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**Item No. 13.1.2**  
**Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee**  
**December 12, 2024**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Community Planning and Economic Development Committee

**FROM:** Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** September 20, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Addressing Castle Hill Pickleball Court Noise

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**ORIGIN**

November 28, 2023, Halifax Regional Council motion (Item 15.3.1):

**MOVED by Councillor Morse, seconded by Councillor Lovelace**

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to provide a staff report and recommendations with respect to the Castle Hill pickleball courts and reducing noise levels for neighbouring residents.

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Castle Hill Park is located at 22 Castle Hill Drive in Halifax. In 2019, the two tennis courts in the park were converted for pickleball use, one of the courts serves both tennis and pickleball and the other court pickleball only. The courts are located approximately ten metres from a four storey multiple-unit dwelling. As the popularity of the sport grew the courts became busier. In 2023, noise complaints were received by city staff and the local area councillor from residents who live on abutting properties. During the 2024 season efforts were made to address the noise but these have not been successful.

Pickleball noise complaints are becoming a growing issue across North America and many jurisdictions are now considering where pickleball courts are to be located to ensure noise levels are suitable for nearby residential uses. The City of Vancouver commissioned a study on the matter which led them to: implement appropriate setback distances for pickleball court siting; use sound buffers as needed; centralize pickleball courts in three areas of the city; and, to close courts with excessive noise issues. This has been a successful approach.

Following the Vancouver model, it is recommended that new pickleball courts be developed at the Mainland Common and that the pickleball courts at Castle Hill Park be converted back to a tennis court and general multi-purpose court following the 2024 season. The pickleball court setbacks developed by Vancouver will be used as guidelines for any new pickleball court development within HRM to ensure they do not impact nearby residences.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

1. Remove the pickleball court markings and nets from the courts at Castle Hill Park; and
2. Include funding within the proposed 2025/26 Capital Budget for the design of pickleball courts within Mainland Common as outlined within this report.

## **BACKGROUND**

Castle Hill Park is located at 22 Castle Hill Drive in Halifax. The park was transferred to the municipality as part of the surrounding subdivision development in 1996. It is 6,520 square meters (1.6 acres) in area and contains:

- a parking lot;
- three dedicated pickleball courts;
- a dual tennis/pickleball court;
- a half-basketball court;
- a playground, and
- greenspace.

Castle Hill Park is surrounded by residential uses. It abuts three properties that contain multiple-unit dwellings and 12 properties that contain single unit dwellings (Attachment A).

As pickleball has expanded in popularity across North America, many municipalities have built new pickleball courts and converted existing tennis courts into pickleball courts to meet public demand. In 2019, the two tennis courts in Castle Hill Park were converted for pickleball use. One was converted into three pickleball courts, and the other into a dual tennis/pickleball court by painting lines so either sport could be played. However, as the use of the pickleball courts increased, nearby residents raised concerns about excessive noise.

The nearest courts within Castle Hill Park are located approximately ten meters from an abutting four storey multiple-unit dwelling, located at 93 Kearney Lake Road (Attachment A). The building's elevation is such that even at the ground floor the building lies higher than the courts resulting in an amphitheater effect for noise. Residents of both the multiple-unit building and the single-unit dwellings located on Castle Hill Drive with backyards that abut the park have reported that the pickleball noise has negatively impacted their quality of life and the enjoyment of their properties.

In response to the complaints, during the summer of 2023, the court hours were limited to 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily, which differs from the standard park hours of 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. daily. Signs denoting the new hours were posted on the court doors. Despite this measure, the complaints from nearby residents continued, citing that the courts were often being used as early as 6:00 a.m. In November 2023 Regional Council requested a staff report to provide recommendations to reduce noise levels for the Castle Hill Park pickleball courts.

For the 2024 season additional sound mitigation measures were instituted by staff. The court gates were locked in line with the reduced court hours, and the municipality provided soft quieter pickleballs with posted signage directing that these are the only type of pickleballs to be used on the courts. These efforts are described in further detail below.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Pickleball Noise**

Pickleball related noise is becoming a greater issue as the sport grows in popularity. Pickleball play generates noise in several ways, the most prominent being the noise of a hard surfaced paddle hitting a hard plastic ball that creates a sharp popping sound upon each impact. The type of court surface also affects the amount of noise generated by both ball impact and the shuffling of sneakers. Further, the game is a social sport played on a small court. Generally, one tennis court can be converted into multiple pickleball courts, which results in an increased intensity of noise from both game play and socialization (game excitement, clapping, cheering, etc.). Contrasted with tennis, which is played with softer balls, softer rackets, and typically fewer players per area, pickleball has the potential to be more disruptive within a neighborhood park setting.

### **Sound Mitigation Measures**

Sound mitigation measures are now being considered in the planning of new pickleball courts in many jurisdictions across North America. The common methods for controlling pickleball noise are outlined below.

