



London N. Breed, Mayor  
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

**Date:** January 19, 2023  
**To:** Recreation and Park Commission  
**Through:** Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager  
**From:** Dana Ketcham  
Beverly Ng  
**Subject:** Pickleball – Stern Grove and Larsen Playground

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### **Agenda Wording**

Discussion and possible action regarding the possibility of creating dedicated pickleball courts at the Stern Grove Tennis Courts or the Larsen Tennis Court and Basketball Court.

### **Strategic Plan Reference**

Strategy 1: Inspire Public Space: Develop more open space to address population growth in high needs areas and emerging neighborhoods.

Objective: 1.3 Steward and promote good park behavior

Objective: 1.2 Strengthen the quality of existing Parks & Facilities

Strategy 2: Inspire Play: Promote active living, well-being and community for San Francisco's diverse and growing population

Objective: 2.2 Strengthen and promote the safety, health and well-being of San Francisco's youth and seniors

### **Background**

Pickleball, invented in 1965 as a children's backyard game on Bainbridge Island, Washington, is a recreational racquet sport that combines tennis, ping-pong, and badminton on a hard surface indoor or outdoor court. The sport of pickleball has been gaining popularity across the United States over the past several years. Interest in pickleball has grown exponentially over the past five years increased in San Francisco. Pickleball is social in nature and is frequently played in groups. People of all ages, backgrounds, and skill levels can join in to play while meeting new people, thus making this recreational activity a vital connector.

In 2018, RPD recognized the growing interest in pickleball and coordinated a working group consisting of pickleball community members. Together, RPD and the working group have worked to support the pickleball community by identifying priorities, adding new courts, providing equipment, developing reservation procedures, and finding new opportunities for play. This



included allowing certain sites to have a container to store nets for ease of setup and creating dedicated pickleball hours since pickleball is group play.

During the early years of meetings, the working group identified priorities for locations for possible dedicated pickleball courts:

- Dedicated pickleball courts with fencing wrapped around
- Location has ample parking
- Location has a restroom

Over the last five years, RPD worked to increase pickleball spaces while balancing other recreational sports in the City, but demand for pickleball courts still exceeds supply. Meanwhile, our data shows that during peak, dry weather seasons, up to 97% of tennis courts that can be booked online are booked within five minutes of our online reservation system opening each day.

### **Creating Pickleball Courts**

Pickleball's spike in popularity created a park and open space conundrum. It has been challenging to find an outdoor location with a hard surface, fencing, ample parking, and a restroom among the City's 220 parks and open spaces while balancing other recreational needs and impact on nearby residents. The pickleball working group also began focusing on having multiple dedicated pickleball courts in one park or open space that was on the northwest side of the city.

RPD and the working group have worked together to create pickleball playing space including:

- Creating 11 dedicated pickleball courts
- Creating 48 dual lined pickleball courts so they can be used for pickleball or tennis.
  - Starting in 2020 every tennis court scheduled to be repaved now includes dual-painted lines so it can accommodate either pickleball or tennis.
  - Providing dedicated pickleball hours at certain sites
  - Providing either moveable nets on site or permits for the community to place containers where pickleball equipment can be stored
  - Creating reservable pickleball courts

In addition to the overall growing popularity of pickleball, the pandemic furthered interest in the sport as it was one of the few outdoor activities that were allowed. RPD has heard from many in the community how important pickleball is to them and that more resources are needed.

### **Tennis Courts**

RPD has 140 tennis courts in our park system, of which 109 are multi-court sites (one or more courts in the same location) and 31 are single neighborhood courts. In 2019, the Department began providing a free online system to offer the public an opportunity to plan ahead and reserve a neighborhood court. The new reservation system was rolled out slowly after meeting with various community groups. As of today, 83 tennis courts can be reserved online with the remaining 57 tennis courts available for last-minute walk-up neighborhood use.

Other impacts on RPD tennis court availability:

- RPD provides access to courts and athletic fields to all school-based teams from San Francisco between 3:30 pm and 6:30 pm. This includes tennis teams. San Francisco Public

school-based teams get priority of locations to allow students to walk to games and practices nearby easily. These are all locations with 3 or 4 courts to provide enough courts for many players at the same time for practice or matches.

