



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

PRC 25-13
October 20, 2025
Regular Business

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	PRC 25-13: Sport Court Use and Allocation Policy	☒ Discussion Only
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Provide input toward the development of the Sport Court Use and Allocation Policy.	☐ Action Needed: ☐ Motion ☐ Recommendation
STAFF:	Ryan Daly, Recreation Manager	
EXHIBITS:	N/A	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda bill is to solicit input from the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) toward the development of a policy to guide the allocation and use of outdoor pickleball and tennis courts (Sport Courts) managed by the City of Mercer Island (City).

- The City offers access to Sport Courts across multiple parks, serving a diverse demographic of community users.
- Parks and Recreation staff manage the maintenance, operations, and reservations of City managed Sport Courts.
- Currently there is no formal policy guiding the use and allocation of Sport Court facilities and to date staff have managed reservations absent a policy.
- Growing demand, especially for pickleball, necessitates a policy framework for equitable and efficient management and use.
- Lack of consistency has the potential to cause confusion and access challenges between drop-in play, organized use, and events.
- Staff have conducted ongoing community engagement and reviewed usage patterns over the past two years, including this past summer permitting the Rotary Club of Mercer Island to host a tournament which provided insight into park and patron impacts of such an event.

BACKGROUND

The City of Mercer Island provides public access to Sport Courts across multiple parks that serve a diverse and growing community of pickleball and tennis players. The management, maintenance, and reservation of these facilities are administered by Parks and Recreation staff.

The City's existing sport court facilities include:

- Luther Burbank Park – 8 Pickleball Courts (*Jake Jacobson Pickleball Courts*)
- Aubrey Davis Park – 4 Tennis Courts
- Homestead Park – 4 Tennis Courts
- Island Crest Park – 2 Tennis Courts
- Roanoke Park – 1 Tennis Court

Current Practice

At present, the City does not have a formal policy to guide the allocation and use of Sport Courts. General rules are posted at each facility to help users understand acceptable conduct, rotation expectations, and time limits.

While these guidelines promote fair and equitable access for drop-in users, they do not establish clear criteria for the reservation or permitting of organized activities, including tournaments, instructional programs, or events.

Despite the absence of a formal policy, Recreation Division staff currently manage limited court reservations, designated to Homestead Park and Aubrey Davis Park. Staff have endeavored to accommodate these uses while maintaining reasonable drop-in access for the public. These reservations have historically been infrequent and limited to:

- Mercer Island High School Tennis Team
- City-coordinated summer camps
- Third-party instructional programs
- Occasional individual patrons

The Recreation Division's Workplan, as approved by the City Council within the 2025–2026 Biennial Budget, includes the following item:

1.1.4 – Develop and implement a Sport Court Allocation and Use Policy to address the priority use of pickleball and tennis courts, for endorsement by the Parks and Recreation Commission by Q2 2025.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Tonight, staff will engage the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) to seek initial input that will inform the development of a *Sport Court Allocation and Use Policy*. This policy will be presented at a future PRC meeting for endorsement.

As community demand for court use, particularly for pickleball, continues to grow, the City aims to establish a policy framework that provides clear, equitable, and consistent guidance for the use of Sport Court facilities.

Currently, use and scheduling practices vary by site and activity. The lack of a unified policy can lead to confusion, inconsistent access, and challenges balancing drop-in use with organized programs, private instruction, and tournaments.

Staff have engaged frequently with both tennis and pickleball players over the last two years, reviewed court usage patterns, and observed the impacts of different activities, including tournaments. Input received has reflected a diverse range of user perspectives and priorities.

Pickleball

Pickleball has continued to grow in popularity- seeing increased numbers of players annually. Since the Jake Jacobson Pickleball Courts at Luther Burbank Park opened, they have seen outstanding use. At times the courts exceed capacity and see long waits to access courts- especially on weekends, while at other times the courts are easily accessible. The City does not have demographic data on the use of outdoor pickleball courts, however data reflects for MICEC drop-in use is that 50% of MICEC pickleball players are Mercer Island residents.

