facilities such as tennis courts, lacrosse boxes, basketball courts, etc. are sometimes underutilized because of their condition or location. We realize that some communities may opt to build a pickleball hub by repurposing such facilities because this is easier and less expensive than building new courts from scratch. Municipalities considering this option should consult with local representatives from all the affected sports. Consultation with tennis users ensures that the municipality is aware of the demand and value of various courts for neighbourhood, league, and tournament play. As is the case for determining an appropriate location for any pickleball court or hub, neighbourhood proximity and parking concerns must be taken into consideration when repurposing another facility.

COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS

We recognize that different communities have different circumstances, needs, and means, and that not all communities will be able to build a pickleball hub. Adding pickleball lines to tennis courts is obviously better for pickleball players than having no pickleball courts at all. However, there are right and wrong ways to create and to manage dual-purpose courts. Municipalities should consult with local representatives from both sports.

SUMMARY

- Both tennis and pickleball are growing in popularity and participation.
- Pickleball is underserved, particularly with respect to dedicated courts.
- Tennis and pickleball are different sports with different needs.
- More pickleball courts are needed while minimizing the impact on tennis courts.
- Pickleball court location must account for sound and parking issues.
- When contemplating making a significant change to any municipal sport facility, municipalities should consult with local representatives from all the affected sports.

Tennis BC and Pickleball BC's joint recommendation is to:

Build Pickleball Hub(s)



For more information, or to discuss this issue, please contact:

Walter Knecht, President-Pickleball BC
walter@pickleballbc.ca

or

Mark Roberts, CEO-Tennis BC
mroberts@tennisbc.org