

# GAME ON PICKLEBALL: A Plan for Promoting Pickleball in Howard County, Maryland



## Introduction

Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the United States and Howard County. It provides health benefits, entertainment, and the opportunity to compete. It is a multi-generational sport that appeals to all age groups, especially to mature adults, the fastest growing segment of the population in Howard County. In an effort to coordinate the expansion of pickleball in Howard County, the Howard County Pickleball Association (HCPA) formed and led a Pickleball Working Group consisting of organizations that either offer pickleball play opportunities or represent a group interested in participation in the sport. The outcome of the Working Group was a comprehensive Pickleball Master Plan Report offering direction for promoting the growth and development of pickleball in Howard County. This summary of the Pickleball Master Plan highlights the key consensus recommendations of the Pickleball Working Group, which consisted of the following organizations:

- Columbia Association
- Columbia Association Senior Advisory Committee
- Columbia Association Tennis Advisory Committee
- PlayPickleball.org
- Howard Community College
- Howard County Pickleball Association
- Howard County Public School System
- Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks
- The Dancel Y in Ellicott City

The full report, *Game on Pickleball: A Plan for Promoting the Development and Growth of Pickleball in Howard County, Maryland*, was prepared by HCPA and presents background information about the sport and outlines a detailed action plan for establishing Howard County as a leader in the development of pickleball in Maryland. The full report can be found on the HCPA website, [www.howardcountypickleball.org](http://www.howardcountypickleball.org), under the menu item “Master Plan” or go to <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MdD6mbpCaYFEnZRsh6oKk8zUQgZFnKcC/view> to view the report.

## The Problems

As a wealthy community with a population of 323,196, Howard County doesn’t have enough pickleball courts to meet the needs of its residents. There are **16** locations concentrated largely in the eastern portion of the County providing a total of **72** indoor and outdoor courts. (See attached map.)

Although this might sound like a substantial number, consider the following:

- Only **8** of these courts are dedicated pickleball courts consisting of permanent pickleball nets with the regulation lines.
- All of these dedicated courts are outside so there are no year-round play opportunities on them.
- None of the outdoor courts are covered so bad weather limits play time.
- Only **6** of the outdoor courts are lighted, part of the year.
- Only **2** of the courts are provided by the County and open to the general public at no cost. The other **6** are provided by Columbia Association to members, cardholders, and non-members for a fee.
- The remaining **64** courts are shared courts meaning they are used for more than one sport. There may be painted lines on the courts or temporary lines, which have to be added when the courts are in use for pickleball. Temporary pickleball nets also have to be installed during use. In an effort to facilitate pickleball playing opportunities, HCPA transports nets the Association has purchased to and from the courts and arranges for volunteers to setup the nets and line the courts, as needed. (See attached photos illustrating the use of shared courts.)

- The hours dedicated to pickleball play are limited because of these sharing arrangements.

From a policy perspective, there is a lack of equity in existing pickleball amenities as compared to tennis or basketball facilities. In the absence of dedicated pickleball courts (with permanent nets), pickleball players are unable to show up at a court and begin play, for which tennis and basketball players are routinely able to do.

Comparatively, the report finds that:

- Collier County, FL (population 378,488) has **58** dedicated courts in Naples, FL.
- Charlotte County, FL (population 184,998) has **16** lighted, dedicated courts in Punta Gorda, FL.
- Washington County, UT (population 171,700) has **24** dedicated courts in St. George, UT.
- Spalding County, GA (population 66,100) has **20** dedicated courts including **3** under cover in Griffin, GA. (See the attached photo of this facility.)

## **The Solutions**

To remedy these problems, the Pickleball Working Group identified three goals to guide the development of the Pickleball Master Plan recommendations.

Goal #1: Develop facilities that expand play and limit barriers. To increase the supply of pickleball facilities and limit barriers to play, the Pickleball Master Plan recommends:

- Identify existing facilities that can be transformed into pickleball courts.
- Investigate the feasibility of covers and lights for courts to extend play time.
- Find ways to make shared courts more accessible so that volunteers do not have to transport, set up, and tear down nets for play.
- Find locations and identify funding for new, dedicated pickleball courts.
- Work for greater commercial support and provision of pickleball courts.

Goal #2: Develop a comprehensive set of pickleball programs. To engage new players and retain existing players through play opportunities, instruction, leagues, tournaments, and social events, the Pickleball Master Plan recommends:

- Provide training for instructors.
- Develop a joint plan for new player instruction.
- Hold a community-wide festival that features pickleball.
- Host a major regional pickleball tournament.
- Offer clinics for skills advancement.
- Identify what types of league offerings are needed and offer league play.
- Encourage multi-generational play and bring pickleball to middle school and high school students.
- Work with educational systems to bring more pickleball to the community.

