

Next Steps - Shared Use Request - Ephesus Park

Response by “Friends of Chapel Hill Public Tennis Courts”

04/29/2022

Below are comments being provided based upon recent discussions among Ephesus court tennis players, coaches, members of ChapelHillTennis.org, and advocates for improved Chapel Hill public tennis courts.

The response is based upon a document entitled “CHPB Proposal for Shared Use of Two Ephesus Tennis Courts” dated 3/25/2022 and from an email from Director Phil Fleischmann requesting a response from the tennis community by the set date of Fri., April 29. The e-mail also stated that “facility rules and utilization guidelines are within the purview of the Parks & Recreation Dept” and added the assigning of staff to monitor use of the pickleball and tennis courts.

The tennis community sees this proposal as representing two options:

1. The end of public tennis at Ephesus courts (because of incompatibility of the two sports, especially the high noise level of PB, and management of scheduling and court selection by PB)
2. Continuation of improvements of the four remaining Ephesus tennis courts, leading to increased usage from families, students, youth and adults through drop-in play, lessons, and camps of local Chapel Hill citizens.

But given the two choices, the tennis community sees no need to discuss this proposal further directly with the PB group. Our simple answer is NO to Option 1!

Background information supporting our position follows on subsequent pages. Although we recognize that P&R has the purview to make "the decision" we can only hope that it will be the “right decision” and not a decision made by political influencers. We remain hopeful that P&R will continue to work with the tennis community based upon the improvements made to the courts during the past 16 months and the planned resurfacing in June. If option 1 is chosen, then all of the implemented changes are for naught.

Background and Relevant Information

- History

1. Prior to 2016, there were six tennis courts at Ephesus. The courts were full with people waiting for an open court. P&R offered youth and adult tennis classes M-TH from 5-8pm which were all well attended.
2. In spring 2016, P&R Director Jim Orr with his “decision purview ability” was convinced by a group of PB advocates (later to be known as ambassadors) to convert two of the tennis courts to six PB courts. Tennis court users were not even aware of the decision until the nets were removed. When asked, Jim replied “maybe in retrospect we should have solicited feedback from local tennis users.” When reminded that middle school Culbreth uses the courts for their home practices and matches, he replied “we have no obligation to provide facilities to the school system.”
3. Tennis lessons were moved arbitrarily to Cedar Falls and were never as successful. Tennis usage at Ephesus dropped off primarily because the two sports should never be adjacent due to the noise level generated by PB.
4. In summary, the conversion was made without any IMPACT study done (noise, dislocation of tennis lessons, camps, and other youth programs, school team support, overflowing parking congestion, and others).
5. However, the tennis community has worked to survive and thrive even after giving up 1/3 of their courts to PB and with all these obstacles.

- Court Status and Maintenance

1. Tennis and PB should never be co-located due to the loud noise level from PB. Google “pickleball tennis noise” to see how even neighborhoods are starting to rebel against the loud noise level. If you ever watch tennis matches, you will note that it is a “quiet” sport.
2. Permanent lines that are for non-tennis sports are very distracting to players. In fact that is one of the reasons USTA will not allow these lines. Garrett Road Park in Durham has recently removed the PB lines from their courts.
3. PB courts have been resurfaced 3 times since 2016. Ephesus tennis courts have never been resurfaced in this time. In fact one net was taken down last year, with the crack in court 2 deemed to be unsafe. After pleading, cracks were filled with concrete and the net was put back up. But on a tour of courts in the fall of 2021, Dwight from Americourt was comparing the PB surface to the tennis surface, and stated “the tennis courts, especially court 3, are barely playable”.
4. With the noise and overall maintenance neglect, it has been a struggle to attract new tennis players. We have seen people return as court conditions have improved. Recently, a PB seating area was constructed next to the sidewalk entry to the court which requires tennis players to walk through a crowd even if courteous, can be uncomfortable. It is another decision without seeking any feedback from the tennis community about its impact.

5. Also, PB has been granted permission to use the backboard ordered specifically for tennis which brings additional excessive noise within the tennis court area. Seems like the struggles never end.

- Usage

1. Additional comments on collecting usage numbers:
 - a. Tennis facilities are used by middle schools, lessons, and camps for both youth and adults. The model is for inclusive recreational opportunities for local community users of all ages to be able to drop-in and find a court. With few exceptions, the users are from families of local Chapel Hill taxpayers. It is run as a public court.
 - b. There is no social media presence inviting or telling when people can play. There is no group of private leaders assigning nights for play and encouraging players from non-CH districts to come play. That would be running it as a private club.
 - c. Finally, usage numbers should represent quality not quantity. What are the age groups of the users? Where do the users reside, are they taxpayer families? Usage numbers should be taken at all facilities, perhaps there are other facilities which could be used with less impact.
 - d. And do parks facilities need to be used 100% of the time? Just look at greenways, playgrounds, fields, and other facilities that have periods of downtime.
2. PB has been targeting a takeover of the tennis courts since 2018. As reference, please see the PB article from Chapel Hill Magazine (8/1/2018) [<here>](#). In this article, a PB ambassador JB Marr states about Ephesus "Our goal is to expand here," JB says, gesturing to the surrounding courts. The intermediate goal is to convert two of these tennis courts to more pickleball courts". Note that there is no thought given to the impact on the tennis community, it is simply an "invasion."
3. And based upon the proposal, it appears the PB group is generating monies from activities held on a public town court? Is there a town contract signed for this arrangement or is this again use of a public court as if a private club?

