



TOWN OF LOS GATOS
PARKS COMMISSION REPORT

MEETING DATE: 10/02/2023

ITEM NO: 2

DATE: September 28, 2023
TO: Parks Commission
FROM: Nicolle Burnham, Parks and Public Works Director
SUBJECT: Discuss and Provide Feedback on Pickleball at La Rinconada Park

RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss and provide feedback on pickleball at La Rinconada Park.

BACKGROUND:

At its meeting of June 4, 2018, the Los Gatos Parks Commission (Commission) received a report from staff recommending that the tennis court at La Rinconada Park (Park) be striped to accommodate pickleball and that a pilot program for pickleball be initiated. The Commission supported this recommendation.

In Fall of 2018 the Town of Los Gatos entered into an agreement with First Serve Productions to layout and stripe four pickleball courts on top of the existing tennis court at the Park.

On April 1, 2019, the Commission heard a report indicating that the pickleball pilot had been successful and recommending that the courts be programmed two days each week for pickleball under the guidance of Los Gatos Saratoga Recreation. The Commission supported this recommendation.

On August 5, 2019, the Commission heard a report from Los Gatos Saratoga Recreation (LGS Rec) regarding their pickleball program. The report indicated that programming was scheduled for Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 AM to 12 PM. Since the pilot program was initiated in 2019 pickleball use at the Park has grown to seven days per week during most hours in which the park is open (sunrise to one hour after sunset). At present, LGS Rec runs pickleball programs at La Rinconada six days a week with a combination of open play and lessons. A total of 20.5 hours per week is dedicated to LGS Rec use. All other times are open play for the public.

There is no record of additional discussion of pickleball in Commission meeting minutes until December 5, 2022, when a representative of LGS Rec discussed the need for additional pickleball courts and asked to convert courts at Blossom Hill Park from tennis to pickleball.

BACKGROUND (continued):

During 2023, the Commission has received numerous comments from the public regarding the need for more pickleball courts, and about the adverse impact of pickleball noise on the residential properties near the Park. In addition, staff regularly receives noise complaints about this activity at La Rinconada.

At the August 2023 meeting, staff provided the Commission an overview of concerns about pickleball related noise at the Park and potential options for addressing this. The Commission requested additional information to facilitate discussion of these alternatives.

DISCUSSION:

Management of noise related to pickleball is a chronic problem shared by parks and recreation agencies and communities all over the United States. Pickleball paddles and balls are much harder than tennis rackets and balls and so pickleball sounds very different from tennis. With a smaller court, the frequency with which pickleball strikes occur adds to the noise impacts. This has proven to be a very challenging issue to resolve.

Three options presented in August were: 1) eliminating pickleball at La Rinconada; 2) implementing acoustic barriers; or 3) requiring the use of "Green Equipment" that are designed to generate less noise. Since the August meeting staff has met with LGS Rec to discuss additional potential solutions.

Option 1 – Eliminate Pickleball at La Rinconada

This is not a preferred option given the level of use the four pickleball courts receive. The loss of four courts would reduce the number of dedicated public pickleball courts in Los Gatos to zero.

Option 2 - Implement Acoustic Barriers

Staff evaluated the installation of an acoustic barrier around the courts. Installation of a hard wall and landscaping would create safety concerns since they would reduce visibility into the court. Installation of acoustic blankets affixed to the existing chain link fence on two sides of the court would be feasible and some courts have succeeded in managing noise with this technique. Staff can install these blankets, but the Town does not have funding to purchase them. The cost to purchase the blankets is \$10,000 - \$12,000.

Option 3 – Require Use of Pickleball Equipment that Reduces Noise (Called Green Paddles)

DISCUSSION (continued):

A “green pickleball paddle” refers to a pickleball paddle that is meant to produce less noise than traditional pickleball paddles. The term “green” in the name is used to indicate that they are more environmentally friendly because they produce less noise pollution.

