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Update on Provision of Pickleball Staff Report to Council

Report Number: 2023-90

Department(s): Recreation & Culture Department

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

Meeting Date: December 4, 2023

Recommendations

1. That the report entitled Update on Provision of Pickleball dated December 4th, 2023 be received; and,
2. That the designated mini soccer field located in the northern section of George Richardson Park be approved as the site of a new pickleball facility; and,
3. That Staff be authorized to undertake design and costing for this new pickleball facility with project scope to include 14 to 20 pickleball courts, a scalable clubhouse and a provision for bubbling be approved; and,
4. That the bubbled facility operating plan included in this report be approved in principle; and,
5. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

Purpose

On March 27th, 2023, Council was presented with a report entitled “Supporting the Growth of Pickleball”. The purpose of this report is to provide further recommendations after more research has been completed by staff.

Background

Like all communities across North America, the Town of Newmarket has seen tremendous growth and interest in the sport of Pickleball. It continues to be the fastest growing sport in North America.

In order to address this exponential growth, the March 27, 2023 report recommended the development of a 12 to 14 court facility at Lions Park, recognizing that this size of facility would be an interim measure to meet the anticipated level of growth. Further, it was recommended that the Lions Tennis Courts be converted to accommodate this facility. Staff have worked with an external vendor to review the site. Upon further exploration, there are a number of challenges identified for this particular site:

- The existing tennis courts can only accommodate a maximum of 10 pickleball courts.
- Given the size of the site with existing run out spaces and sloping of a bubble, any potential future bubble would only accommodate a maximum of 6 pickleball courts when bubbled.
- The existing parking lot serves as an overflow for downtown parking demands. That coupled with heavy use of the parking lot for by pool users during the summer would necessitate an expansion of the parking lot. This is not possible given the location within the flood plain and the extensive wet ground in the area.

As well, the conversion of the Lions Tennis Courts only represented an interim measure to address the growth of pickleball. Given the challenges of that site, staff explored a variety of options for the development of a facility that would offer greater flexibility to address the growth of the sport.

Discussion

Staff explored a variety of site options for the development of a new pickleball site. The following criteria shaped the exploration of potential sites:

- Ability to accommodate 14 to 20 courts with the capacity to bubble all of them during winter months.
- Achieve the highest number of courts we can within the range (14 to 20) based on site, design, bubbling, and funding considerations.
- Distribution of recreation facilities throughout the Town.
- Potential displacement of other recreational facilities or amenities.
- Consideration of proximity to residences and buffering of the site
- Parking capacity.

After detailed analysis and exploration of sites, there is one clear site that can effectively meet the criteria.

Pickleball Facility at George Richardson Park

Staff are recommending the construction of an unlit facility containing between 14 to 20 courts, located at the north end of George Richardson Park on one of the current mini soccer fields. This would also include a scalable clubhouse facility with changerooms/washrooms and the highest number of courts we can within the range (14

to 20 courts). Attached on **Appendix A** is a draft site plan of what a 20 court facility (the maximum) could look like on that field. This site meets the criteria as follow:

- It can accommodate up to 20 bubbled courts.
- It places a premiere facility in a ward with fewer recreational amenities.
- It represents the loss of a mini soccer field. Staff believe this loss can be addressed through partnership opportunities with school boards and/or the development of new field elsewhere.
- There is an existing well-established buffer of mature trees and a sizable earthen berm between the site and the closest residents.
- There is ample parking to address day-time use. There will be challenges with evening parking – but there is room to address with future parking at the site if needed.

Preliminary discussions have been held with the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and they have provided assurances that a pickleball facility (and bubble), and a clubhouse could be constructed at this site.

It is anticipated that construction of a facility of this magnitude will cost between \$3.5 Million and \$5.5 Million (including the cost of a bubble). This will be funded through recreation related development charges. Scope and costing to be better defined with the securing professional services to complete a fulsome detailed design/costing and potentially build. In the new year a 10 to 15 year plan for recreation capital projects and corresponding funding sources will be presented to Council. This facility will be factored within that plan.

Bubbling The Pickleball Facility

There is a strong business case for bubbling this facility for an extended fall/winter season from Sept 1st until April 30th. It should be noted that a bubble would contain its own lights. The following table represents the net operating surplus that could be realized through a town operated bubbled facility.

Anticipated Annual Operating Surplus

Revenue Type	Annual Projected Rev.	Details to Note
Memberships	\$112,000	Approximately 750 members anticipated (mixture of different categories)
Court Rentals	\$100,000	Assumption that courts are booked or programmed 85% of the time
Lessons/Clinics	\$125,000	Predominantly driven by introductory courses and one day clinics.

Leagues/Programs	\$265,000	Assumes drop in fees with sessions accommodating up 100 people at a time.
Tournaments	\$150,000	This will have the potential to be a premiere venue for tournaments.
TOTAL REVENUE	\$750,000	
Expense Type	Annual Projected Exp.	Details to Note
Staffing	\$300,000	Includes a variety of part time staff including instructors, facility workers and front desk
Utilities	\$80,000	\$10,000 per month, 8 month operation. Based on other bubble comparators
Annual bubble installation/tear down and storage	\$60,000	Based on precedent with tennis bubbles
Bubble Repayment	\$50,000	Based on 20 year life of bubble costing \$1 Million
Supplies	\$100,000	Cleaning supplies and program supplies
Annual Repairs & Maintenance	\$75,000	General provision
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$665,000	
TOTAL ANNUAL SURPLUS	\$85,000	

Given the likely potential to generate operating surplus generated through the operation of an eight month per year bubble, it is recommended that a bubble be included with the initial capital construction.

Casual Pickleball Play

In the report to Council on March 27, 2023, a strategy was presented to address play opportunities for those who were looking for a more casual experience or were not interested in joining a club. The addition of this facility will not impact that previously approved strategy. Specifically, this strategy highlighted a single purpose set of pickleball courts at Quaker Park and dual lining of a variety of tennis courts throughout Newmarket.

Key Milestones & Timing

Should Council approve this project, staff would immediately work to secure an architect/project manager to oversee final design, costing and construction project management. It is expected that a design can be completed, and construction can begin in 2024. Ideally, this would lead to an opening in time for the fall of 2025.

Conclusion

The sport of pickleball is experiencing continued growth and is showing no signs of slowing down. The Town has developed a multifaceted approach that has included resurfacing some existing courts, and dual lining a variety of tennis courts. Developing a premiere facility of this nature would put Newmarket at the forefront of communities capable of hosting tournaments. This is an excellent opportunity for sport tourism that would bring broader economic benefit to the community.

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

Staff continue to connect with various members of the pickleball community and have been working closely with leadership of the Newmarket Pickleball Club to ensure that recommendations align with resident and player experiences.

Once the draft design is completed, there will be a meeting to seek feedback from the area residents and the pickleball community.

Human Resource Considerations

This has been addressed within the proposed operating model.

Budget Impact

This has been explored through the Discussions section of the report.

Attachments

Appendix A – Court Layout at George Richardson Park

Approval

Colin Service, Director, Recreation & Culture

Jeff Payne, Commissioner, Community Services

Contact

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