



# Seattle Pickleball

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WEDNESDAY APRIL 12,  
2023



# Today's Agenda

- Meeting Goals & Desired outcome
- Introductions and about SMPA
- The growth of pickleball is not slowing down
- Seattle's pickleball hotbeds
- Pickleball "Hubs"
  - What is a hub?
  - The case for Green Lake
- The case for dedicated courts
- Legacy policies and practices vs rapidly changing community needs
- Discussion & Next Steps







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## Meeting Goal and Desired Outcome

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### **Meeting Goal:**

To demonstrate to SPR that the community is speaking through its actions and to convince SPR that it is in its own best interest to change how pickleball decisions and policies are being made and that they must be decoupled from tennis

### **Desired Outcome:**

Mr. Diaz will agree to appoint or hire a pickleball “expert” to include in all internal SPR meetings related to policies and resource management that affect the pickleball community to offset legacy tennis bias



SMPA is a 501c(3) non-profit created in 2016 to support pickleball in the Seattle area and is focused on four key areas:

#### GROW THE SPORT

- Supported the effort to make Pickleball the State Sport, and recently introduced a WA pickleball license plate to be voted this year by legislation
- Sponsors of the Westside Pickleball League, raising money for school athletic facilities

#### ENGAGE WITH GOV'T AND PARKS DEPARTMENTS

- Worked with SPR on the 2017 pickleball pilot, and the 2022 Outdoor pickleball study
- Secured grants and community funding for 36 semi-permanent nets placed in Seattle parks
- Member of a RCO COAFF technical work group developing grant policy for the construction and maintenance of outdoor athletic facilities statewide

#### ENABLE PLAY

- Organizers of Washington's largest outdoor pickleball tournament - The Seattle Metro Classic
- Sponsors of the Diversity and Inclusion Fund, a volunteer outreach program designed to foster improved access to pickleball instruction and play
- Empower members to run free clinics, leagues, and tournaments

