

**Pickleball Presentation**  
**Town of the Blue Mountains Council Meeting**  
**October 21, 2019**  
**Presented by Jayne Sutherland**

First off, let me say that I and I believe most of the residents I'm speaking for, have nothing against pickleball. As you probably all know, it's a fast growing, very popular recreational sport. It has especially taken off with older adults because it is not as punishing as tennis, does not need years to become proficient at and is an excellent venue for socializing.

All that being said, I would like to touch on a few issues of concern to some of the residents in the Town of the Blue Mountains regarding the construction of four pickleball courts on the green space beside the tennis courts at Bayview Park.

I have grouped them into 5 topics:

1. Noise
2. Traffic / Parking
3. Cost
4. Consultation / Communications
5. Loss of Green Space

## **1. Noise**

As you can see from the slides, here are some comments about pickleball noise in other communities. [attributable quotes from media and organizations]

As the popularity of the game grows and it expands into more municipalities, pickleball noise has become a contentious issue in communities across North America. This has led to petitions, outcries in the media, lawsuits, and expensive and prohibitive noise abatement strategies. The noise is so pervasive and irritating that in many areas, property values have been negatively affected. Even for those not living directly near the courts, for those of us who walk in the Bayview Park environs every day, the incessant clatter of pickleball courts would be a very unwelcome disruption to the relative peacefulness and ambience of the neighbourhood.

Events such as 'Music By the Bay' and those renting the pavilion in the Park, are in large part, welcomed by residents. They make the park a dynamic, interactive place but, importantly, are of a limited duration and are not pervasive and non-stop. Pickleball's popularity will probably mean that the courts will be constantly in use during daylight hours, not only on weekends, like most park events, but during the week as well by the growing numbers of the Blue Mountains' retirement community.

The one very simple solution, that seems to appease all in addressing noise complaints, is to relocate or build the courts in the first place in non-residential areas. In talking to some of the TBM staff I was told that constructing a pickleball court near Moreau Park on the community centre precincts, which is also zoned for recreational use, is not feasible because of nearby residents. What we don't understand is why the Town ruled out putting a pickleball court in the BVCC area because of nearby residents, but is

seriously considering Bayview Park despite its surrounding residential area. The majority of my fellow Park neighbours are full time residents, so weekend or seasonal status should not factor in.

## **2. Traffic / Parking**

Another of our concerns is the traffic and the requisite increase in demand for parking these courts will cause. Given the increasing popularity of pickleball not only do I anticipate a healthy participation by the general public, there is also the local pickleball club with 120 members and another 40 on its waiting list that will be avid users of the courts. This in and of itself is great. Getting people out in the fresh air, having fun and getting healthy exercise is a laudable goal.

However, those visiting Bayview Park and its surrounding residents can only access the area via an increasingly busy and bottlenecked Highway 26 in Thornbury. Why would other players throughout the Town of the Blue Mountains, and I'd like to think that we're not just doing this for Thornbury pickleball players, want to be forced to use this sometime bumper-to-bumper stretch of highway through town to get to the pickleball courts? A location anywhere south of the highway would allow this additional traffic both in and out of Thornbury to be disbursed across multiple routes. As well, Bay Street East is already a very busy road in the summer, is adding additional traffic to that mix of picnicking families, children in the playground, tennis players, dog walkers and residents really necessary?

As for parking, it is my understanding that a parking lot will be built on the green space beside the pickleball courts and that consideration is being given to making these pay parking spots. Potentially, if the four courts are being used at full capacity and half that number are waiting to play, that could mean that 24 cars would need parking spots. Unless most of the green space is used for parking, there wouldn't be room to accommodate them all.