#### **Quiet Equipment**

Modified paddles, court surfaces, and the ball itself have all been developed to stem noise impacts by using softer materials. Quiet paddles are thicker and made of softer sound absorbing materials versus those of a standard hard paddle. Softer court surfaces such as those with rubber have been developed to absorb more impact than asphalt. Lastly, quieter pickleballs have also been developed that are composed of sound absorbing materials in their design, such as softer plastics or a foam composition.

#### **Hours of Operation**

Limiting the hours of operation for a pickleball court can be an effective way of managing noise impacts as it provides predictability for neighbours for when noise will occur. Hours are communicated using posted signage, and while generally posted signage in parks is effective on an honour-system basis, for this measure to be completely effective it must be pro-actively enforced.

#### **Noise Barriers**

The use of noise barriers, also known as acoustic fencing or acoustic baffling, provides some sound mitigation. The barrier is attached to the court fencing and can significantly reduce noise. However, there are limitations to the effectiveness of noise barriers as they only work at the ground level. If the point of reception is above the height of the barrier, the sounds created from game play will not be mitigated. Other drawbacks to noise barriers include their expense and possibility of creating a safety issue if they block visibility to the court.

#### **Setback Distance Standards**

Appropriate setbacks are the most effective way of mitigating pickleball noise. Research on setback distances was recently completed by the City of Vancouver, which was facing similar issues to those being experienced at Castle Hill Park. In 2018 several tennis courts were converted to pickleball courts and as the courts increased in popularity noise issues arose. Lawsuits were filed in both 2021 and 2022 by nearby residents of two different court locations. In response to the complaints and in review of the issue, both court locations were closed.

After the 2021 lawsuit was filed, the city commissioned a study by BAP Acoustics on pickleball noise. The goal of this work was to determine necessary setbacks for courts to keep noise levels at a 50 dB level or less, which is required under Vancouver's Noise By-Law (Table 1).

As a result of the BAP study, the City of Vancouver implemented the use of setbacks and sound barriers where needed. It also decided to centralize pickleball courts to three locations. Each location has been planned to provide an even distribution throughout the city, with each site containing multiple courts. One of these locations has 14 courts. City of Vancouver staff have advised that these efforts have reduced noise complaints significantly. Vancouver continues to use these sound mitigation measures as guidelines and plans to embed them in policy through the development of their court strategy.

**Table 1: Vancouver Pickleball Court Setbacks from Residences**

Number of Courts	Setback Distance Required to Meet 50 dB (m)			
	No Noise Mitigation		3m Noise Barrier*	
	Hard Ground	Soft Ground	Hard Ground	Soft Ground
2 (1 X 2 grid)	65	50	35	30
4 (2 X 2 grid)	90	75	50	45
6 (3 X 2 grid)	105	85	55	50
12 (3 X 4 grid)	160	115	75	60

\*Does not apply to situations where point of reception overlooks the court.

**Castle Hill Park Pickleball Courts**

The distance between the Castle Hill Park pickleball courts and abutting residential properties is substantially less than the setback distances developed in Vancouver. The municipality has attempted to mitigate noise impacts at Castle Hill Park in each of the last two summers, through controlling the hours of operation of the courts and the deployment of soft quieter pickleballs. Both measures have resulted in some noise reduction, but problems remain.

Additional noise complaints have been received throughout the summer of 2024. There is also displeasure among some pickleball players regarding the soft ball requirement, while some nearby residents have complained of ongoing instances where regular pickleballs continue to be used. Due to the small setbacks from residences, the elevation of the multiple-unit dwelling sitting above Castle Hill Park, and the limited success in the acceptance of the soft balls, the pickleball lines and nets should be removed from both courts at Castle Hill Park. The dual tennis/pickleball court would readily be converted back to a single tennis court, and the three dedicated pickleball courts would be converted to a multi-purpose court which would allow for a wide range of activities.

It is recognized that the removal of the Castle Hill Park pickleball courts will result in a reduction in the number of courts for use within the municipality. This will result in a greater reliance on other pickleball courts until new ones are established.

**New Centralized Multi-Court Pickleball Facility**

Mainland Common can accommodate a multi-court pickleball facility, with several sites being identified as prospective locations that would readily meet the best-practice setback distances to not impact on residential uses. This would also have the benefit of providing centralized courts, being near other recreation facilities, having parking, and access to transit. With Regional Council’s approval, funding for the design of new courts will be included in the 2025/26 Capital Budget with construction anticipated for 2026/27.

**Guidelines for New Pickleball Courts**

The situation at Castle Hill Park and the Vancouver case study has highlighted the importance of ensuring neighborhood compatibility when establishing new pickleball courts within a park. The setbacks identified in Table 1, will be used as guidelines in the siting of new pickleball courts on a go-forward basis to ensure their placement does not negatively impact surrounding residential uses.