A quiet pickleball paddle is usually made from materials that absorb / dampen vibrations and reduce the amount of noise generated when the paddle strikes the pickleball ball. However, there does not yet appear to be any consistent standard or certification for green pickleball equipment.

Mandating the use of this type of equipment would reduce the noise impacts; however, neither the Town nor LGS Rec has the capacity to enforce this requirement consistently. Regardless, we can still recommend this and ask that the pickleball community be courteous to their neighbors and mindful of their proximity to residences.

Option 4 – Operational Changes

The courts at La Rinconada Park, like most park assets in Los Gatos, are open from sunrise to one hour after sunset seven days per week. Staff has discussed limiting the hours of play by locking the courts each evening and opening them each morning at a set time (e.g., opening at 8 AM and locking at 6 PM). The Town does not have the staff resources to complete this task with consistency. That said, limiting hours of play may provide some relief to the neighborhood and staff recommends installing signage at the court that limits the hours of play.

Staff recommends limiting the hours of pickleball play via signage rather than installing locks. If the pickleball community refuses to adhere to the hours of play, then more drastic measures such as locking can be evaluated.

Option 5 – Convert one Tennis Court at Blossom Hill Park to Pickleball

Since La Rinconada Park has the only pickleball courts in Los Gatos, use of the courts is intensive. Additional courts could potentially provide some relief and an alternative location for pickleball play. Staff has discussed with LGS Rec the need to identify other courts and LGS Rec has considered additional courts at locations not owned by the Town. At this time, no other options have been identified.

The tennis courts at Blossom Hill Park are heavily used for tennis. Staff at LGS Rec observed use of the courts at Blossom Hill Park and La Rinconada over a two-week period in September. Attachment 1 shows the results of these observations. While there are certain times when all courts at Blossom Hill Park are in use for tennis, there are times when courts are vacant.

DISCUSSION (continued):

Given the observations by LGS Rec staff is willing to consider a pilot program to convert one of those courts to pickleball. One tennis court yields four pickleball court so this conversion would double the number of courts in Town. While there are advantages and benefits to converting a Blossom Hill Court, there are also concerns regarding potential noise impacts and conflicts in play.

Staff recommends that the northwesterly court be converted for the pilot project since it is furthest from the residential properties. The closest residences on Hilow Court and on Fairmead Lane are approximately 280 feet away from court in question. At La Rinconada Park the closest residences are 140 feet from the courts.

If a court at Blossom Hill Park were to be converted, the four pickleball courts would be directly adjacent to a tennis court, creating the opportunity for conflicts between the two uses. Fencing cannot be installed between the courts as it would not provide enough “run off” area adjacent to either use. As part of the pilot program staff would need to monitor concerns presented by users and consider these when discussing making the court permanent.

The cost to stripe one tennis court for pickleball would be \$10,000. The Town does not currently have funding for this work.

CONCLUSION:

Staff has identified options for potentially reducing neighborhood impacts associated with pickleball at La Rinconada Park. Table 1 summarizes these options and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Table 1. Summary of Options

Option	Pros	Cons
1. Eliminate pickleball at La Rinconada	- Eliminates noise impact	- Leaves no pickleball courts in Los Gatos
2. Install acoustic barrier	- May reduce some noise impact	- No Town funding for purchase - Actual attenuation would be hard to predict
3. Mandate Green Zone equipment	- Would reduce noise	- May impact play - Hard to enforce - relies on goodwill of players to achieve noise reduction
4. Operational Changes	- Would reduce early morning and evening impacts depending on hours selected	- Hard to enforce - relies on goodwill of players to achieve noise reduction
5. Stripe on tennis court at Blossom Hill for Pickleball	- Would provide four additional pickleball courts in Los Gatos	- May not reduce demand at La Rinconada - No Town funding currently

These options are not mutually exclusive and combinations of each may be feasible. Staff looks forward to the Commission's feedback.