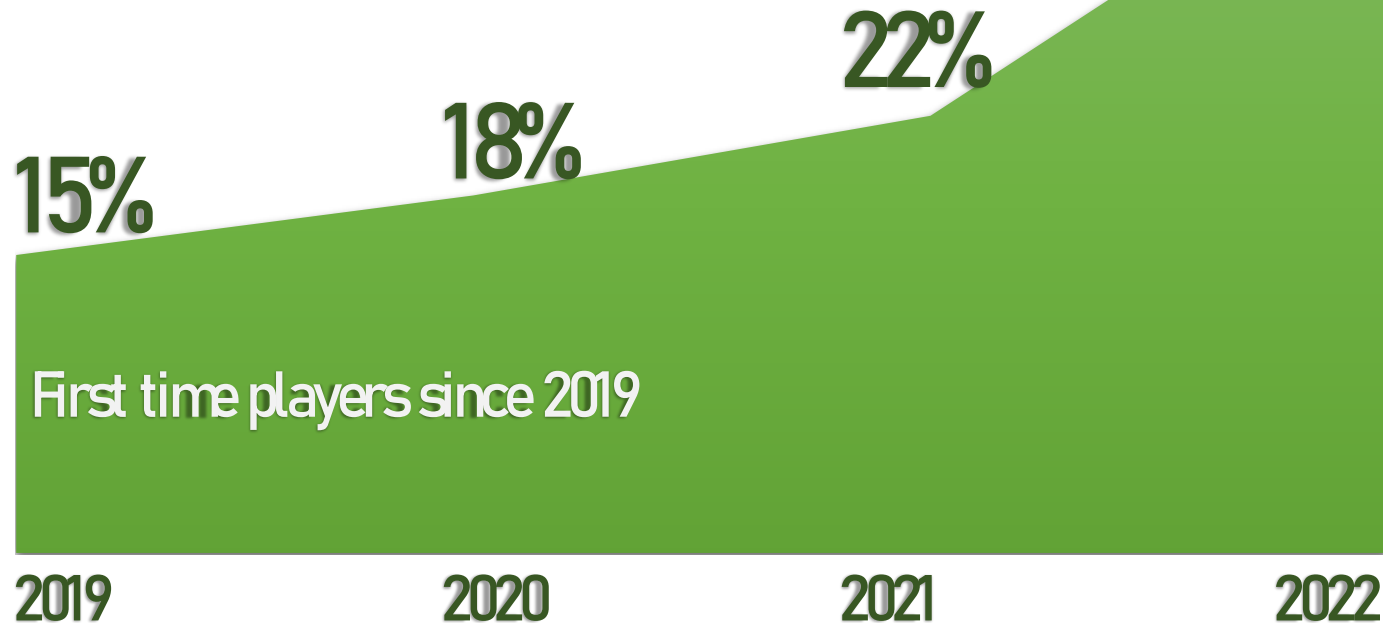
#### BUILD COURTS

- Led the effort for Laurelhurst and Lakeridge community-built courts

# Pickleball growth is not slowing down

# 36.5M

People played at least once in the last year