- Separate from RPD, the supply of tennis courts in the City has recently been reduced because the Bay Club sold the land associated with SF Tennis Club in 2017, which closed 24 tennis courts in September 2020. These closures significantly reduced the number of available tennis courts throughout the City. Faced with the impending closure and impact on general shortages, in 2017 Department received a donation of \$864,000 from San Franciscans for Sports & Recreation to renovate and upgrade 17 RPD tennis courts across the public park system.

In addition, during the pandemic, there was a resurgence of tennis play because it was one of the few outdoor sports people could play. The Department expanded reservable courts to meet this demand.

### **Stern Grove Tennis Courts and PUC Water Line Break**

Prior to the pandemic, RPD fully renovated the Stern Grove Tennis courts with a donation from San Franciscans for Sports & Recreation. Prior to that time, the courts were in poor condition. As part of the renovation, RPD dual-lined the courts for tennis and pickleball. The newly renovated courts opened in the summer of 2020.

In the winter of 2020-21, the pickleball community asked to create dedicated pickleball hours at the Stern Grove courts as well as bring in a container to store pickleball nets. RPD outreached to the tennis and pickleball communities, and after some negotiation settled on the hours of Monday to Friday 10:30AM to 1:00PM, Sundays 12:00PM to 3:00PM, and Saturdays 2:00PM to 5:00PM. After the renovation, the courts opened and were used extensively by the tennis and pickleball communities.

In August 2021, a San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) water pipeline broke and extensively damaged Stern Grove, including the tennis/pickleball courts. The Department recognized the impact on the pickleball community which had no alternatives nearby and quickly added pickleball lines at Parkside Tennis Courts so the pickleball community had a place to continue to gather and play. Dedicated pickleball hours were also set after negotiations with the tennis community at Parkside to allow for balanced user play.

### **Recent Pickleball Community Proposal**

As the SFPUC continued to work on repairs to Stern Grove, the pickleball community approached RPD with a proposal to convert the existing Stern Grove Tennis Courts into permanent pickleball courts. The proposal included eight dedicated pickleball courts with permanent nets creating a pickleball complex.

In order to solicit additional feedback and continue to balance recreational needs across the Department's parks and open spaces, the Department held a community meeting on November 3,

2022 regarding the community's proposals for dedicated pickleball courts in and around Stern Grove. The 4 possible proposals (see attachment) were:

1. Convert the two Stern Grove tennis courts to 8 pickleball courts.
2. Convert Larsen Playground's 1 tennis court and 1 basketball court into 8 pickleball courts.
3. Multi-line court for both tennis and pickleball at Stern Grove courts creating 6 pickleball courts to 2 tennis courts that allowed for joint use.
4. Replace the existing south croquet field at Stern Grove with 8 pickleball courts.

Over 300 community members attended the meeting, the majority of whom were from the pickleball community, followed by the tennis community, and multi-tennis-pickleball users. The pickleball community heavily supported option 1 – converting Stern Grove Tennis courts to eight pickleball courts. The tennis community felt strongly that given the shortage of tennis courts, the expansion of pickleball courts should not be at the expense of the elimination of tennis courts. RPD received over 350 emails and communications in support or opposition to the pickleball proposal.

### **Consideration of Four Options**

Today, RPD is asking our Commission to advise on a decision about the expansion of pickleball play. The most pressing decision is the possible conversion of tennis courts in the Sunset to dedicated Pickleball courts. Below are some factors to consider related to the four options for pickleball in the area.

- Both Stern Grove and Larsen Playground are across the street from homes, but not directly adjacent to a home, therefore noise impact is not an issue.
- Due to the SFPUC's impact on Stern Grove, they have agreed to cover the cost of repairing the courts as either pickleball, tennis, or multi-lined courts, which will not create added cost to RPD.

### **OPTION 1 - Convert the two Stern Grove tennis courts to eight pickleball courts.**

This proposal would NOT MEET the pickleball working group's original priorities for dedicated pickleball courts:

- Dedicated pickleball courts would accommodate eight courts, with fencing wrapped around (**YES**)
- Location has ample parking (**YES**)
- Location has a restroom (**NO**)

Additional factors to consider - **PLUSES**:

- Possibly less wind
- Potential for expansion (horseshoe pits – 100 feet from tennis courts)
- Pickleball community strongly favors this option

Additional factors to consider – **CHALLENGES**:

- Will remove 2 tennis courts from the system

- No adjacent restroom with the nearest restroom at the Trocadero Clubhouse, which is down a steep social trail or a longer walk (8 mins) and car access is difficult
- Tennis Community does not favor this option but has been willing to do shared usage.