Goal #3: Foster ongoing collaboration among pickleball and other groups. To ensure that the Pickleball Master Plan is kept current and the plan is implemented, the Pickleball Master Plan recommends:

- Transform the Pickleball Working Group into a permanent HoCo Pickleball Network.
- Schedule at least two meetings of the HoCo Pickleball Network each year with HCPA initially providing secretariat duties.
- Bring information about the Pickleball Master Plan to Columbia villages as well as government and civic leaders.

## Next Steps

HCPA and other interested organizations will take the following next steps to implement the Pickleball Master Plan:

Step 1: Develop a proposal for facilities conversion and new facilities development over the next five years in Howard County (Facilities Proposal).

Step 2: Introduce the Master Plan and the Facilities Proposal to the public. Meet with interested organizations and representatives of media outlets to explain the Master Plan and Facilities Proposal.

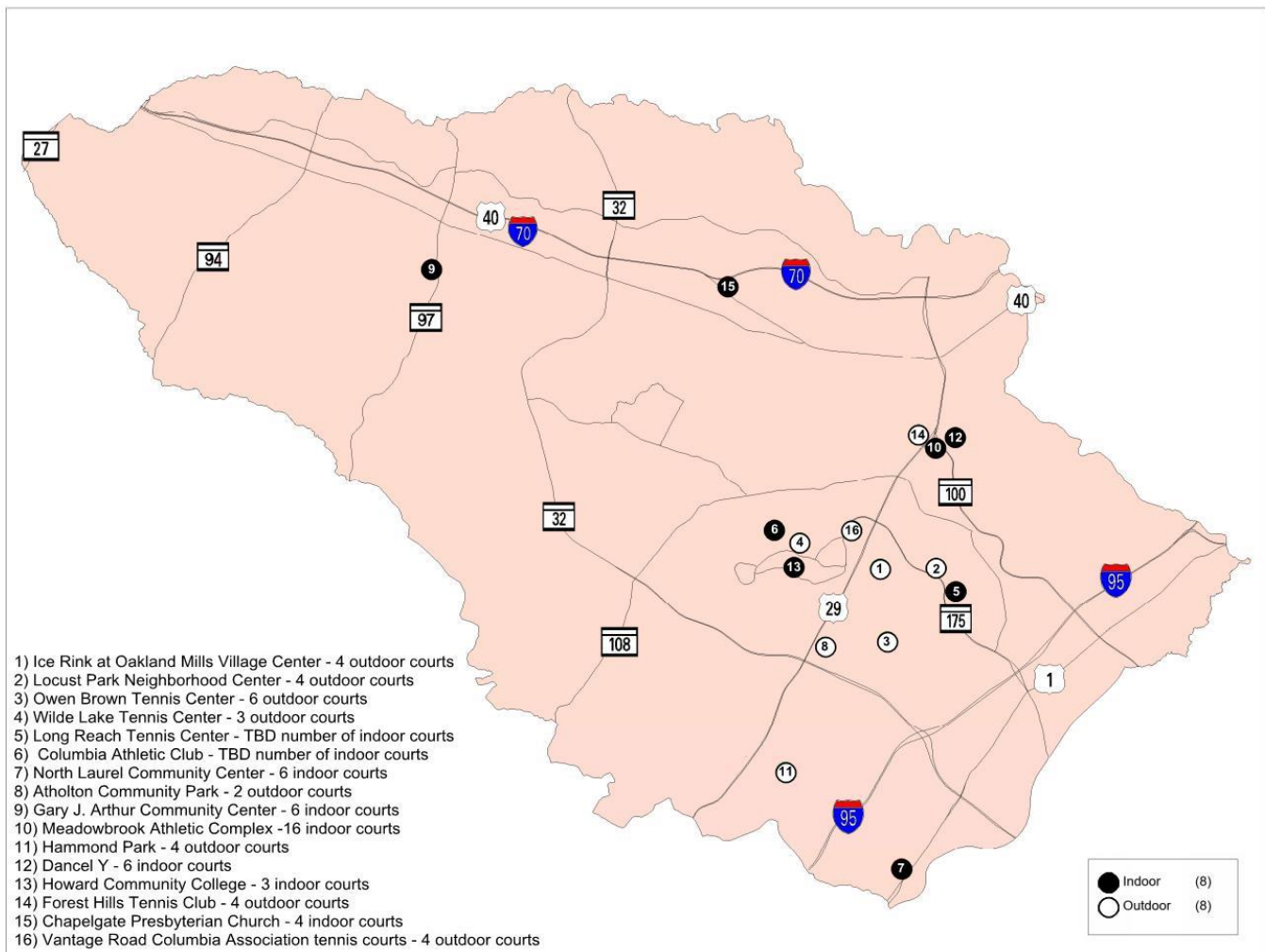
Step 3: Build a coalition of groups and individuals who support the Facilities Proposal.