Attachments

1. Observed Court Usage – La Rinconada and Blossom Hill Park

OBSERVED COURT USAGE - LA RINCONADA AND BLOSSOM HILL PARKS

Site	Time of Day	Tuesday 9/12/2023	Wednesday 9/13/2023	Thursday 9/14/2023	Friday 9/15/2023	Saturday 9/16/2023	Sunday 9/17/2023	Monday 9/18/2023
La Rinconada Park	10am	PB 4 players	PB 18 players	PB Class-10	PB 20 players	PB-10 players	0	PB 23 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 1	10am	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 2	10am	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	0	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 3	10am	0	Tennis 2 players	0	Tennis 4 players	Tennis 2 players	0	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 4	10am	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis-3players	0	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 5	10am	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis-3players	0	Tennis 5 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 6	10am	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis-3players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 4 players
La Rinconada Park	2pm	PB Lesson 10 adults	0	PB 4 players	0	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 1	2pm	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Lesson 8 kids
Blossom Hill Park Court 2	2pm	0	Lesson 3 kids	0	0	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 3	2pm	0	0	0	0	0	0	Lesson 1 adult
Blossom Hill Park Court 4	2pm	0	0	0	0	0	0	Lesson 2 adults
Blossom Hill Park Court 5	2pm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 6	2pm	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	0
La Rinconada Park	6pm	PB 4 players	PB 4 players	PB 4 players	Tennis-2players	0	0	4 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 1	6pm	Tennis lesson, 8 kids	Tennis 3 players	0	Tennis-2players	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 2	6pm		0	Tennis 4 players	0	0	0	4 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 3	6pm	Tennis 4 players	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis-2players	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 4	6pm	Tennis 3 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	0	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 5	6pm	Lesson, 1 adult	0	Tennis 4 players	0	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 6	6pm	0	0	Tennis 2 players	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players

Site	Time of Day	Tuesday 9/19/2023	Wednesday 9/20/2023	Thursday 9/21/2023	Friday 9/22/2023	Saturday 9/23/2023	Sunday 9/24/2023	Monday 9/25/2023
La Rinconada Park	10am	PB 15 players	PB 8 players	PB Class-10	PB 21 players	PB-12 players	0	PB 18 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 1	10am	0	0	0	Tennis lesson, 5 adults	Tennis 4 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 2	10am	0	0	0		Tennis 4 players	0	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 3	10am	0	0	0	Tennis 4 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 4	10am	Tennis 5 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis-2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 5	10am	0	0	0	0	Tennis-4 players	0	Tennis 5 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 6	10am	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 4 players	0	Tennis 1 player	Tennis-2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 4 players
La Rinconada Park	2pm	PB Lesson 10 adults	0	PB 4 players	0	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 1	2pm	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Lesson 8 kids
Blossom Hill Park Court 2	2pm	0	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 3	2pm	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	0	Lesson 1 adult
Blossom Hill Park Court 4	2pm	0	Tennis 2 players	0	0	Tennis 2 players	0	Lesson 2 adults
Blossom Hill Park Court 5	2pm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 6	2pm	0	0	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	0
La Rinconada Park	6pm	PB 4 players	PB 6 players	PB 4 players	Tennis-2players	0	0	4 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 1	6pm	Tennis lesson, 8 kids	Tennis 2 players	0	Tennis-2players	Tennis-4 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 2	6pm		0	Tennis 4 players	0	0	0	4 players
Blossom Hill Park Court 3	6pm	Tennis 4 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis-2players	0	0	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 4	6pm	Tennis 3 players	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players	0	0	Tennis 2 players	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 5	6pm	Lesson, 1 adult	0	Tennis 4 players	4 players	Tennis-4 players	Tennis 2 players	0
Blossom Hill Park Court 6	6pm	0	Tennis 4 players	Tennis 2 players	0	0	Tennis 2 players	Tennis 2 players

Notes: Observations courtesy of Los Gatos Saratoga Recreation