



Pickleball Strategy Report (May 1, 2025)

Across Canada, cities and towns are experiencing an unprecedented surge in demand for pickleball. In response, many municipalities have hired consultants to develop Pickleball Strategy Reports—sometimes combined with tennis strategies—to assess local needs and plan for infrastructure. These reports are shaping the future of racquet sports across the country.

Pickleball Partners has conducted an in-depth review and comparative analysis of numerous pickleball strategy reports, highlighting the shared findings while drawing attention to the critical nuances that set pickleball apart from other sports. Our goal is to help municipalities avoid missteps, save money on expensive consultants, and build sustainable, inclusive strategies that reflect the unique character and explosive growth of the sport.

The Realities Behind the Reports

While most reports acknowledge the rapid rise of pickleball, they often fall short in execution due to:

- **Survey bias:** Many surveys only capture current players and overlook the fast-growing demographic that is new to or unaware of pickleball but will soon demand access.
- **Underbuilding:** Cities install a few courts, receive overwhelming public response, and quickly realize they underestimated demand.
- **Band-aid solutions:** Painting lines on tennis courts, allocating time in gyms, or marking parking lots may satisfy short-term optics, but they do not reflect the scale or permanence this sport requires.

These stop-gap measures can lead to **conflicts, court domination by small groups, exclusionary environments and long wait times**, especially when facilities have only 2–4 courts. These issues erode the core community spirit of pickleball.

Why Pickleball is Different

Pickleball is not just another sport. It is:

- **Multigenerational:** Played by kids, adults, and seniors alike.
- **Inclusive:** Welcoming across cultures, languages, and athletic backgrounds.
- **Community-building:** Perhaps more than any other sport, pickleball forms friendships and local networks at a rapid pace.
- **Spontaneous:** Success depends on **open play environments** where players can just show up and find a game—not structured reservations and exclusive use.

Unlike tennis or hockey, pickleball thrives on **accessibility, informality, and variety**. Treating it like other sports leads to fragmented, underperforming infrastructure.

Successful Strategies

We have identified key features of successful strategies and they all have one theme in common: two distinct consulting approaches:

The most successful strategies come from in-house staff-driven reports in consultation with primary user groups. See our report on Newmarket's Pickleball Strategy. Other municipalities have engaged hired independent, evidence-driven consultants: Grounded in authentic user data, local engagement, and benchmarking from high-performing jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S.

The most successful strategies work **with local clubs and user groups**, who bring players into the game, foster inclusivity, and run programs that match player skill levels. These clubs are the grassroots engines of growth—and ignoring them leads to disconnected planning, unhappy users, and complaints.

What Works

Cities that “get it right” start by understanding that **pickleball is here to stay**. Year-round demand is rising, and the sport is no longer just for older adults. Investments must reflect:

- **Dedicated, clustered courts** (6–12+ courts per site)
 - **Programming for skill development and inclusion**
 - **Open play formats with affordable and fair access rules**
 - **Year-round access via covered or indoor facilities**
 - **Collaborative planning across municipalities and with non-profit clubs**
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Collaboration is the Future

Year-round facilities are costly—but essential. For municipalities that are challenged financially, the answer is **regional collaboration**: co-owned or jointly managed pickleball hubs shared by neighbouring municipalities. These facilities are better utilized, more affordable per capita, and can serve thousands.

Those who have the financial capabilities focus on collaboration with primary user groups. A prime example: **Newmarket (pop. ~89,000)** is building a **20-court year-round pickleball facility**. It will become a regional draw, relieve pressure on surrounding towns, and serve as a benchmark for getting it right. Newmarket relied on in-house staff, working with the community pickleball club, to provide a cluster of six outdoor courts at Quaker Park and six lined shared-use tennis courts. As demand surged, they approved plans to build 20 indoor dedicated courts in an air-supported structure owned and operated by the Town. They adopted the same strategy with their tennis program, building a new indoor facility owned and operated by the Town, ending a long-standing partnership with a for-profit operator. This will allow the Town to provide affordable, accessible courts and recycle profits back into programs.

Pickleball is not a trend—it's a transformation. Municipalities that fail to plan accordingly will fall behind. This report offers the insights needed to make the right decisions now—grounded in analysis, best practices, and the real experiences of cities across Canada.

MUNICIPAL STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS

✦✦ Greater Victoria (2024)

- Regional collaboration among Victoria, Saanich, Oak Bay, and Esquimalt.
- Consultant: *Consultant not listed in the summary document.*
- Goal: Develop hub-style facilities and address residential noise concerns.
- Setbacks: Up to 175m for 14 courts; prioritizes soft ground and berms.
- Plans for temporary courts, booking apps, and a regional permit system.

