

## Aurora looks at interim solutions to meet growing pickleball popularity in 2024

Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in North America and likewise, Aurora has observed a significant increase in the need to service this sport.

Providing recommendations that look to support the growing sport over the next few years, the Town investigated possible alternative pickleball locations and future pickleball multi-court opportunities through a review of existing Town-owned lands.

An increase in indoor gymnasium playing time was made available beginning in September 2023.

As an interim solution, for 2024, staff intend to operate a variety of four-week mini-sessions indoors at the SARC. These will be pre-registered so staff do not need to collect admissions on-site and will run in the spring only. A staff report said that demand decreased in summer months due to the heat and players' preference to play outside.

The Town also looked at exclusive use schedules for pickleball and tennis outdoors. Pickleball court lines will be added to Fleury Park tennis courts to provide a multi-use amenity for both sports, the Sports Use Bylaw will be revised to accommodate the type of pickleball style of playing time, paddle racks will be installed at all outdoor pickleball locations, and a revised playing schedule will be created to balance out the available pickleball and tennis playing times on the shared outdoor courts at Norm Weller and Fleury Parks.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she was happy to see some of the future initiatives. She clarified that there are no parking lots for pickleballers to play on, and said it was a shame that there were no third parties that were willing to have a temporary solution.

‘I was really impressed with the Fleury Park proposal,’ she said. ‘I would actually suggest proposing an increase of courts. I think that there’s a huge amount of space there that we can accommodate.’

Councillor Gilliland noted that the space could attract many tournaments, for both local clubs and external organizations. Intermediate leagues want to place themselves appropriately and are looking for a sufficient amount of courts.

‘I can tell you just from experience, like the park in Newmarket, they have six courts there in summertime, they offer pickleball every single day when I’m there, there’s not a court that’s empty. And, in fact, they’ve now spilled over into a secondary park for overflow,’ she said.

Parks and Fleet Manager Sara Tienkamp said six courts fit sufficiently in the proposal without significant grading and works needed; however, there may still be a possibility to add courts once the facility design is completed.

Director of Community Services Robin McDougall said that the staff are looking wherever they can for voids that might be available for indoor pickleball playing.

‘Definitely heard the feedback, I’ve passed that along [to staff] regarding how we offer our leagues and our mini sessions to consider offering them more by level as well,’ said McDougall. ‘So again, I think we’ll do as best we can with the space we have available to us at this time. We are all eager for the SARC gymnasium to be open. But right now we’re dealing with a limited available time.’

To ensure that local residents are given first dibs for indoor playing spaces, McDougall said that typically residents get a week in advance to register. If spaces are still available by the end of the week, bookings then open up to non-residents.

McDougall acknowledged the suggestion to have a similar system for drop-ins as well.

?And that has been referred to staff for consideration,? she said. ?We've never really had an issue with drop-ins maxing out, so that is something that I've asked staff to consider requiring it, but it'll have to be well promoted ? it could be difficult. So, we will work toward something of that nature.?

**By Elisa Nguyen**