

TO: CITY OF PALO ALTO PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

FROM: ADAM HOWARD DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

DATE: SEPTEMBER 27, 2022

SUBJECT: COURT USAGE AND JOINT USE COURTS

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) discuss and provide feedback on the policy options for joint use courts.

BACKGROUND (Please reference attached map for Mitchell Park court layout)

The City of Palo Alto has seen an increase in the number of pickleball players and requests for pickleball space. Pickleball in Palo Alto started organically. A group of pickleball players began using Mitchell Park Tennis Courts 5, 6, and 7 on a first-come first-served basis, which was not supported by the City's court policy, but was also not creating many issues. Staff continued to see an increase in pickleball play and felt it was important to address the growing demand for pickleball space. Over the last four years there have been multiple changes to policy and park space to allow for more pickleball play.

- 2018- Policy was updated to allow pickleball to use on Mitchell Park Courts 5,6, and 7 on a first-come first-served basis. Temporary lines were included for pickleball use.
- 2019- With continued growth of Pickleball staff and the PRC began looking for ways to provide designated space for the pickleball to be played.
 - New courts were designed and Mitchell Park courts 6 and 7 were designated as multi use courts
 - Priority times created for the multi-use courts to address most popular times for both Tennis and pickleball
 - Pickleball has priority 8am-2:30pm 7 days a week
 - Tennis has priority 3pm-10pm- 7 days a week
- 2020- New courts opened
- April 2022- lights were added to the two standalone courts In Mitchell Park
- May 2022- Multi use courts were repainted with yellow lines to improve visibility



DISCUSSION

At the February 22, 2022 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, staff began discussions on how the new courts and multi-use courts were functioning. After discussion with the PRC and members of the public, staff began to focus on the two joint use courts in Mitchell Park to determine court usage and determine if the policy and spaces are working efficiently and meeting the needs of the public.

Below are the current courts in Palo Alto:

- Designated pickleball courts – Mitchell Park -8 courts (all lit)
- 51 tennis courts (17 lit tennis courts)
 - Cubberley Community Center (6)
 - Mitchell Park (4) – 4 lit courts
 - Rinconada Park (9) – 6 lit courts
 - Hoover Park (2)
 - Peers Park (2)
 - Terman Park (2)
 - Weisshaar Park (2)
 - Gunn High School (7) *
 - Palo Alto High School (7)* – 7 lit courts
 - JLS Middle School (6)*

- Jordan Middle School (4) *

*PAUSD courts are available during the week after 4pm, weekends and non-school days.

- 2 multi use courts (2 tennis courts, 7 pickleball courts) (all lit)- Mitchell Park

Since the new courts have been constructed and the multi-use courts have been in use the following is some of the feedback staff has received.

Pickleball feedback:

- Evening time is compacted
- Would like additional space or some evening priority time
- Grouping of courts is important for the community aspect of the game

Tennis feedback:

- Lit tennis courts are crucial for tennis community and in high demand
- Mitchell Tennis courts are the only available lit courts in South Palo Alto.
- If multiple users are playing pickleball on multiuse courts, its very difficult to have to ask them to move.
- Don't take from tennis to grow pickleball

Since the start of 2022, staff has done some random spot checks of lit court usage around Palo Alto to try and better understand how the courts are used in the evening (analysis is in [Attachment A](#)). Overall, all courts are heavily used, but the pickleball courts seem to have higher numbers of players using the space and waiting. When looking at the joint use court policy staff and the Court Ad Hoc Committee believe that there are some changes that are needed. Staff has provided a couple different options, with pros and cons of each, as well as providing a recommendation as to what is believed to be the best option moving forward.

Policy Options for Joint Use Courts

Option 1: The first option would be to leave the policy as it is. Allow pickleball priority in the morning, 8am-3pm 7 days a week. Tennis priority remains 3pm-10pm 7 days a week. This is a 50/50 split of the courts and still provides priority during each perspective sports busiest times. Although this is probably the fairest split of the courts, it doesn't consider the growing number of pickleball players that have to wait for space and doesn't accurately account for the needs of the pickleball community.

Option 2: A second option would be to move away from joint use and turn these courts into single use courts for either pickleball or tennis. Although pickleball numbers may suggest this course of action, staff feels the impact would be too great to the tennis community and if moving in that direction in the future, staff feels it's better to transition slowly, making sure the space is being fully utilized before making larger more dramatic changes.

