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COLUMNISTS

OPINION

Sutherland: It's not the game, it's the location

Distracting noise of pickleball players still a concern for neighbours.

By **Sylvia Sutherland**

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Columnist Sylvia Sutherland.
Metroland file photo

Some of the proponents for putting 16 pickleball courts at Bonnerworth Park are trying to sell the public a bill of goods. They claim the opponents of the project are anti-pickleball. That's simply not true.

They are not "out of touch." They do not "dislike" the sport. They do not consider the people who play it "hoity-toity." They simply don't want 16 courts in a residential area, or the baseball diamonds gone.

They don't want green space paved over for either the courts or the 80-car parking lot that will accompany them. They don't want the sound that has been described as a "high-pitched, penetrating, incredibly distracting noise" penetrating their homes, disturbing their peace hour after hour, day after day.

Some of the opponents to locating the courts at Bonnerworth Park would actually like to play pickleball, but not there. This includes Coun. Alex Bierk, who says he would love to learn the sport.

Some of the opponents do play.

There is "Mike." In a comment on the Examiner's website, he wrote, in part, "I am a pickleball player and I play a lot ... I don't believe we should be encroaching on residential areas by disturbing their environment and causing noise pollution that may not be able to be mitigated ... I would not want this nuisance in my neighbourhood.

"Surely, there is someplace else in this city that is vacant or could be better repurposed and not in a residential area. They should pause this project even if they still can, take a hard second look at options, do the proper studies and not railroad this thru (sic)."

Has the city actually looked at any alternative sites? Other than Knights of Columbus Park, from where the existing pickleball courts are being removed.

If it has, what sites? Where? Why was Bonnerworth considered better than any of them? Shouldn't council, in the interest of due diligence, have considered this list, if it exists, before rubber-stamping Bonnerworth?

Speaking of due diligence, what is the risk to the community if the city barrels ahead with the courts only to be sued or possibly taken to the Ontario Land Tribunal and have them closed down?

It's happening across Canada and the U.S. Check out this small sampling of headlines:

- From Oregon — "Lake Oswego shuts down pickleball courts indefinitely due to noise complaints."
- From Phoenix, Ariz. — "Pickleball pitting neighbor against neighbor, leading to lawsuits."
- From Port Moody, B.C. — "Pickleball banished after neighbours complain of rising stress, anxiety."
- From a bit closer to home — "Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and pickleball club fined for violating noise bylaw. Pickleball courts ordered closed for two years."

A Welland court found that the outdoor facilities in Niagara-on-the-Lake violated section three of the town's noise bylaw, which states, "no person shall make, cause or permit sound or vibration at any time, which is likely to disturb the quiet, peace, rest, enjoyment, comfort or convenience of the inhabitants of the town."

Section 2.2 of Peterborough's noise bylaw states, "No owner shall emit, cause or permit the emission from the owner's property of noise likely to disturb the inhabitants of the City of Peterborough."

See you in court?

Bierk has dubbed the whole affair "Bonnergate." Others call it "Picklegate."

Whatever you call it, many in this city, including some pickleball players, believe council should “take a hard second look at options, do the proper studies and not railroad this through.”



Sylvia Sutherland was Peterborough's mayor from 1985 to 1991 and from 1997 to 2006.

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