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Supporting the Growth of Pickleball Staff Report to Council

Report Number: 2023-18

Department(s): Recreation & Culture, Parks & Facilities Services

Author(s): Colin Service, Director, Recreation & Culture

Meeting Date: March 27, 2023

Recommendations

1. That the report entitled Supporting the Growth of Pickleball dated March 27, 2023 be received; and,
2. That the funding provided through the Shining Hill Municipal Capital Facilities Agreement for two additional tennis courts be used to construct a dedicated 12 to 14 court pickleball facility, utilizing the Lions Park Tennis Courts be approved; and,
3. That the operation of this new summer outdoor pickleball facility in partnership with a not for profit Newmarket Pickleball Club (similar to Newmarket Tennis Club) be approved; and,
4. That the resurfacing and relining strategy as outlined within the report be approved; and,
5. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to develop a long term strategy that addresses and supports the exponential growth in participation in the sport of pickleball.

Background

When the Recreation Playbook was adopted in 2015, pickleball was an emerging sport that showed signs of growth. As such, the two tennis courts at Quaker Park were converted into one of York Region's first dedicated pickleball facilities, accommodating 6 pickleball courts.

Since that time, the sport has grown exponentially. It emerged as a sport predominantly played by older adults. While the majority of players are older, the sport has grown dramatically within all age ranges. In an effort to continue responding to the demand, pickleball lines for six courts were painted on the Joe Persicini Park tennis courts, dual lining the courts for tennis and pickleball. In this model, tennis nets remain fixed and pickleball play is accommodated with the use of temporary nets that are stored at the side of the courts when not in use.

During the winter months, pickleball play has been accommodated in two manners. Pickleball lines are almost the same as badminton lines. So pickleball is regularly played in gymnasiums that are lined for badminton. This is the case in Newmarket – though it should be noted that the demand for pickleball far exceeds the time available (Newmarket only has two gymnasiums, Youth Centre and Magna Centre, in its’ inventory of programmable spaces and the Youth Centre gym is too small to affectively accommodate the sport). In addition to the indoor gymnasium space, pickleball play outdoors during the winter has also become quite popular. During the pandemic, the Town left nets in place during the winter months and volunteers emerged to keep the courts shoveled and safe for use. This has continued post pandemic.

On January 31st, a public meeting was held with the pickleball community. Feedback was gathered at the meeting, through emails, surveys and a dedicated Hey Newmarket web page post meeting. The most common piece of feedback received is that Newmarket has not kept pace with the growth of the sport and more facilities are needed. Following closely behind that feedback was that the current surface standard of courts is very low and needs upgrading.

Discussion

In order to address the growth of pickleball, a multipronged approach is necessary. When adopting an approach that is multifaceted, it is imperative that strong foundational principles are in place. Based on research and experience with the sport, and from a holistic sport development approach, the following are key principles guiding the strategy:

- There are individuals who are not interested in playing as part of an organized group or club – there will be opportunities available for these individuals to play
- Any club or organization that forms must be open and cannot refuse or restrict memberships

A Dedicated 12 to 14 Court Facility

As part of the Municipal Capital Facilities Agreement between the Town of Newmarket and Shining Hill Developments, a 12 court tennis facility was to be constructed. Due to site limitations, only 10 courts can be accommodated at the Tennis Centre at Shining Hill. Shining Hill Developments has indicated that they will provide the remaining two

courts at a location of the Town's choosing. It should be noted that two tennis courts can accommodate 6 to 8 pickleball courts.

Staff are recommending that the funding from Shining Hill Developments be allocated to conversion of Lions Park Tennis Courts to 12 to 14 court facility. It is believed that conversion of this existing space and addition of a grade beam to facilitate a bubble in future could be done more economically than construction of two new tennis courts in an undeveloped location.

Staff are recommending the Lions Park location for a variety of reasons: the facility is already lit; the Gorman Pool facility could easily be utilized as a shared clubhouse facility and includes washrooms, changerooms and a meeting room; it is located close to downtown and provides potential economic spinoffs, while creating a vibrant core that balances recreational and cultural experiences; the location is really part of a campus that includes an underutilized lawn bowling facility – there are natural synergies between the sports with capacity to further enhance both sports; there is parking on site; preliminary reviews indicate a potential bubbling of the facility in the future could be permitted.

There are two issues with Lions Courts that will need to be addressed. Staff will need to work with residents in the area should a bubble be erected in the future. As well, the community run outdoor rink would no longer be able to occupy this area – staff can work with the volunteers to further develop opportunities in Lions Park for a rink to continue operation in the future.

A Newmarket Pickleball Club

It is common for not for profit clubs to emerge to foster growth and participation in all sports. Currently the Town works with numerous organizations who offer membership based programming in Town facilities. The Newmarket Tennis Club, Newmarket Soccer Club, and various ice sport organizations have operated successfully in Newmarket, at Town of Newmarket facilities for decades. As pickleball continues to grow, a similar model of not for profit club management will serve to help the sport continue its forward trajectory.