✦✦ Coquitlam (2017–2037)

- Consultant: *Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants Ltd. (PERC)*
- Balanced long-term growth: maintain 0.25 tennis courts/1,000 residents.
- Clusters of 4–6 courts recommended in future parks.
- Indoor courts via partnerships.
- Supports shared use but prioritizes walkable access and basic amenities.

✨ ✨ **Ottawa (Draft 2025)**

- Consultant: *Monteith Brown Planning Consultants*
- 315 tennis and 172 pickleball courts (many dual-use).
- Noise setbacks from 45m (1 court) to 175m (14 courts).
- First-come, first-served model dominates; club play limited to 50% of total hours.
- Focus on standardizing outdoor court policies and infrastructure.

✨ ✨ **Toronto (2023 Staff Report)**

- Internal staff report (no external consultant listed).
- Grew from 1 to 165+ courts in 6 years; more than 50 rec centres offer pickleball.
- Capital plan: 3 new lit complexes + dedicated Centennial Park hub.
- Mixed-use dry pads, repurposed tennis, and dedicated builds.
- Robust programming and partnerships with Nike and Toronto Pickleball Alliance.

✨ ✨ **Peterborough (2023)**

- Consultant: *Monteith Brown Planning Consultants*
- Forecasts need for 34 pickleball courts and 26 tennis courts by 2031.
- Recommends two 8-court hubs and one 16–20 court provincial tournament site.
- Proposed provision: 1 lit pickleball court per 4,000 people.
- Supports court clustering, highlighting standards, and indoor expansion.

✨ ✨ **Barrie (2024)**

- Consultant: *Monteith Brown Planning Consultants*
- Current: 14 tennis and 25 pickleball courts (mostly shared-use).
- Target: 46 pickleball courts by 2036 (1 per 5,000 residents).
- Prioritizes court clusters with post-tensioned concrete, lighting, and buffers.
- Community engagement shows a preference for dedicated courts.

✨ ✨ **Vaughan (2025)**

- Consultant: *Monteith Brown Planning Consultants*
- Tennis target: 1 court/5,000; Pickleball: 1 court/3,500.
- Plans to triple pickleball capacity.
- Multi-court hubs and indoor dome feasibility in the roadmap.
- Strategic alignment with schools and private partners.

✨ ✨ **Halton Hills (2021)**

- Consultant: *Monteith Brown Planning Consultants*
- Provision goal: 1 court per 5,000 residents for both sports.
- Introduced a 3-tiered model: neighbourhood, community, and club courts.
- Trafalgar Sports Park selected for 8-court hub.

- Recommends transitioning from shared-use to dedicated courts.

✨ **Newmarket (2024 announcement)**

- Internal project (consultant not listed).
 - Plans underway for a 20-court outdoor bubble complex.
 - Includes clubhouse, retail, and noise mitigation design.
 - Integrated with a broader active recreation facility.
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SHARED KEY FINDINGS & BEST PRACTICES

✅ **1. Rapid Growth & Demand Across Age Groups**

- All cities report surging interest in pickleball among both seniors and younger adults.
- Waitlists, club formation, and casual play have exceeded capacity.

✅ **2. Court Provision Ratios**

- Most municipalities aim for:
 - **Pickleball:** 1 court per 3,500–5,000 residents
 - **Tennis:** 1 court per 5,000–6,000 residents

✅ **3. Shift to Dedicated Multi-Court Hubs**

- Best practices favour clusters of 6-8+ outdoor courts for towns/cities with populations below 50,000
- Benefits include tournament capability, skill-level segmentation, shared amenities, and reduced conflicts and reduced wait times.

✅ **4. Noise Mitigation Requirements**

- Setbacks from homes range from 35m to 175m.
- Recommended features: acoustic fencing, berms, soft ground, and landscape buffers.

✅ **5. Equity, Access & Booking Models**

- Blend of drop-in, club block booking, and individual permits.
- First-come, first-served is still standard in many cities.
- Fair allocation policies and central booking apps are emerging (e.g., Victoria).

✅ **6. Indoor Expansion Needs**

- Strong demand for indoor winter play.
- Cities/Towns with populations 100,000+ will need 8-20 indoor dedicated courts if supported by a vibrant, growing pickleball community.

✓ 7. Court Design Standards

- Use of post-tensioned concrete / Air support structure has a longer payback time
- Line colour differentiation (e.g., yellow for pickleball)
- Standard fencing (black vinyl), net heights, LED lighting (60 lux+), benches, and shade

✓ 8. Community & Club Engagement

- Public engagement guided nearly all strategies.
- Cities support club-led programming but maintain access for public/non-members.

This collective review reveals a shared strategic trajectory: cities are **transitioning from improvised and shared-use courts toward purpose-built, well-distributed, and community-aligned pickleball infrastructure**, supported by modern design, equitable access, and proactive partnerships.