First time players since 2019

**8.5M** Played at least 8 times last year

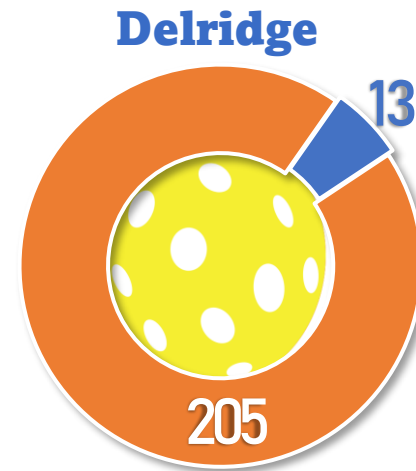
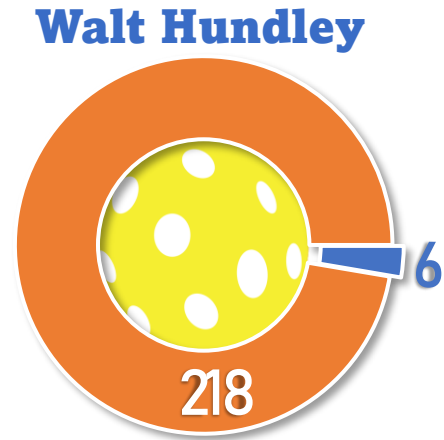
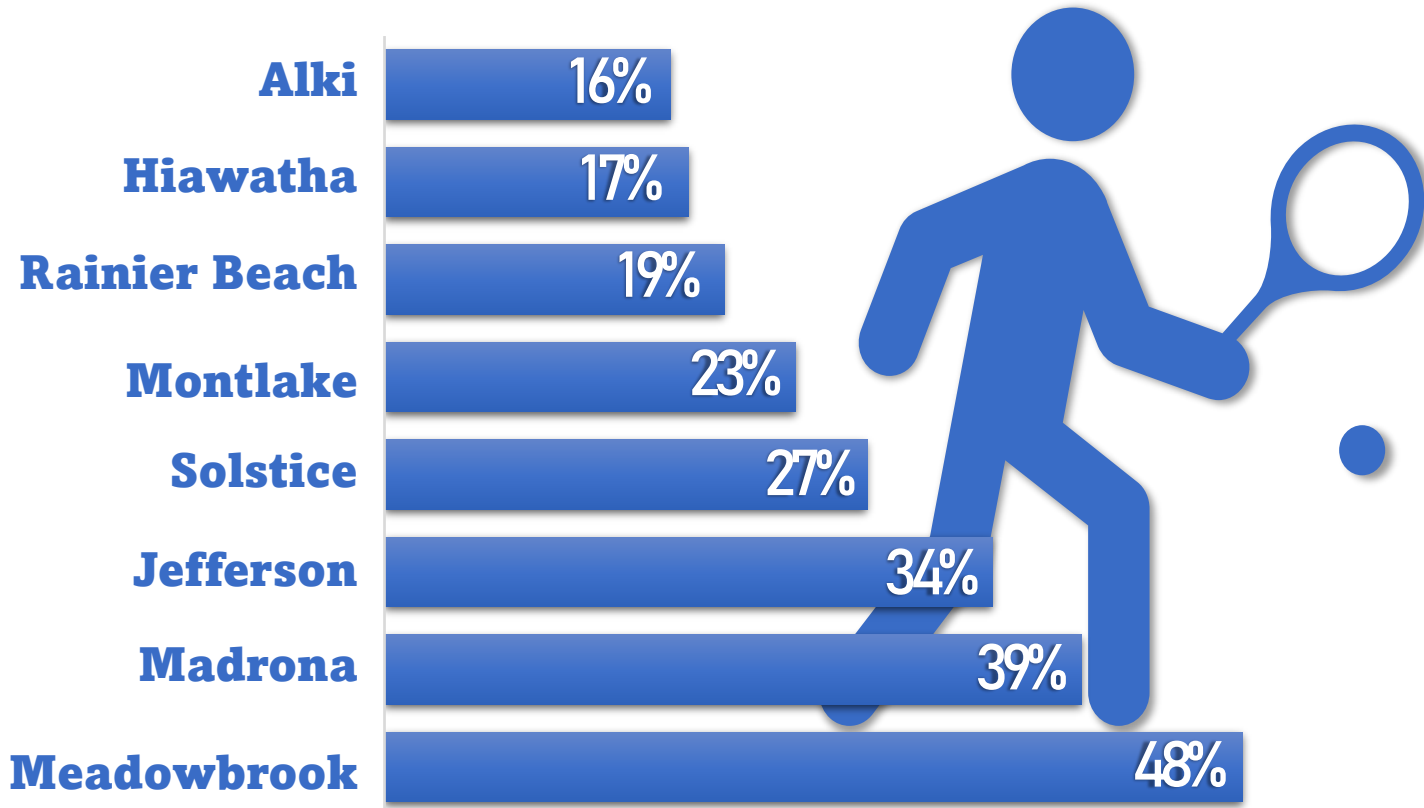
**95%** Plan to keep playing in the next year