A Newmarket Pickleball Club has recently formed in the Town of Newmarket. This club has been formed independently of the Town. Staff are recommending that the Town works collaboratively with this new club to form an inclusive and welcoming model that would then operate a newly constructed pickleball facility. This would follow the model of the Newmarket Tennis Club (summer club), a not for profit club operating a membership based club on town owned lands. Should a bubble be added in future, similar to the approach with tennis, staff would report back with a recommendation on operating the bubble or partnering with a private provider.

Post construction of a new site, all other pickleball courts would then be open access courts, again similar to our current model of tennis where there are public courts that are open access for those who want to play independent of a club system.

Court Resurfacing and Lining Strategy

The current court surface standard in Newmarket is considered to be quite low. Tennis and pickleball are generally played on a hard court surface with an asphalt or concrete base and an acrylic overlay. There are varying levels of acrylic overlay that will impact the longevity of the courts and will impact the speed in which the court plays – a light overlay will play faster than a heavier overlay. While initially more expensive, an acrylic overlay can preserve the longevity of a court, increasing the length of time between resurfacing.

In Newmarket, the majority of courts are the asphalt/concrete base with no acrylic overlay. The base with no acrylic overlay is adequate for recreational play. However, the court breaks down a bit more quickly creating small divots that can dramatically impact play, particularly in pickleball. Specifically, all tennis and pickleball courts in Newmarket are an asphalt or concrete base (less the acrylic overlay) with the exception of the Keith Davis Tennis Centre, Art Ferguson Tennis Courts and Lions Park Tennis Court. The Keith Davis Tennis Centre and the Art Ferguson Tennis courts are asphalt/concrete based with a lite acrylic overlay. The tennis courts at Lions Park are a concrete base with a plastic tile application over the concrete base. This surface was installed as a trial in new technology. It has not been popular as a surface as it plays exceptionally fast and balls skid through the court.

Moving forward, staff are recommending a surfacing strategy based on three different levels of surface: Level one – asphalt/concrete base with a medium level of acrylic overlay; Level two – asphalt/concrete base with a light level of acrylic overlay; Level three – asphalt/concrete base with no acrylic overlay. Level one would be reserved for premiere facilities: the Tennis Centre at Shining Hill and Art Ferguson Tennis Courts; and the new to be built Pickleball Centre and the Quaker Park Pickleball Courts. This would ensure that club operated tennis and pickleball centres are surfaced at top level as well as a public access site for each sport. The remaining courts will be resurfaced at level 2 or 3 with an even mix of surfaces and distribution of those surfaces across the Town. Outdoor winter pickleball will only be able to be accommodated on a level 3 surface as shoveling and salting is very hard on an acrylic overlay.

With respect to lining, the feedback was overwhelmingly conclusive – for high level play in both pickleball and tennis, dual lining courts is less desirable. As such, staff are recommending that the new pickleball facility and Quaker Park remain singularly lined for pickleball; and the Tennis Centre at Shining Hill and Art Ferguson tennis courts remain singularly lined for tennis (temporary lines can be added to indoor tennis facilities to accommodate pickleball play at specific times relatively easily). Staff are further recommending that all other public courts be dual lined for both pickleball and tennis.

There are two models of dual lining – imbedding a pickleball court within a tennis court and using the same net for both sports or painting pickleball courts on one side of a tennis court and using temporary nets for pickleball. Staff are suggesting that the vast majority of courts will be painted with pickleball lines imbedded within a tennis court and utilizing the same net for both. Joe Persicini park can continue to be lined as it is currently, with six pickleball courts and use of temporary nets. Winter pickleball can continue on one of these dual lined sites that is surfaced at a level 3 surfacing.

Staff are able to proceed with resurfacing the Quaker Park pickleball courts at a level 1 surfacing this year.

Conclusion

The sport of pickleball is experiencing exponential growth and is showing no signs of slowing down. The multifaceted approach that is proposed recognizes our real financial constraints while also creating a best in class pickleball experience.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

This approach aligns with our fiscal strategy while demonstrating a well managed and balanced approach. This approach will put Newmarket at the forefront in creating extraordinary spaces for physical activity and specifically the sport of pickleball.

Consultation

There has been extensive public consultation on this strategy as outlined in the report.

Human Resource Considerations

There are not additional human resource considerations.

Budget Impact

All recommendations around resurfacing and lining can be accomplished within the existing resurfacing programs over a period of the next few years. Development of a new pickleball facility is quite feasible with the anticipated contributions of Shining Hill Developments. However, staff will report back after further investigation.

Attachments

None

Approval

Colin Service, Director, Recreation & Culture

Rob Braid, Director, Parks & Facilities

Jeff Payne, Commissioner, Community Services

Contact

For further information, please contact Colin Service at cservice@newmarket.ca