Step 4: Continue to gather data about the growth of the sport and the unmet needs of players.

Step 5: Become familiar with the County and Columbia Association budgeting processes and meet with elected officials and their staff to discuss the Facilities Proposal and seek endorsements.

Step 6: Convene the new HoCo Pickleball Network at least two times each year.

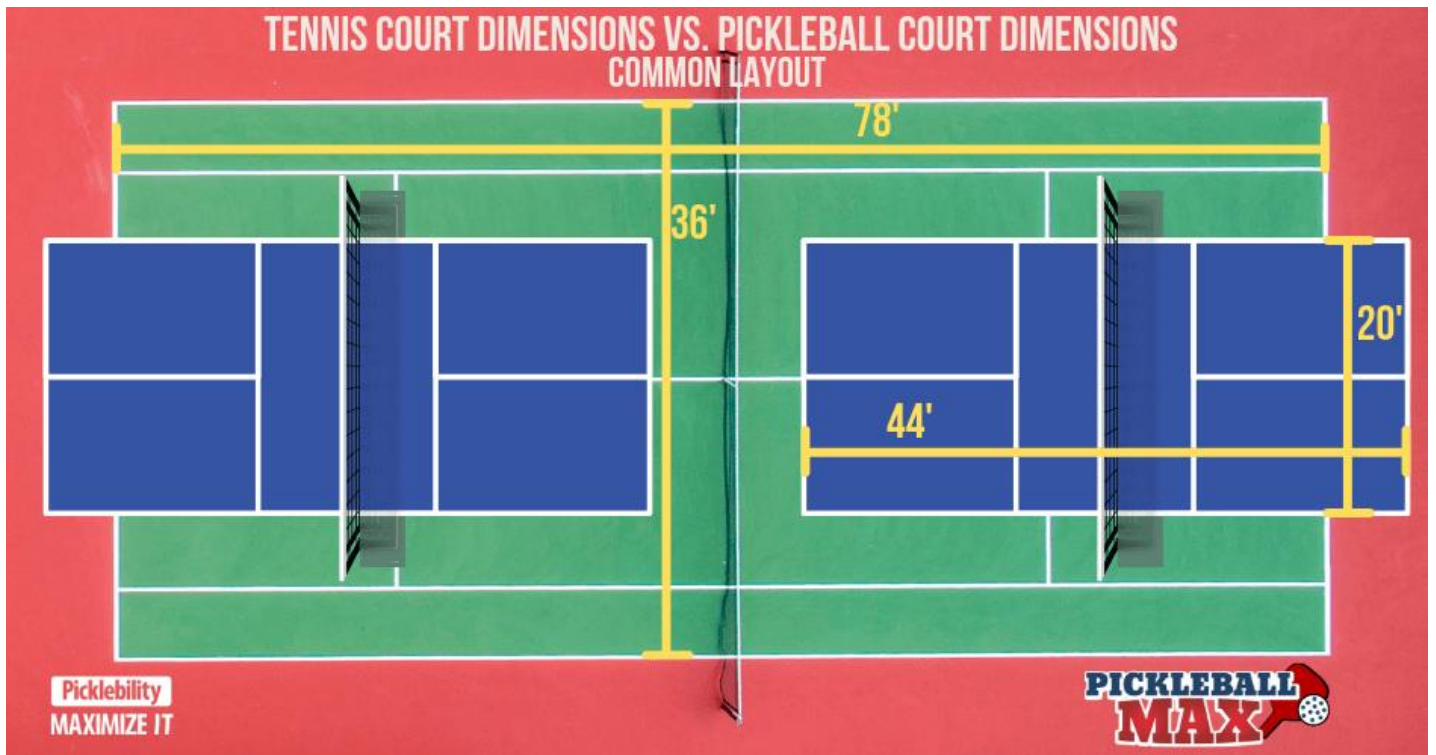
## Map of Pickleball Court Locations in Howard County



### Basketball Court Transformed into Pickleball Court with Tape and Portable Nets



### Tennis Court Transformed into Two Pickleball Courts





## Twenty Dedicated Courts (three covered) in Griffin, GA



### Contact

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