**45%** Plan to increase how often they play

**1 in 4** Have trouble finding a place to play

**1 in 3** Have had tennis players get angry that they play on tennis courts

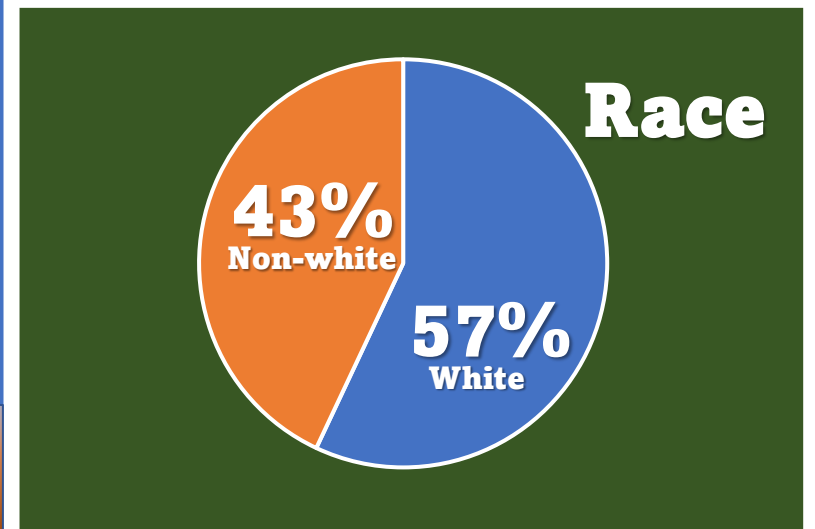
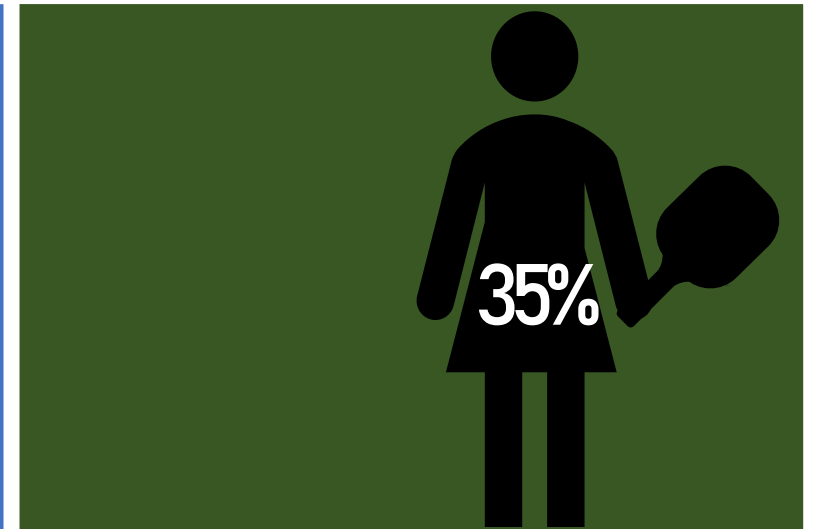
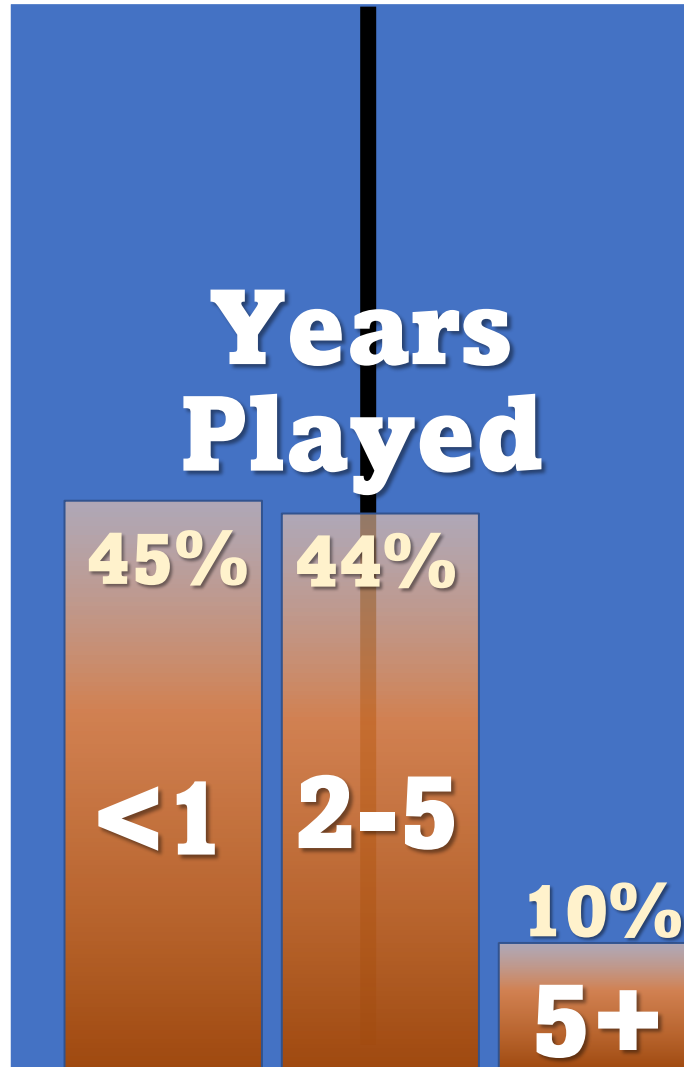
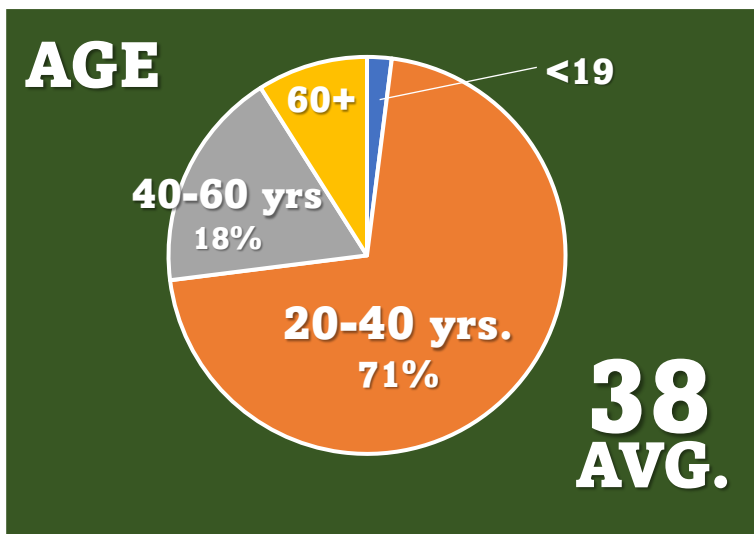
# SPR courts are underutilized by tennis, oversaturated by pickleball



