



**PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

**Item 4
March 2, 2023
Regular Business**

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION

TITLE:	Luther Burbank Park Sport Courts Renovation	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Approve the recommendation to amend the project scope to convert a third Luther Burbank tennis court to pickleball use.	

STAFF:	Sarah Bluvas, CIP Project Manager Paul West, CIP Project Manager
COUNCIL LIAISON:	Craig Reynolds
EXHIBITS:	n/a

SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is to provide background information to the Parks & Recreation Commission (PRC) on the Luther Burbank Park Sport Courts Renovation capital project and to seek the PRC’s approval to convert a third Luther Burbank Park tennis court to dedicated pickleball use instead of a dual-use court for tennis/pickleball. The other two courts will also be renovated for dedicated pickleball use as originally planned, converting the Luther Burbank Park sport courts facility into a pickleball-only facility.

BACKGROUND

Luther Burbank Park features three sport courts that have hosted summer tennis camps and first-come, first-served open play by community members and off-Island visitors. The courts were constructed in 1972 below grade on top of dense soil; the subgrade has settled over the last 50 years; they have endured tree root intrusion and have become wavy, affecting recreational tennis play and general useability. In summer 2018, the City closed the courts to repair extensive cracking, and the courts closed again in 2020 to prevent players from congregating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PICKLEBALL AND LUTHER BURBANK PARK

Prior to the pandemic, pickleball players played indoors during drop-in hours at the Mercer Island Community and Event Center. The Community Center closed in March 2020 due to the pandemic, and indoor pickleball play did not resume until the facility reopened with limited hours and use in 2021. While the Community Center was closed, residents worked with the City to temporarily stripe the Luther Burbank Park courts for dual-use pickleball and tennis play. Pickleball players voluntarily coordinate playtime using two online platforms, and pickleball play has consistently been the primary use on the courts since the temporary striping was installed.

The 2022 PROS Plan found that access to pickleball courts and access to tennis courts were of equal importance to survey respondents (34% very important/somewhat important to 36% very important/somewhat important, respectively). However, Mercer Island currently has fourteen dedicated, outdoor public tennis courts but zero dedicated, outdoor pickleball courts (an additional six tennis courts are

available to the public at the Mercer Island High School when school activities are not in session). The PROS Plan also states that the City should “plan for a grouping of new, dedicated pickleball courts” and identifies Luther Burbank Park as a preferred site for converting tennis courts to pickleball.

Renovating the Luther Burbank Park sport courts was approved in the 2023-2024 Biennial Budget and Capital Improvement Program. This capital project includes:

- Resurfacing and restriping the courts, with pickleball as the primary use;
- Replacing netting systems; and
- ADA improvements such as limited grading at the facility’s southwest corner to improve access to the courts.

The City received a grant from the King County Parks Capital and Open Space grant program, which is funded by the King County Parks Levy, to support this project. DA Hogan has been retained to design the court renovations, and construction is anticipated to begin in fall 2023.

DEDICATED FACILITY VS. DUAL-USE FACILITY

The original scope for this capital project included converting two tennis courts to six dedicated pickleball courts and renovating the third tennis court to be a dual-use tennis/pickleball court. This would result in eight pickleball courts and one tennis court at the renovated facility. However, staff now recommend amending the project scope to convert all three tennis courts to dedicated pickleball courts, resulting in an additional number of pickleball courts to be determined in final design. Reasoning for this recommendation is provided below.

- **Diminished experience for both sports:** These sports feature different playing styles and logistics, making it difficult to maintain the experience of each individual sport in a dual-use facility.
- **Operational challenges posed by a dual-use sport court:** After the sport courts at Luther Burbank Park are renovated, the facility will continue to be operated on a self-regulated, first-come, first-served basis, using guidelines posted at the facility. Dual-use facilities that are open-scheduled often require an additional level of customer service to address conflicts between user groups.
- **Guidance from the 2022 PROS Plan:** The 2022 PROS Plan found that access to pickleball courts and access to tennis courts were of equal importance to survey respondents (34% very important/somewhat important to 36% very important/somewhat important, respectively). However, Mercer Island currently has fourteen dedicated, outdoor public tennis courts but zero dedicated, outdoor pickleball courts. Through the recommended change, the community will gain at least eight dedicated pickleball courts while maintaining access to eleven public tennis courts. Additionally, the PROS Plan notes the following when planning new pickleball facilities: *Outdoor pickleball courts are most successful if clustered rather than spread individually throughout the park system. Such a grouping promotes [revenue generating] leagues, pick-up tournaments, and related social interaction. Courts are best located in groups (at least two, but preferably six to eight to accommodate the social aspects of the sport) to provide for the regular league activity that grows as the sport is adopted within a community.*

On Thursday night, staff will seek the PRC’s support to convert the third Luther Burbank Park tennis court to dedicated pickleball use.

NEXT STEPS

After a decision is made for the third tennis court, staff will update the grant project scope with King County. No major impacts to the grant award or construction cost estimate/timeline are anticipated by making this

change. DA Hogan will finalize the design this spring and prepare the project for construction, which is planned for two phases. The bulk of work will be completed in fall 2023, and the courts will be temporarily restriped to allow pickleball play until acrylic surfacing and permanent striping can be installed (tentatively planned to complete by spring 2024).

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Approve the recommendation to amend the project scope to convert a third Luther Burbank tennis court to pickleball use.