There are several other pickleball courts across the municipality (Attachment B). Some of these may not meet the guidelines outlined above. However, these existing sites all have their own unique circumstances, such as the presence of vegetation, differences in topography, and different surrounding land use relationships. These existing courts will remain until evaluated separately either due to additional court specific noise complaints being received, or the municipality undertaking a broader court centralization program.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial implications have been minor and include the cost of providing soft pickleballs, posting court signage, and staff for opening and closing the courts daily. These costs have been accommodated within the general operating budget. The cost to remove the pickleball lines and nets at Castle Hill Park, re-establish a single tennis court, and convert the three pickleball courts to a multi-purpose court is expected to be approximately \$50,000 and can be accommodated in the general operating budget-W705-State of Good Repair. The cost associated with the construction of centralized courts at the Mainland Common will be presented in future capital budgets. While there are no immediate financial implications the expected cost is to be approximately \$1,000,000 which will include lighting.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no risks associated with the recommendations of this report. The risks associated with retaining the pickleball courts at Castle Hill Park without a resolution, are that regular pickleball activity at the park will continue to create issues for surrounding residents and there will be a lack of appropriate pickleball courts for unrestricted play.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Changes to the use of the pickleball courts (limited hours and required use of quiet balls) have been communicated through posting signage. Consultation in the preparation of this report occurred with Pickleball Nova Scotia, and informally with area residents and park users.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to retain the pickleball courts at Castle Hill Park with the continued use of sound mitigation measures, either indefinitely or until new centralized courts are constructed.
2. The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer select an alternative location, other than the Mainland Common, for a new centralized multi-court pickleball facility.
3. The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to take alternative measures than the pickleball court siting guidelines presented in the staff report, which may require a supplementary staff report.

### **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

**Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c.39**

#### **Powers of Municipality regarding property**

Section 61(3): the property vested in the Municipality, absolutely or in trust, is under the exclusive management and control of the Council, unless an Act of the Legislature provides otherwise.

**By-Law P-600 Respecting Municipal Parks  
Signage**

Section 12(1): the Director may cause to be erected a sign or other device specifying an area in a park where specific activities are permitted, prohibited or restricted.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment A Map of Castle Hill Park
- Attachment B Outdoor Pickleball Court Locations Within HRM

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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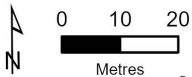


Multi-Unit Dwelling  
93 Kearney Lake Rd

**CASTLE HILL PARK - COURTS**

-  Castle Hill Park
-  Parcels
-  Separation Distance Approximately 10m

**HALIFAX**  
Parks & Recreation  
Policy & Planning





Attachment B  
Outdoor Pickleball Court Location Within HRM

Court Location	Address
Larry O'Connell Park	6691 Fourth Street, Halifax
Merv Sullivan Park	3791 Novalea Drive, Halifax
Gorsebrook Park	1111 Robie Street, Halifax
Highland Park Junior High School	3479 Robie Street, Halifax
Graves Oakley Memorial Park	104 Leiblin Drive, Spryfield
Melwood Avenue Park	3 Melwood Avenue, Halifax
Northcliffe Recreation Centre Park	115 Dunbrack Street, Halifax
Westwood Park	3315 Huron Street, Halifax
Castle Hill Park	22 Castle Hill Park, Halifax
Highland Park Junior High School Park	3479 Robie Street, Halifax
Prospect Road Community Centre	2141 Prospect Road, Hatchet Lake
Beechville, Lakeside Timberlea Recreation Centre	1492 St Margarets Bay Road, Lakeside
Greenwood Heights Park	124 Greenwood Street, Halifax
Morash Park	68 Woodlawn Road, Dartmouth
Craig Blake Memorial Park	110 Appian Way, Dartmouth
The Birches Park	49 Portland Estates Boulevard West, Dartmouth
Mount Edward Road Park	106 Mount Edward Road, Dartmouth
Baker Drive Community Park	80 Basswood Run, Dartmouth
Shubie Park	End of John Brenton Drive, Dartmouth
Dartmouth Common	60 Windmill Road, Dartmouth
Brownlow Park	40 Peddars Way, Dartmouth
Northbrook Park	1 Chapman Street, Dartmouth
Cranberry Lake Park	312 Flying Cloud Drive
Cole Harbour Commons	460 Auburn Drive, Cole Harbour
Eisenhauer Park	19 Glen Arbour Way, Hammonds Plains
Uplands Park	6 Crestfield Drive, Hammonds Plains
Viscount Run Park	70 Viscount Run, Hammonds Plains
Sylvania Terrace Park	53 Sylvania Terrace, Hammonds Plains
Winslow Drive Park	15 Winslow Drive, Upper Tantallon
Buckingham Drive Park	32 Buckingham Drive, Stillwater Lake
East St. Margaret's Consolidated School Park	8671 Peggy's Cove Road, Indian Harbour
Atlantic Tennis Centre	50 Verdi Drive, Bedford
Brookline Drive Park	210 Brookline Drive, Bedford
Beaver Bank Kinsac Park	1701 Beaver Bank Rd, Beaver Bank
Millwood Common Park	155 Millwood Drive, Middle Sackville
Metropolitan Avenue Park	94 Metropolitan Avenue, Sackville
Weir Park	2476 Sackville Drive, Upper Sackville
Springfield Lake Recreation Centre Park	266 Lakeview Avenue, Middle Sackville

*Disclaimer: The data used to compile this list is derived from multiple sources and as a result, may contain inaccuracies, errors or omissions.*