**Pickleball** Tennis  
**PLAYER COUNT**

A May 2022 study showed tennis-only courts being used on average less than 30% of the time. While courts lined for both sports increased to greater than 60% utilization, overwhelmingly by pickleball players (96%).

# What do pickleball players look like? Everyone.







# Seattle's Pickleball Hotbeds

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THE MOST POPULAR PLACES TO PLAY IN SEATTLE



# West Seattle Walt Hundley & Delridge

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- Both locations utilized 7 days a week, frequently from early morning to dusk
- Pickleball represents 96% utilization of court usage (Survey, May 2022)
- Often twice as many players waiting to play than the 16 players on the 4 courts
- Request for higher court density denied
- Request for high-contrast pickleball lines repeatedly denied
- Wide range of players mixing socially, inspired formation of the Westside Pickleball League, which has generated a real sense of community





# Miller Playfield

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- Pickleball played every day, all day
- 4 community-provided nets on site
- Pilot site for high-contrast pickleball lines (but only after many emails)
- New LED-lighted courts
- Repeatedly denied request for court ratio greater than 2:1
- Request to be named a “hub” has been denied
- One of the few locations with an official SPR drop-in pickleball program. (MWF 10a-12p)







# Rainier Beach Playfield

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- Best courts in South Seattle
- LED-Lighted courts, lines for 8 pickleball courts since fall 2022
- No pickleball nets, players are expected to buy, bring, and set up their own nets, making the game less accessible
- Low contrast lines
- Far from community centers with an active pickleball community
- Site of first Diversity and Inclusion in Pickleball (DIIP) event



# Bitter Lake Park

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- Can find pickleball played here 7 days a week. Popular with players of all ages and skill level
- 4 community-provided semi-permanent nets. Players required to buy, bring, and set up portable nets for other 4 courts.
- 8 pickleball courts on 4 lighted tennis courts
- Underutilized space due to SPR's 2:1 ratio policy, courts are often maxed out on nice weather evenings
- Blue pickleball lines are barely visible. Requests for high-contrast lines were denied
- Courts often used for SMPA clinics, round robins and holiday play





# Green Lake East

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- Most popular venue in Seattle – As many as 100 players sharing 6 city-lined courts
- Community tapes off 2 extra courts to make 8 total
- No nets purchased by SPR, community-purchased 6 semi-permanent nets
- Reservation revenue overwhelmingly pickleball
- Drop-in use is 95% pickleball
- Requests for denser configuration of pickleball courts repeatedly denied
- Request for high-contrast pickleball lines repeatedly denied
- Request to be named a pickleball “hub” has been delayed for months
- 23 tennis courts within 1.4 miles



# Green Lake East

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*“The scene [at Green Lake East] felt open and democratic .... A 60-year-old woman held her own against a muscular 20-something. A fourth grader was just learning the ropes ... The racial and age diversity of the people playing pickleball felt refreshingly cool for a part of the city with a mostly white population and teeming with youthful tech workers.” (NY Times, Kurt Streeter, August 2022)*





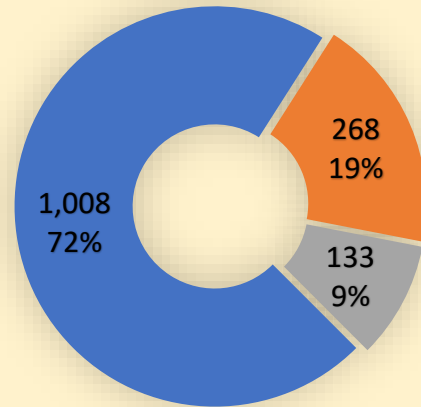
A photograph of two women on a pickleball court. The woman on the left is older, with short white hair, wearing a white polo shirt with a green and white striped towel draped over her shoulder. She is smiling and looking towards the younger woman. The woman on the right is younger, wearing a white visor and a dark tank top, also smiling and clinking a clear plastic cup with the older woman's cup. The background shows a chain-link fence and green foliage under bright sunlight.

# Pickleball “Hub”

The case for Green Lake and other potential locations

# Green Lake: The Community's Hub

## Green Lake Reservation Hours



Pickleball



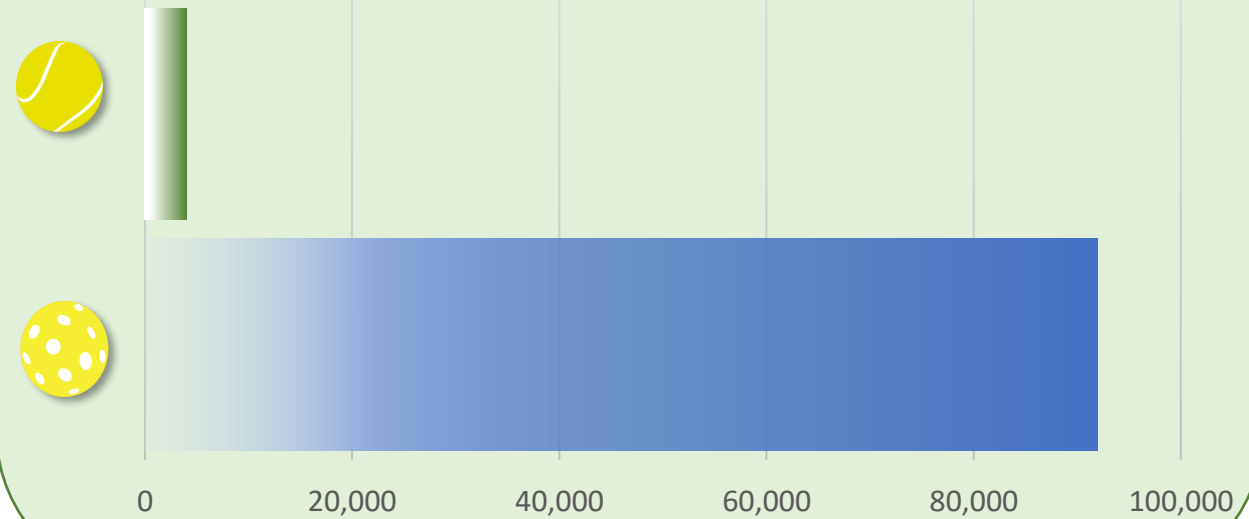
Blanchet H.S. Tennis



Other Tennis



## ESTIMATED TAX-PAYER COURT HOURS AT GREEN LAKE





# Green Lake “Hub” concept

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## General philosophy

- Facility accepted as “home” to pickleball players
- Shared facility (with tennis), but pickleball community has priority

