

June 19, 2023

To: Andy Field, Parks and Recreation Director

From: Juliana Humphrey and Pickleball Association of San Diego

Re: Response to Parks and Recreation Board Presentation of June 15, 2023

PASD respectfully accepts the opportunity to submit additional comments regarding our request to temporarily repurpose six courts at Peninsula Tennis Club to pickleball until the City of San Diego completes a pickleball facility. In addition, we will respond to questions raised by Board members, comments made by the Tennis presenter (including the tennis-planned surprise announcement of a plan for 19 courts at Barnes), and comments by Parks staff about the state of pickleball in San Diego.

PASD's presentation was in three parts. The first part explained the data behind why PTC courts were chosen for the temporary repurposing for pickleball. The data show that PTC uses less than half of their court hours. Full stop. Tennis presented no information counter to PASD's, even though they own all the data. Tennis also did not dispute the fact that their most recent reservation system often exaggerated the use of their courts and used courts for non-tennis purposes.

The second part of PASD's presentation explained its philosophy about public pickleball courts. PASD believes that pickleball is an inexpensive sport and should be free or inexpensive to play at a public facility. PASD would bear the costs of court conversion. Again, tennis had no response.

The third point by PASD was that pickleball courts and programs should be run by pickleball players or pros, rather than by tennis clubs. Players desire a "pickleball experience" at a facility with ladders, leagues, and curated play for various levels. This does not happen when pickleball courts are an addendum to tennis.

In contrast with the positive potential for a pickleball center run by pickleball, PASD offered three recent, stark examples of local tennis clubs' mistreatment of pickleball play in favor of tennis. The point was echoed by several speakers who play at tennis clubs where pickleball plays second fiddle. No dispute by tennis.

After the presentation, a board member seemed incredulous that PASD would request pickleball courts be run by pickleball. He said the suggestion "made his head explode." It is regrettable that the member did not absorb the seriousness of the examples of tennis mismanagement presented, including the loss to a vibrant group of seniors who were shut out of their one tennis court by the greed of University City Racquet Club, or the example of Barnes, at its then-four pickleball courts, costing players more than twice the going rate to play. At a public club.

The same board member criticized PASD for not working on other solutions for its members. Given the limited time constraints, PASD chose not to speak at length about its historical attempts to create a public pickleball facility in San Diego. In fact, PASD worked toward several

ideas within the last two plus years. This criticism may have been encouraged by the tennis presenter's claim that PASD did not seek approval from local park and recreation advisory committees for its pending request. This claim was false. At our meeting in January, *with the tennis presenter in attendance*, PASD specifically asked the Park Director whether PASD needed to shop its request for temporary courts to the various committees as it had been doing with its plans for several previous months. The director said no; Parks and the Mayor would make the decision themselves. The tennis presenter was not corrected during the "fact" presentation.

The truth is that the founders of PASD went in good faith to all boards/committees suggested to them, often several times, and presented all their pickleball plans and ideas as transparently and thoroughly as they were allowed. The plans always included the component that PASD would pay to build or convert courts. Each board/committee said they deferred to the Parks Board. The founders were also in direct correspondence with multiple city staff about finding a city park space where PASD could build. They received a flat "no" about building courts from scratch at Nobel Park in 2021. By January 2023, PASD had demonstrated enough rationale and community support to present at Parks Board. This invitation came from the Parks Director and made sense: he and the mayor would be making the decision on the PASD plan.

Tennis had no data-driven elements to its presentation. What it had was a surprise announcement that Barnes Tennis Center – in cooperation with PTC and District Tennis – was building 19 pickleball courts at its club. (Ironically, the founders of PASD made their first proposals, to Barnes in 2020, to pay to build 20+ courts in the approximate space shown by Barnes now. The proposal was abandoned when management informed them that Barnes was reserving the space for other purposes.) Clearly, tennis believed that Barnes' action would make PASD's proposal moot. However, given the announced purpose of the 19 courts for Barnes, PASD contends its proposal should still be considered.

Per the Barnes manager's own words, the proceeds from pickleball players at Barnes will be used to subsidize the club's many tennis programs. Whatever the merit of such programs, pickleball dollars should not be paying for them, and would not be if pickleball had control over its own club. Further, there was no mention of pickleball players being able to join Barnes as members and thus able to reserve a court at a reduced cost as tennis players do.

The use of inflated pickleball rates to support tennis programs is not a "win" for pickleball. Rather, it highlights the currently unbridgeable divide between PASD and tennis. Tennis wants to profit from pickleball and PASD wants pickleball play to be free or low cost – truly non-profit.

Here is the math regarding tennis play versus pickleball on an annual basis at Barnes. Presume the tennis player and pickleball player each play three times per week:

Tennis player: Join Barnes – all play is included. (\$350; \$250 seniors) *

**Other perks*: Discounted clinics/lessons/leagues, discount in pro shop

Pickleball player: No membership opportunity.

A. 3 times/week two hours open play (\$5 each time = \$780)

B. 3 times/week two hours reserved play (\$14 each time = \$2148)

This is the same story at all public tennis clubs where pickleball is available. They accept the money of pickleball players but do not treat them as equals of the tennis players. This is the inequity and unfairness that PASD seeks to end on the public pickleball courts in our city.

Last, PASD must comment on the information provided by Parks regarding “what pickleball players want.” The Parks representative reported that players preferred indoor play. This is in opposition with the experience of PASD’s thousands of players. The beauty of living and playing in San Diego is being outside. What may be being expressed to Parks is a preference for more *free* places to play, which describes the indoor courts, and few outdoor courts provided by the city. PASD would be pleased to assist Parks in reaching out to our thousands of members to gauge their preferences for a public pickleball facility.

PASD looks forward to the decision of Parks and Recreation and the Mayor on its proposal.