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Home / Opinion / Columnists

COLUMNISTS

OPINION

Clarkson: Pickleball decision will have consequences

Climate columnist weighs in on the Peterborough pickleball controversy

By Tricia Clarkson

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Sue McGregor-Hunter and Douglas Webster play a game of pickleball at Knights of Columbus Bowl Park in Peterborough in 2021. Clifford Skarstedt Metroland file photo

The City of Peterborough is in a pickle about pickleball courts at Bonnerworth Park. Residents are making noise about them and our mayor and five city councillors aren't listening.

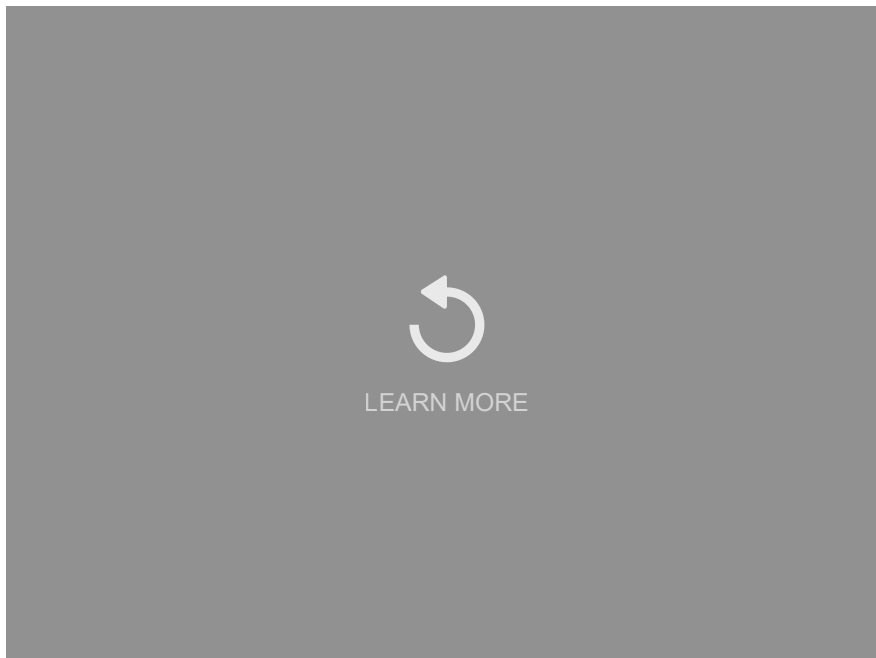
At the May 13 council meeting, Mayor Jeff Leal and councillors Gary Baldwin, Andrew Beamer, Kevin Duguay, Lesley Parnell and Don Vassiliadis voted against Coun. Joy Lachica's notice of motion to review new information about the pickleball project. Apparently, they didn't want to hear it.

However, by not giving this project a fair hearing, these five councillors and Mayor Leal are going to be hearing new information and complaints about it for a long time to come.

According to a column in the New York Post headlined, "Pickleball is Wreaking Havoc across the U.S. — and it's only going to get worse," furious noise complaints, violence, lawsuits, and criminal charges are on the rise.

Residents are complaining that the hard paddle and perforated plastic ball used to play the game make for louder "impulsive" noises that travel over longer distances than noises from tennis balls and racquets. Dozens of lawsuits have been filed across the U.S. against municipalities because of noise concerns.

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One complainant said that the constant "pop-pop-pop" of the game "comes through the windows and walls of his home and forces his family to play loud music, wear noise-cancelling headphones, close windows or leave our home when we just can't take it anymore," he said.

Another complainant petitioned the city of San Francisco to immediately shut down the courts in her neighbourhood.

"The noise isn't just grating — it's altering our way of life and affecting wildlife. The endless racket threatens our fragile ecosystem. This isn't just about us, it's about preserving nature for future generations. Beyond that, home values within a 500-foot radius are sinking, deterred by the unyielding noise. This isn't just a hit to homeowners, it's a blow to our local economy," she said.

Residents of West Seattle are complaining about unbearable noise from just six pickleball courts there. A wildlife biologist measured the decibels of noise to be over 80.

"Combined with the light pollution from the courts, this is detrimental to public health, and also to local wildlife," the biologist said.

Imagine the noise that 16 pickleball courts will make in Bonnerworth Park?

Very few communities build that many in one park — and when they do, they don't cost \$4.4 million. The construction of 16 pickleball courts in Greenwood City, Indiana cost the city US \$1.4 million.

Tennis player Martina Navratilova has complained that pickleball courts are taking over tennis courts, even though, according to the United States Tennis Association, “The number of people playing tennis is more than the combined number of people playing pickleball, badminton, racquetball and squash.”

This issue isn't going away. Peterborough residents who disagree with Mayor Leal and city councillors' vote against Councillor Lachica's recommendation to obtain more information, should email them the following questions:

1. Why wasn't this decision open to a public review before going ahead with it? This appears to be a blatant violation of the Open Public Meetings Act by the City of Peterborough.

2. Was an environmental assessment done on this project? Its heavy carbon footprint goes against the city's promise to view all projects through a climate lens. Was it?

3. Does the city need 16 pickleball courts in a public park? Why wouldn't four be considered instead?

Four courts would cost taxpayers less money and the tennis court and baseball diamond could remain.

4. How will the city acknowledge the petition against this project with over 3,200 Peterborough residents' signatures on it (and growing)?

5. How does the city justify spending \$4.4 million on 16 pickleball courts when it's complaining it doesn't have enough taxpayer dollars for necessities?

6. How much of the park green space will be replaced with a parking lot?

7. If the city wants to attract tourism, why doesn't it attract it with a green project?

8. What is the proven argument “for” this project?

According to the Examiner on May 10, “Pickleball court plan may not be final,” Councillor Kevin Duguay emphasized that Bonnerworth Park is a community park — meaning it's meant to serve everyone in Peterborough — not a neighbourhood park that's only designed for neighbourhood residents.”

You just defeated your own argument, Mr. Duguay. “Everyone” doesn't play pickleball. The majority of neighbourhood residents will use these courts, not the majority of Peterborough residents.

Thanks to Joy Lachica for showing true leadership on this issue by requesting a fair notice of motion to review new information about it. Unfortunately, your opposing city councillors don't want to hear it.

Thanks to councillors Alex Bierk, Matt Crowley, Dave Haacke and Keith Riel for supporting Joy's motion. You have shown that you have a moral obligation to all of the citizens of Peterborough — not just a chosen few.



Tricia Clarkson is a local climate change columnist and co-chair for Peterborough Alliance for Climate Action.

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