## Pickleball “Hub” at Green Lake East

- Dual-lined for three tennis and eight (or ten) pickleball courts
- Court reservations: pickleball only for general public; schools and youth groups ok for tennis or pickleball
- Court use guidelines clearly posted at court and on SPR’s website





# Green Lake: Next steps

- SPR makes a decision, based on the merits of our argument, to designating Green Lake East a “Pickleball Hub.”
- If “go”
  - SPR meets with GLP and SMPA to craft “Pickleball Hub” court guidelines
  - SPR budgets for court relining ... or asks GLP for funding
  - White lines for three tennis courts
  - Orange (or other highly contrasting color) for eight to ten PB courts: See interactive courts configuration diagrams [here](#).
  - Timing: mid-May, immediately following Blanchet High School’s tennis season
  - SPR posts new court-use guidelines at the court and on its website

**Requested action by Mr. Diaz:** Schedule a follow-up meeting with representatives of the Green Lake Pickleball community to determine if GLE should be designated a “Pickleball Hub.”





# Other Potential Hubs

## West

- Solstice (Scheduled for resurface in 2023)
- Walt Hundley

## North

- Bitter Lake
- (Green Lake)

## Center

- Miller
- Mount Baker

## South

- Beacon Hill
- Rainier Beach





# The Case for Dedicated Courts





# 3 dedicated courts in Seattle

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- Maple Leaf Park
    - Oriented incorrectly
    - Adjacent to a walking path that infringes on play and is not safe
    - Not enough room behind the baselines
  - Laurelhurst Park
    - Repurposed with community-funds
    - Single court, cannot accommodate groups of players
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# Pickleball tournaments. A Big Dill

## Seattle Metro Classic:

- Largest outdoor tournament in Washington
- Began in 2018: 1-day, 4 courts, 32 players
- 2023 tournament: 5 days, 18 courts, 650 players. “sold out” in 3 days
- Age range, 12 – 84 years old
- National draw, attracting players from 19 states and 2 countries
- Held in Shoreline, WA since 2019
- [Promotional Video](#)

## National tournaments Seattle could attract:

- PPA Tour – Seattle Open scheduled without secured venue
- APP Tour – No tournament stop in the PNW
- USAP NW Regional – Annual tournament, draws thousands of players. Currently floats from city to city
- MLP – Professional pickleball league





## Support Active Lifestyles and a Culture of Community

- No outdoor recreational sport can engage more participants in less space
- 8-12 courts for regular rec play, more needed for tournaments
- Wide walkways/alleys between sets of courts to gather and socialize
- Lighted courts for short winter days, picklers are not picky about temperature, they'll play in cold weather
- Some covered courts for rainy days. It's a challenge finding indoor/dry places to play during wet winter months. Most indoor places are private clubs or charge \$15/hour/person to play