Estimated Fiscal Impact: no fiscal impact to resurface the courts.

Estimated timeline: Summer 2023

**OPTION 2 - Convert Larsen Playground’s one tennis court and one basketball court into eight pickleball courts**

This proposal would MEET the working group’s priorities for dedicated pickleball courts:

- Dedicated pickleball courts would accommodate eight courts, with fencing wrapped around (YES)
- Location has ample parking (YES)
- Location has a restroom (YES)

Additional factors to consider - PLUSES:

- Restroom facility is directly adjacent
- Less impact on the tennis and basketball community – only removing one court. There are two other neighboring basketball and tennis court about 0.4 miles away
- Potential expansion into adjacent field
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Additional factors to consider – CHALLENGES:

- Expected conversion will take 6 months longer
- Pickleball community is concerned the conversion will take too long.

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$180,000 - \$300,000 (FYI: late 2022 cost estimates, cost can fluctuate)

Estimated timeline: Winter 2023/2024

**OPTION 3 - Multi-line court for both tennis and pickleball at Stern Grove courts.**

This proposal would NOT MEET the pickleball working group’s priorities for dedicated pickleball courts:

- Dedicated pickleball courts would accommodate eight courts, with fencing wrapped around (NO)
- Location has ample parking (YES)
- Location has a restroom (NO)

Additional factors to consider - PLUSES:

- Possibly less wind
- Opportunity to create dedicated pickleball hours and expand play
- Could add sturdy rolling nets to accommodate pickleball play
- Create dedicated pickleball hours

Additional factors to consider – CHALLENGES:

- Would only allow for 6 pickleball courts
- No adjacent restroom with the nearest restroom at the Trocadero Clubhouse, which is down a steep social trail or a longer walk (8 mins) and car access is difficult
- User conflict remains for shared usage of multilined courts

Estimated Fiscal Impact: no fiscal impact to resurface the courts. Cost of approximately \$3000 to provide rolling pickleball nets for 6 courts.

Estimated timeline: Summer 2023

**OPTION 4 - Replace the existing south croquet field at Stern Grove.**

This proposal would NOT MEET the pickleball working group’s priorities for dedicated pickleball courts:

- Dedicated pickleball courts would accommodate eight courts, with fencing wrapped around (**YES**)
- Location has ample parking (**YES**)
- Location has a restroom (**NO**)

Additional factors to consider - PLUSES:

- Opportunity to create a permanent pickleball site from the ground up.
- No reduction in other sport courts
- Restroom access is relatively nearby at the Wawona Clubhouse

Additional factors to consider – CHALLENGES:

- Removes natural turf from the park system
- Site requires extensive ADA conversion to accommodate a permanent pickleball site
- Cost of conversion will require extensive budget investment
- Conversion will be a longer process (undetermined)

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$1.5 million rough estimate, based on the need for grading and to provide ADA access to a newly developed site and ADA parking.

Estimated timeline: n/a

RPD continues to work together with representatives from the pickleball and tennis communities to explore creative solutions to expand play in the future. RPD has been working to identify underutilized public spaces that can support a pickleball complex, including Kezar Parking lot and City College Courts.

## **Recommendation**

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RPD recommends a hybrid approach:

- Converting Larsen Playground's one tennis court and one basketball court into eight dedicated pickleball courts (Option 2)
- The Stern Grove courts continue to be dual-lined in accordance with our policy about dual-lining courts (Option 3)
- During the construction process to convert Larsen Playground sports courts to dedicated pickleball courts, the Department will make the Stern Grove tennis courts a pickleball site with portable rolling nets and all hours dedicated to pickleball play. After the completion of Larsen Playground's dedicated pickleball courts, the portable nets and dedicated pickleball hours will be removed from Stern Grove.
- Upon the opening of the Stern Grove courts, Parkside courts will no longer have dedicated pickleball hours which provides more access for the Parkside and Sunset neighborhood tennis players.
- Recognizing the impact on other sports communities, RPD will pause any further conversion of sports courts to dedicated pickleball courts, since RPD's Capital and Planning unit is tasked with identifying underutilized public space that can support future dedicated pickleball complexes within the city.

### **Supported By:**

Department Staff

### **Attachments:**

- A. Pickleball general – one pager November 2022
- B. Pickleball options – one pager November 2022