## **3. Cost**

The town will be spending \$160,000 on the pickleball courts. I'm not going to debate whether that should be spent on pickleball. Everyone's priorities are different. Some people think that money should go to kid's programs, some think that it's a lot of money for the relatively small demographic that most pickleball players fall into and some think that the long-suffering sidewalks of Clarksburg should get preference. The important point is that although 90% of the funds are coming from the development charges fund and 10% from general revenues it is not in fact a "mostly tax free" project. The use of these funds under the Development Charges Act are to offset the cost of growth-related infrastructure of new development which otherwise would have to be paid by increasing property taxes of existing taxpayers. Municipalities can use these funds for infrastructure such as water, sewers and roads (and sidewalks, I assume) or for soft services such as recreational centres and libraries. A bigger question is where pickleball courts fit in to the municipality's priority list. Without more research I really don't know. What I do know is that many of the people I've spoken to feel strongly that this decision was made in a vacuum with no community input. Which leads me to my next topic:

## **4. Consultations / Communications**

I understand that the decision to spend \$160,000 on pickleball courts was approved in the Council's 2019 budget deliberations. This was of course just one item in the myriad of budgetary approvals being decided and allowed for no public consultation on this specific issue. I'm told that as this is not a re-zoning issue - the land is already zoned as recreational - then no notice needed to be given to local residents. Nor was there any communication from the town that the construction was imminent on the green space, that it would be completely torn up and it would take almost a year.

But the strongest objections to this project that I've heard are because of the perceived surreptitious approval of this project. Many are still livid about what they call the Esso Station fiasco. It is this public perception of secrecy that causes people to distrust their elected representatives.

When I talked to staff I was told that three local residents were consulted: The Condie's who live directly in front of the tennis courts and who have been told by a real estate professional that the pickleball courts will in fact decrease their property value, The Condie's next door neighbour, Mr. Norman, whose house is up for sale and Tom Kritsch, the newest addition to the homeowners across from Bayview Park. I know that the Condie's had to repeatedly call the town office to talk to someone and then resorted to showing up in person to make an appointment with a TBM staffer. In their case it was not consultation, it was just a staffer hearing them out and then saying, sorry the decision's already been made. These three consultations were done long after the pickleball decision was made and the budget approved. It would seem that only the Thornbury Pickleball Club had any advance notice.

## **5. Loss of Green Space**

Unlike the Thornbury of my childhood, there is not as much green space now as there was back in what used to be the Town of Thornbury. That's not to say that the Town's evolution and growth has not been positive, but I think what makes us unique is the charm of Thornbury as a village without the plethora of box stores, retail chains, fast food strips and pay parking. But to maintain this uniqueness it is vital to preserve those open green spaces that remain and to check the impulse to develop every space, be it with houses, retail outlets or recreational facilities. Once they've been developed, there's no going back. People choose to retire to this area for the small town charm, green space and peace and quiet - otherwise why move from the city at all? I believe that the green space beside the tennis courts has inherent value in that it gives a sense of openness to the neighbourhood and is a visual respite from our propensity to fill every nook and cranny.

This green space is also used for playing frisbee, catch and kicking a soccer ball around etc. Not every recreational site needs to be structured and built upon. We need undesignated recreational spaces so that people can choose to do what they please. And personally, speaking as one who uses this green space every day, it is also free of droppings from our beloved, yet messy, herd of Bayview Park Canada Geese.

## **Conclusion**

I believe it is clear from all the points I have made this evening is that there is an irrefutable need for further public dialogue. Let's not make the mistake of many communities all over North America that

are now facing lawsuits, tense community relations and spending even more money to relocate pickleball courts or pay restitution to residents.

In closing, construction of the courts in a non-residential area is the simple and obvious solution that would address all of the concerns I've raised. I have a petition here from over 200 residents, half of whom do not live in the Bayview Park area, who are asking the Town to build pickleball courts in a non-residential area. And, of the three areas under consideration, both BVCC and Bayview Park are surrounded by residents. Only Tomahawk seems like an ideal choice: It's non-residential, has plenty of space, has toilet facilities and existing parking space. That way it may not be necessary, as Joni Mitchell sings, to "Pave paradise and put up a parking lot".

Thank you.