Mazano Mesa Courts, Albuquerque, NM



# Case Study: Sawyer Point Park in Cincinnati, Ohio

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- Converted tennis courts
  - 18 pickleball courts, 3 tennis courts
  - 24 pickleball courts available for tournaments
  - APP tour event in May 2023 expected to have a \$2-3 million economic impact to Cincinnati\*
  - Funded with city capital dollars, \$72K in community donations, and the Cincinnati Parks Foundation
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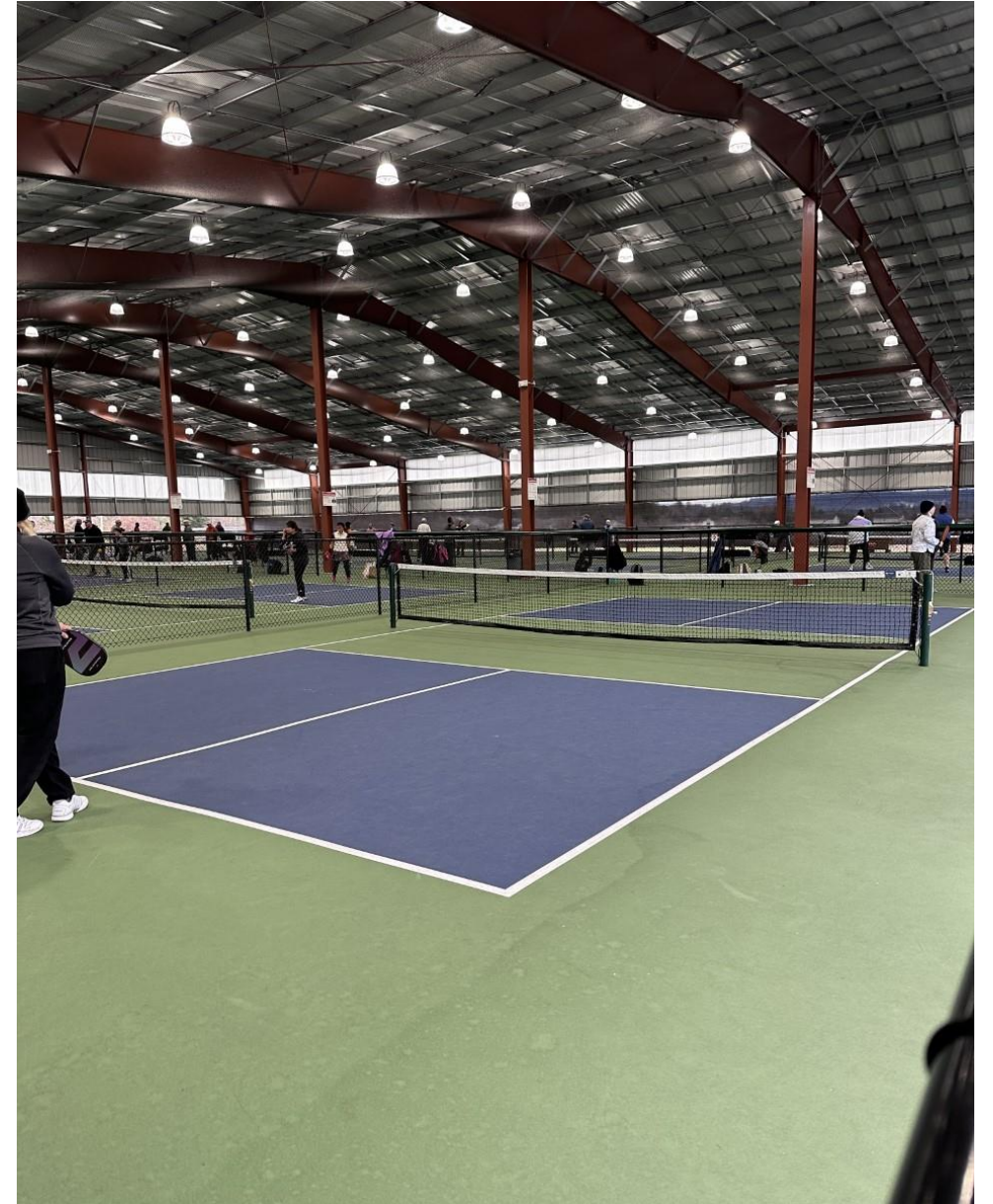






Case Study:  
Blackburn  
Pickleball  
Pavilion, Mt  
Vernon, WA

- 10 covered, lighted courts
- \$1.7M to build
- Facility is managed and maintained by Skagit Valley Pickleball club
- Can expand to 28 courts by using adjacent tennis courts



# Magnuson Park Project

- SMPA supports this site location and other sites designated for dedicated pickleball courts
- SMPA recommends a 24-court layout at Magnuson with room to temporarily expand for larger tournaments
- Stuart Silk Architects has agreed to donate time for initial design work

## Concept site: Magnuson Park

- The Concept Plan illustrates a total of 14 courts, arranged in groups of 3, allowing for a logical and flexible competitive hierarchy to be established for both day-to-day drop-in use and organized tournaments.
- A large, central gathering space and restroom provides a welcoming and convenient social experience for drop-in use and greeting/check-in space for tournaments.
- The total cost of development of this facility, as shown, is estimated at approximately **\$7,800,000**.