Option 3: The third option would be to provide pickleball 2-3 nights a week of priority on the multi-use courts. This would allow additional night play for pickleball users while limiting the impact to the tennis community. There are multiple combinations that could be used, but staff and the Ad Hoc Committee believe that best approach would be to provide pickleball nighttime priority on Friday, Saturday, Sunday nights. Although there will be impact to the tennis community, staff feels these nights would have the least impact, while still allowing the pickleball community to grow into additional evening play. Numbers suggest that Saturday and Sunday are the lowest used nights but believe it's best to grow the popularity on these nights, rather than shift already popular evening play for the tennis community during the week. Staff recommends this option.

Additional Suggestions:

- The suggestion to add lights to existing tennis courts to help reduce nighttime congestion on the courts has been expressed multiple times. The cost of lighting courts is extensive so it only makes sense to light a large grouping of courts, the only courts that would work are Cubberley's 6 tennis courts. Cubberley's infrastructure is at its max electrical capacity so staff feel that a project to bring in additional power, plus add lights to the courts would be a project that's at least five hundred thousand dollars but could move into the million-dollar range depending on what workable solutions were found to getting additional power. The project costs combined with the uncertain future of the Cubberley Campus makes that a project that wouldn't be able to occur soon.
- An additional suggestion that staff has heard is to dual stripe more courts, specifically in North Palo Alto. Staff believes this would lead to additional conflict between tennis and pickleball communities. This is also an issue because the dual stripes are only one part of the equation. To make the courts dual use, there would also need to be movable nets, storage and volunteers willing to set up and remove nets.
- The suggestion to build additional courts is a suggestion staff receives often, this would be the ideal situation so that both pickleball and tennis could thrive in their own spaces. Financing projects would be a challenge, but finding adequate space is the bigger issue. Staff hasn't been able to identify space where additional courts would fit and make sense. Keeping in mind, both pickleball and tennis communities have identified grouping of courts as an important factor.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will take the feedback received by the PRC and members of the public and return with a recommended policy change. That could be as early as next month depending on the feedback we receive.

Attachment A:

Locations	28-Aug	2-Sep	3-Sep	4-Sep	9/11/2022	9/13/2022
Mitchell Park	Sunday- 6:30pm	Friday 6:20pm	Friday 7:50pm	Sunday 7:30pm	Sunday 5:15	Tuesday 6pm
Court 1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Court 2	2	2	2	2	2	0
Court 3	2	4	2	2	2	2
Court 4	0	4	2	0	2	2
Courts 5	6P	0	0	2P	2	2
Court 6	6P	0	0	0	4	2
waiting	0	6	2	0	2	0
Pickle Ball A and B	8			8		
Pickleball	19	34	42	22	30	24
waiting	6	12	8	3	4	25
Rinconada	6:10					
court 1	0	4	4	2	4	
court 2	0	4	2	0	4	
court 3	2	4	2	0	2	
court 4	0	2	4	2	0	
court 5	0	3	2	0	2	
court 6	0	2	2	0	2	
court 7		4	2			
court 8		2	2			
court 9		4	4			
waiting	0	2	12	0	0	
Paly high School						
court 1	2	0	2	2	2	
court 2	2	2	0	2	2	
court 3	0	0	2	0	2	
court 4	2	3	0	2	2	
court 5	0	2	0	2	2	
court 6	2	0	0	0	2	
court 7	2	0	0	0	0	
waiting		0 Paly Football Game	Stanford Football game	0	0	

Locations	1/11/2022 5pm	1/12/2022 6:45pm	1/17/2022 7pm	1/26/2022 6:30pm	1/31/2022 02/05/2022 6:45pm	2/8/2022 7pm	
Mitchell Park	Tuesday	Wednesday	Monday	Wednesday	Monday- 6:30	Saturday	Tuesday- 70 degrees
Court 1	2	0	0	4	4	2	2
Court 2	4	2	2	4	3	2	2
Court 3	4	4	2	3	0	0	2
Court 4	4	4	2	2	4	2	4
Courts 6	2	2P	2P - no nets	3	2	0	2
Court 7	3	2	4	2	2	0	2
waiting				2			2
Pickleball	24	20	24	24	24	20 (courts full)	24
waiting	5	0	8	3	12		7
Rinconada							
court 1	2	2	3	6	4	0- power outage	5
court 2	2	2	4	2	2	0	2
court 3	3	4	2	2	1	0	2
court 4	0	2	2	4	2	0	4
court 5	0	4	2	4	4	0	2
court 6	2	0	4	4	2	0	4
waiting				2			6
Paly high School							
court 1	2	1	2	3	2	0	2
court 2	0	0	4	2	0	0	2
court 3	2	0	2	2	2	0	2
court 4	0	4	2	2	0	2	2
court 5	0	4	2	2	0	0	2
court 6	0	2	4	4	0	0	2
court 7	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
waiting							