Last winter, [Dink on Mercer Island](#)—a local non-profit organization—conducted a [member survey](#) focused on the Luther Burbank Pickleball Courts (Jake Jacobson Pickleball Courts). The survey received 69 responses, many of which are regular players at this site.

Note: The City of Mercer Island did not participate in the development or distribution of this survey; results were voluntarily shared with staff and include responses from both residents and non-residents without demographic breakdown.

Key findings from the survey included:

- 26% supported allowing paid coaches to reserve courts for lessons
- 50% supported allowing sponsored tournaments; 35% were uncertain; 15% opposed

- 55% favored hosting two tournaments per spring/summer season
- 30% preferred one tournament per season
- 15% opposed tournaments entirely

Additional input received by staff in the field emphasized:

- Courts are extremely busy during weekends and summer evenings
- Exploring revenue opportunities through private events or permitted use
- Providing timeslots/opportunities for differing skill levels
- Creating predictable play windows to reduce overcrowding
- Offering structured programming for beginners (clinics, camps, and lessons)

In August 2025, the City permitted a pickleball tournament at the Luther Burbank Pickleball Courts hosted by Rotary Club of Mercer Island as a fundraiser. This event provided a valuable opportunity for staff to evaluate the application, coordination, and facility impacts of tournament use.

Key takeaways from the tournament included:

- Coordination with tournament organizers required significantly more staff time than other tournaments the City has permitted in the past (Lacrosse, Baseball, Soccer).
- Parking limitations at Luther Burbank Park affected concurrent user groups (notably City summer camps).
- Parking limitations also created management challenges for the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC), requiring staff to actively manage the lot to ensure parking availability for MICEC patrons.
- Recreation Division revenues were negatively affected, as staff restricted most MICEC and Luther Burbank Park picnic shelter rentals during the tournament.

Tennis

Tennis court usage across Mercer Island remains steady and consistent, primarily serving individual and casual users. It is assumed that approximately 60-70% of the tennis court users are Mercer Island residents. Tennis users have traditionally been less engaged, and less apt to provide input- often reaching out when court conditions impact use. The number of tennis courts across various locations- provides ample access.

Primary concerns and feedback regarding tennis court use include:

- Unauthorized private instruction occurring on public courts
- Pickleball players marking or modifying tennis courts for dual use without authorization
- Individuals or groups monopolizing courts, limiting fair access for others

Discussion

Staff suggests the following to guide the development of a *Sport Court Allocation and Use Policy*:

- Establish clear categories of use:
 - Drop-in Play: Informal, first-come, first-served use of courts.
 - Hourly Reservations- A scheduled, short-term court use (e.g., for practice, instruction, or private play), limited to designated courts and timeframes.
 - Special Events- Organized programming such as tournaments or leagues which occupy multiple or all courts at a facility.
- Preserve drop-in play as the primary use at all Sport Court facilities.
- Limit events which may adversely impact other park patrons or adjacent facilities by predetermining the allowed size and number of events to be offered annually and monthly.
- Identify specific courts, at specific parks, which may be reserved hourly to enhance access.
- Limit events during peak periods to enable community drop-in access and minimize park impacts.
- Exempt activities coordinated by the City of Mercer Island from the policy.

Discussion questions:

- Should drop-in play be prioritized over other uses?
- Should courts be available for hourly rental by the public or private instructors?
 - Should certain court facilities (or portions of) be dedicated for rentals and others for drop-in use only?
 - Should court reservations be limited to certain times?
- Should tennis or pickleball courts be used for commercial purposes or to conduct fundraising?
- Should reservations and events be restricted during certain seasonal periods?
- Should City coordinated uses be exempt from the policy?

NEXT STEPS

Following tonight's discussion, staff will move forward with developing a draft *Sport Court Use and Allocation Policy* for future review and endorsement by the Parks and Recreation Commission.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Provide input to inform the development of the *Sport Court Use and Allocation Policy*.