Note: These concepts and associated cost estimates were developed to provide a high-level understanding of what a full-suite complex might include and



*SPR's Magnuson Park Concept*

**Requested action by Mr. Diaz:** Form a task force with SPR & SMPA to apply for 2023 COAFF grants and secure community donations to help fund this project





# Legacy Policies and Practices

HOW TENNIS-BIAS HAS PREVENTED SPR  
FROM MEETING THE CHANGING NEEDS  
OF ITS COMMUNITY

- ❖ Pickleball lacks a voice in decision-making
- ❖ Many SPR decisions conflict with pickleball culture
- ❖ Many of SPR's practices and decisions have a tennis-bias

# Legacy Policies and Practices: Pickleball lacks a voice in decision-making

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- SPR's current approach to making decisions involving pickleball play on tennis courts ignores the rapidly changing needs of the community and is reflective of a misguided belief that the tennis and pickleball communities are more similar than dissimilar.
- Currently, deliberations are handled in closed committee sessions which include at least one tennis organization member but no member tending solely to the interests of the pickleball community.
- As a result, pickleball issues and requests are being handled merely as matters affecting tennis, and not as opportunities to enhance pickleball and its growing community across the city.

**Requested action by Mr. Diaz:** Appoint or hire an individual with experience in the sport to tend solely to the challenges and opportunities facing SPR due to the pickleball explosion. This person would represent the pickleball community and participate in internal committee meetings involving policy and resources.



# Legacy Policies and Practices: Many SPR decisions conflict with pickleball culture

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## **Pickleball's Open-play Culture**

Pickleball culture favors open play where large groups of players get together at one location with many courts available over many hours. Players rotate on and off the courts after each game and socialize while waiting. By design, the “drop-in” pickleball culture favors inclusivity and community building across races, ethnicities, social status, ages and other classes.

## **How SPR legacy policy conflicts with pickleball culture**

SPR's current policies and court etiquette guidelines are tennis-centric, built around the assumption that two to four people will be occupying a single court for a specific amount of time. This clashes with pickleball culture.

SPR's current policy to adhere to a 2:1 court ratio arbitrarily and unnecessarily limits capacity for larger groups and puts more strain on SPR resources. It also inadvertently reduces the amount of exercise player's get per session by creating longer wait times between games. This policy is in direct conflict with how the community is demonstrating how they wish to use public resources.

**Requested action by Mr. Diaz:** Revisit legacy policies and guidelines that subvert pickleball culture in favor of tennis culture and are outdated based on current, and growing, utilization of public resources. Specifically, abolish the 2:1 court ratio that is unnecessarily limiting pickleball capacity on overcrowded public courts. Adopt the use of high-contrast lines. Pilot Green Lake and Solstice Park this summer.

# Legacy Policies and Practices:

## Many of SPR's practices and decisions have a tennis-bias

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- SPR's Park District budget is \$14M for tennis but only \$1.9M for pickleball. This ignores data that shows pickleball growth outpaces tennis by far and the budget requirements needed for SPR to meet the increasing demand from the pickleball community for more places to play.
- SPR has targeted tennis courts deemed "undesirable" by tennis players for conversion to pickleball. This ignores the many factors that make these courts undesirable in the first place and assumes pickleball players will be happy just to have courts.
- SPR's policy against high-contrast pickleball lines in order to not "confuse tennis players" is unfair to pickleball players, especially older players and players with color vision deficiency.
- The court reservation system is outdated, tennis-centric, and has an illogical influence on court ratio. SPR has argued in the past that the 2:1 ratio is needed because that's how the reservation software works. Software should not determine SPR policy.
- SPR does not budget for nets when adding pickleball lines to tennis courts.
- SPR's reservation website does not inform users that a court reservation does not include a pickleball net.

**Requested action by Mr. Diaz:** Better balance tennis and pickleball needs in SPR's budget to be more in line with growing public demand, form a pickleball committee to accelerate adoption of new policies and practices that can help SPR catch up, and keep up, with the growth of pickleball.



# Summary of Requested Actions

Appoint or hire an individual with experience in the sport to tend solely to the challenges and opportunities facing SPR due to the pickleball explosion. This person would represent the pickleball community and participate in internal committee meetings involving policy and resources.

Revisit legacy policies and guidelines that subvert pickleball culture in favor of tennis culture and are outdated based on current, and growing, utilization of public resources. Specifically, abolish the 2:1 court ratio that is unnecessarily limiting pickleball capacity on overcrowded public courts. Adopt the use of high-contrast lines. Pilot Green Lake and Solstice Park this summer.

Better balance tennis and pickleball needs in SPR's budget to be more in line with growing public demand, form a pickleball committee to accelerate adoption of new policies and practices that can help SPR catch up, and keep up, with the growth of pickleball.

Form a task force with SPR & SMPA to apply for 2023 COAFF grants and secure community donations to help fund this project.

Schedule a follow-up meeting with representatives of the Green Lake Pickleball community to determine if GLE should be designated a "Pickleball Hub."





# Discussion



THANK YOU!

