



Russ Dean <rdean@exeternh.gov>

**Fwd: PickleBall Proposal Concerns for May 9th, 2022 Select Board Meeting**

Nancy Belanger <nbelanger@exeternh.gov>

Mon, May 9, 2022 at 1:36 PM

To: Niko Papakonstantis <npapakonstantis@exeternh.gov>, Pam McElroy <pmcelroy@exeternh.gov>, Russ Dean <rdean@exeternh.gov>

Hi Niko,

I can't open the link to read the article because I don't subscribe to the Conway Daily Sun. I've copied Pam McElroy on this email to see if she will make copies for all of us for tonight's meeting...fyi!

Nancy

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kevin Keaveney** <kevinkeaveney@comcast.net>

Date: Mon, May 9, 2022 at 12:23 PM

Subject: Re: PickleBall Proposal Concerns for May 9th, 2022 Select Board Meeting

To: Niko Papakonstantis <NPapakonstantis@exeternh.gov>, <nbelanger@exeternh.gov>, <mcowan@exeternh.gov>, <jgilman@exeternh.gov>, <lolliff@exeternh.gov>

Dear Select Board members,

I know this may be late for purposes of tonight's meeting, but a neighbor shared the following May 6th story from the Conway Sun (Conway, NH). A helpful point was the town securing funds (\$35K) through the American Rescue Plan Act. Application for funds is still open. They are using the funds to build new Pickleball specific courts.

[https://www.conwaydailysun.com/news/local/pickleball-picks-up-new-fans-in-the-valley/article\\_44988822-cbf0-11ec-8380-8ff73d3cc34f.html?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=email&utm\\_campaign=user-share](https://www.conwaydailysun.com/news/local/pickleball-picks-up-new-fans-in-the-valley/article_44988822-cbf0-11ec-8380-8ff73d3cc34f.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share)

Thank you,  
Kevin Keaveney  
[Quoted text hidden]

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Nancy A. Belanger

[https://www.conwaydailysun.com/news/local/pickleball-picks-up-new-fans-in-the-valley/article\\_44988822-cbf0-11ec-8380-8ff73d3cc34f.html](https://www.conwaydailysun.com/news/local/pickleball-picks-up-new-fans-in-the-valley/article_44988822-cbf0-11ec-8380-8ff73d3cc34f.html)

FEATURED

## Pickleball picks up new fans in the valley

Terry Leavitt  
May 6, 2022



People square off in multiple pickleball matches during a MWV Pickleball Bocce Group event at the Club at Christmas Moun Glen last Sunday. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

CONWAY — Pickleball. The sport with the funny name has proven itself to be more than just “whiffle tennis.” The pop-pop-pop of balls flying across nets is echoing across the nation, ages.



Here in the valley, it's no different, and with new outdoor courts set to open in Center Conway this month, the sport could grow even more.

"We have a lot of people who want to play," former Conway Rec Director John Eastman (tapped recently to be the town's new town manager) said last month.

According to Eastman, hundreds of people in the area have taken up the racket sport not only at Conway Rec but also inside the North Conway Community Center and at outdoor courts at private clubs like Christmas Mountain in Glen.

The public centers both open their facilities throughout the winter to players, with individuals and groups signing up for two-hour slots to play on indoor courts set up in their gyms.

Assistant Conway Rec Director Mike Lane (soon to take over as rec director), runs the pickleball program there, noting there were seven sessions in March and six in April. "All are sold out," he said. "Then we'll break for the summer and we'll be back inside for October or November."

With the Rec Center opening at the Kennett Middle School only within the past few years, "we're thrilled to have people in the building," Lane said. "I was quite surprised. It's a wide range of clientele. And it's only going to grow from here. We're looking forward to getting back in the fall."

Eastman himself can be seen on the courts, and like many older players, he used to be a tennis player.

"I love tennis. I just can't run that much anymore," he said, and pickleball, which uses a badminton-sized court, "is the ideal thing to do. The court is small."



With its small court, net a little lower than in tennis, and the use of hard paddles and a ball with holes that resembles a whiffle ball, pickleball combines elements of badminton, tennis and pingpong.

According to the USA Pickleball Association, it is the fastest-growing sport in the country. The national explosion of interest is mirrored locally.

“We get calls about it all the time,” said North Conway Community Center Director Carrie Burkett. “It really is an accessible sport. It’s fairly easy to master enough to have a good game.”

The rec programs provide all the equipment needed, including paddles and balls. The sessions — divided by skill levels — are almost always full, with 12 players rotating in and out of play on two courts.