- Time Slots

1. It is clear the PB time slots did not take into account actual tennis activity and impacts, but are solely focused only on the "wants for more" of PB.
2. For instance Culbreth boys have been using the Ephesus courts full time from 4-5:30pm (M-Th) during March/April, and the girls' team uses the same time and days for September/October. Yet PB has requested a time slot from 3-10pm on M, T, and Thur. Where will Culbreth go for their girls and boys tennis teams?
3. Tennis lessons and camps have been scheduled by EMPACT on Tue and Thur evenings and weekend, so that 2-3 courts have been fully utilized during this time too.
4. How is it a co-share when PB is arbitrarily suggesting time slots without any consideration for the impact on tennis players?

5. An addendum is attached with recent and planned Ephesus tennis schedules including lessons, camps, mini-tournaments, 'double' play, and school activities. How would co-share work with these groups?

- Look for Win-Win Solutions from All Viable Alternatives

1. Look for the Win-Win solution described in this [<ViewPoint>](#).
2. It is clear that PB is growing and the number of users is increasing. It is unclear how many of the current Ephesus PB users are CH residents and some evidence that many are not. This should be an important factor when making decisions about allocating town resources.
3. In any event, we are not opposed to and encourage P&R to look for additional PB facilities.
4. There are other parks that likely have less usage. Why is it ok to ask Ephesus tennis players and classes to migrate and not have the PB group find a place to play elsewhere?
5. Consider looking at other indoor facilities, unused parking lots like around University Place, and basketball courts. If users are from CH, there would be an advantage to dispersing the facilities around the town – unless you are only interested in control and running the courts more as a private club.

- Closing

We simply ask you to follow the vision and mission statements from 'Park & Recreation Business Plan 2022'. In the business plan, it states the following:

Our Vision:

Inspire – Create – **Preserve**

Our Mission

To enliven our community by providing exceptional service, creating opportunities for inclusive recreational and cultural experiences, and nurturing beautiful, sustainable spaces.

Support the youth, families, students and local citizens by preserving CH public tennis.

Thank you,
Friends of Chapel Hill Public Tennis

(Visit chapelhilltennis.org regularly for more information)

Addendum – Recent and Upcoming Planned Tennis Activities at Ephesus (see * note at end)

- Culbreth Boys Tennis Teams

March – April, 2022: Practices Mon-Thur, 4-5:30 (4 courts). Home matches run from 4-6:30pm. Team had 40 students try out to make the team!

- Culbreth Girls Tennis Teams

September – October 2022: Practices Mon-Thur, 4-5:30 (4 courts). Home matches run from 4-6:30pm.

- USTA Junior Team tennis (schedule by LeeAnn Rose of DOCTA)

4-22 Friday Night 6:00 to 7:30
4-23 Saturday no matches this weekend
4-24 Sunday practice 1:30 - 5:00

5-1 Practice 1:30 - 5:00
5-6 matches 6:00 - 7:30
5-7 matches 12:30 - 3:30
5-15 Practice 1:30 - 5:00
5-21 matches 1:30 3:30
5-22 Practice 1:30 - 5:00
5-28 matches at 1:00 -3:30
5-29 practice 1:30 - 5:00

6-3 match 6:00- 7:30
6-4 matches at 12:30 - 3:30

- EMPACT Tennis Camps and Lessons

This spring we are expecting programming on:
Tuesday evening 530-730pm
Wednesday 530-730pm for adult programming.

Friday evening 6-8pm youth team tennis matches 8s, and 10s
Saturday 10am-2pm youth 12s,14s, 18s

Sunday youth programs 130-430pm Team tennis practice (year round)

All these above programs go through June.

Starting mid-May -August with DOCTA run Try Tennis USTA programs on Saturday mornings 8am -930am and Monday evenings 5pm -630pm

Summer camps starting second week in June -August we have 9am-3pm for youth. Expecting big groups and will need all courts. Just to emphasize, these are youth programs.

Starting Fall September -November programs will mirror this same schedule.

- More Ephesus Tennis Demand during Cedar Falls and Hargraves Court Renovations

Renovation of Cedar Falls and Hargraves tennis courts starts in fall 2022 and is estimated to last up to a year or more. During this time, it is anticipated that many regular players of these courts will migrate and use the Ephesus courts.

- New Tennis Practice Backboard Installed on Court 3

P&R installed new tennis practice backboard on court 3. Backboard is especially designed with slant to return a tennis ball with a natural arc and is gaining in popularity as it becomes more widely known.

- Morning 'Mixed' Doubles

Any morning, Monday – Friday; uses court 4

- Evening Doubles

5:30-7:00pm, Monday – Friday, 2-3x/week; uses court 1

- Mini-Tennis tournaments throughout the year

Last one was a 'senior' Tournament:

Monday, April 8 & Friday, April 11, 2022; used All 4 courts

(*) Near term usage monitoring will not capture numbers from many of these scheduled or planned events