

On December 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, our Association made a presentation to Howard County Recreation and Parks. The speech (see below) was given to their Board. They explained how 2022 projects had to be in place a year ago. They budget money a year in advance. This year they are planning on several new facilities for Pickleball.

FY2022, summer\fall – shade structure and benches for Atholton

FY2022, spring\summer – court lines, High Ridge in North Laurel, Atholton (tennis courts) in Columbia, and Cypressmede in Ellicott City (after resurfacing)

FY 2023, date TBD, Western Regional minimum of 6 permanent courts to be constructed

FY 2023, spring\summer 6 permanent courts planned for Blandair Park

FY2024, considering Alpha Ridge Park installation of courts (no lights, the area is tagged dark sky)

As you may read in the speech, we asked for dedicated courts, lights for evening play and a dedicated indoor facility. I know these will not be possible for this year's budget, but we need to present them with what we want for out years.

We are slowly making progress with Recreation and Parks. Yes, I wish it was faster, but this is a government agency. They move slowly. There was a good exchange of ideas with their board members after our request for more facilities.

They said they are very aware of the need for more Pickleball facilities. They said they are looking and reevaluating needs constantly. If we have suggestions to please submit them for consideration. I will be happy to take your suggestions forward to our next meeting with Rec and Parks.

The overall tone of the meeting was positive.

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Good Evening, My name is Joanne Griesser, and I am President of the Howard County Pickleball Association.

Before I start my pitch, I would like to thank the Rec and Parks management and staff for increasing our facilities and opportunities to play this past year. The free play days on Sunday and Thursdays encourage many new players. There are more Marc Austin's classes and they are well attended by many of our members. The 55+ tournament was a successful collaborative effort between our organizations; Scott, Steve and Marc worked very hard to organize it and made it fun for everyone. I had fun even though I did not win and I thought my position on the board would at least give me a spot on the podium. And thank you for Krista. She is very responsive to our inquiries, agreed to a town hall where we could ask questions about future plans and she is very easy to work with. Thank you.

The Howard County Pickleball Association has been active for over 5 years. We started our organization in a tiny conference room over the YMCA gym. There were about 20 of us back then, and we had two simple goals in mind, play and promote Pickleball.

Our membership has grown from that first meeting of 20 people to over 600 active members. We add new members every week. While I am advocating for our Association, I am aware that I am also advocating for the non-members as well. Ad hoc groups are popping up all over the county and hosting play sessions. Besides being a member of the Association, I also belong to an Ad Hoc Sunday Morning group of almost 60 people.

Pickleball is mainstream. It has grown from a few players drawing lines in parking lots to being showcased on Good Morning America. It is the fastest growing sport in the United States today. This great sport encourages comradery and good sportsmanship and a wonderful way of getting exercise, young or old. It meets the Healthy Howard Agenda.

Our membership includes long time county residence, like my family, 4 decades in Howard County, my husband and I raised our raised son here, and we plan to retire here. Many Association members have similar stories and have lived in this county longer than I have. We are here because of the amenities the county has to offer. We look forward to staying here, aging in place, because of those amenities.

Our Association wants to be a part of the amenities that Howard County has to offer. To help support the youth programs, our organization has donated equipment to Howard County schools. We have volunteers that are willing to be trained to coach after school programs if Howard County had the facilities. Our organization is developing a playbook to share; it will contain rules, drills and play tips for each level of player from novice to advanced.

In addition to advocating Pickleball for youth programs, we contribute in other ways. Each year we have organized food drives for the Howard county Food Bank. This year our organization donated hundreds of pounds of food and a several thousand dollars to the Food Bank.

We hosted a tournament over the Thanksgiving holiday and raised over \$2100 for Grassroots. Unfortunately, we had to use Baltimore County facilities to accomplish this.

Our organization has some needs as well. We only have 2 dedicated courts in our county. We do not have any dedicated covered or indoor facilities. There is one set of courts at Rockburn with lights for night play but we share that with Basketball players. We get a few hours a week in a couple of gyms, and very little time in the evenings for the people that work during the day. Once the weather gets too cold or the snow gets too deep to clear a court, we have very few places to play.

We are respectfully requesting that you consider funding for permanent courts in parks like Blandair, Western Regional and Atholton. Dedicated courts so we are not at odds with tennis or basketball players. We have submitted a drawing to Jason and Krista, for a dedicated facility that we saw in Florida. We hope it will be considered during a planning phase.

We are asking for more dual use courts in Centennial, Savage, Atholton, Warfield Pond and Blandair parks. This seems like a big ask, but the cost of painting lines for 1 pickleball court on an existing tennis court is only \$500. HCPA would be open to cost sharing some of the upgrades. The additional dual courts in Blandair or Western Regional would be considered a great venue for tournaments. Rec and Parks, and Howard County could benefit from having 16 courts in one location.

That kind of court availability sets up Howard County to host regional tournaments. Not just county tournaments, but regional tournaments that would bring tourist dollars into Howard County. If our group could raise \$2100 in 4 hours, with local talent, think of the amount of money, you could bring in with a regional three-day tournament. Between sponsors and admission fees, the county would see significant profits. This does not include the tourist dollars that would benefit Hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues. This would be a good revenue stream for your department and the county.

If we do not begin to create facilities that are able to host tournaments and give residents access to more courts and facilities, people will spend their dollars in other counties that are currently building the kind of facilities that we have described. Montgomery and Ann Arundel are already well ahead of Howard in their support of this sport. Ann Arundel already has the water, why should we give them Pickleball too.

Finally, we are asking for a dedicated indoor or lighted covered facility for night play and during inclement weather. Pickleball could be played a year round in our county. We know this is a big ask. Funding generated from Tournaments would help to subsidize this project.

We hope you will consider our request and invite us in-depth discussions about our needs and how we can help contribute to the local need of the county. And as always, we would welcome you on the court for a game or two. Thank you for your time.