

PICKLEBALL GROWTH EXCEEDING AVAILABLE PLAY SPACE

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A beloved sport is experiencing growing pains in Halton Hills.

Over the last decade, an ever-increasing number of local residents have taken up pickleball, a paddleball sport combining elements of badminton and tennis. But the few existing outdoor courts are shared with other user groups, and indoor spaces are hotly contested.

"Pickleball is quite popular in Halton Hills," said Mandy Keller, senior manager of community development for the Town.

Originating in Florida, the sport appeals to all age groups, and has been very popular among seniors.

Pickleball unofficially arrived in Halton Hills around 2013, and the Town started working with orga-

nized clubs a couple of years later.

Said Keller, "We're working with them to help build capacity. When something is community driven, it grows better roots."

Of the two existing groups in Halton Hills, Pickleball Halton Hills is actively championing the cause.

"We're growing and promoting the sport," said club member Marc Surette.

With about 115 paid members, the club has had to scramble for available space.

"We haven't been able to organize a full outdoor league," Surette said. "We're without a home."

The Town maintains 14 courts, seven of which are dedicated to tennis, one is shared use between tennis and basketball, and six are shared between tennis and pickleball.



Metroland file photo

The Town of Halton Hills is adding two more pickleball surfaces at Emmerson Park, but clubs are feeling the squeeze as interest in the sport continues to grow.

Combined, this allows for 13 individual pickleball courts in Halton Hills, lo-

cated at Prospect Park, Joseph Gibbons Park, Emmerson Park, and the Gell-

ert Community Park.

Surette said there are two permanent pickleball nets at Prospect Park, but because of growth more are needed.

At the March 1 council meeting, the Town approved relining two tennis courts at Emmerson Park to expand from four pickleball courts to six (an additional court on each tennis surface).

But adding outdoor courts only eases the demand during the summer months.

When the club moves indoors for play during the winter, the available spaces are hotly contested among other indoor user groups.

"We're renting out the gyms at night and fighting with other clubs for space," Surette said.

Surette said Halton Hills Pickleball has recent-

ly incorporated in a push to advocate for the sport and improve access.

"We have to contribute as well," he said. "Yes, we are taxpayers and the town uses our money, but when you look at hockey, they contributed to the new arenas — we have to be the ones contributing as well."

The Town of Halton Hills is conducting a survey through the Let's Talk Halton Hills portal to ensure a clear understanding of the community use and demand for tennis and pickleball facilities.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With the rising popularity of pickleball in Halton Hills, we wanted to explore the issue of available playing space and what's being done to address it.



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