As the days grow warmer, players will be moving to outdoor courts. Burkett says, “It gets very quiet when they leave.”

Volunteers run the programs, coordinating schedules, organizing groups of similar abilities and providing introductory classes to teach the basics.

Play is often close to the net and doubles is particularly popular both for its social aspects and because there is less running and more focus on volleying.

According to PlayPickleball.com, the five rules are: The ball must stay inbounds; only one bounce per side; serving must be done at the baseline; the serve can’t land in the no-volley zone; and the game ends at 11, 15 and 21 points.



Sounds simple, but there can be a lot of strategy involved. And exercise.

Karen Cadegan of Conway, a pickleball enthusiast who helps coordinate the Conway and North Conway rec programs, said new players are often surprised at the workout they get in games lasting only about 15 minutes. One reason people are drawn to it she said, is because “you’re having fun and it’s better than walking on a treadmill.”

That “f” word is consistently brought up.

Burkett says, “It really is so fun. I laugh a lot. Once you start, it’s hard to stop.”

Mt. Washington Valley Pickleball and Bocce Group President Bob Ference of Bartlett uses three words to describe it: “Fast, fun and social.”

About six years ago, the group transformed the former tennis courts at the Club at Christmas Mountain in Glen into eight pickleball courts. They’ve been packed ever since. Today, about 150 players maintain the courts and enjoy the game. The courts are open to members seven days a week.

The group gathered to open the season for play last Sunday after clearing and cleaning the courts.

Many set up chairs outside one set of four busy courts to wait their turn, hanging their paddles on the chainlink fence to hold their place in line.

“People want to be around other people. They want to socialize,” said group member  
“They have tables with umbrellas and chairs, there’s time to talk. That’s a unique  
very social.”



Simone heads up the bocce arm of the group. Bocce, he said, is a kind of lawn bowling popularized in Italy that he has been around his whole life. The game incorporates nine balls: four colored balls about the size of a bowling ball for each team and one smaller white ball known as the pallino or jack, which is thrown out first. Each team then tries to get their balls closest to the pallino.

After joining the pickleball group, Simone discovered an old overgrown horseshoe pit at Christmas Mountain and rehabbed it into two bocce courts.

“What’s wonderful about bocce is people who are fighting illness or injury find themselves coming because they can do something,” he said.

The bocce courts are also open to pickleball players who are club members. Last year, he said, 80 people played bocce at least once and the group held a bocce tournament that raised \$2,000 for Jen’s Friends, the local cancer foundation.

Like Simone, Clare Grabher thinks the social aspect of any game is a large part of the draw.

Grabher, a professional pickleball player and former tennis pro who splits her time between North Conway and Vero Beach, Fla., said pickleball is an exceptionally social sport, even at the professional level.

“I’ve never seen anything like it. The fun people are having, the accessibility of the sport to people who haven’t previously viewed themselves as athletes,” she said. “It’s just the finest sport in the history of sport. I adore it.”



Grabher, 62, has the walk to back up her talk. She competed in the Minto U.S. Open Pickleball Championships held April 23-30 in Naples, Fla., where nearly 3,000 players competed for over \$100,000 in prize money. Grabher not only brought home the gold, winning doubles in the 60-and-older category with partner Rachel Kroog, she also took silver in mixed doubles, 60+, with partner Steve Cole.

While the U.S. Open attracts the best players in the country, it hosted all levels of competitions from beginners to professionals.

“You don’t see that in any other sport,” she said.

The same can be said for smaller pickleball tournaments, like the valley’s own fourth annual White Mountain Hotel & Resort Pickleball Tournament, which will be played from May 20-22 at the hotel in Hale’s Location.

Trevor Sullivan, hotel general manager and the USA Pickleball Association ambassador for the valley, established the tourney to help promote the sport after the hotel transformed an old tennis court into two pickleball courts, and added a half-basketball court, corn hole and shuffleboard — all amenities guests said they’d like to see.

Working with Grabher, who is the pickleball pro at the hotel, Sullivan brought in sponsored professionals to kick off the first year’s event, which attracted 50 players.

“After that, it really exploded and grew,” he said, and last year, close to 100 people signed up in a day or so after registrations opened. Players will come from around the Northeast, New Jersey and Canada, with most coming from New Hampshire and Maine.



The tournament has even expanded to using the courts at the Club at Christmas Mountain as well, with the championship held back to the hotel.

Grabher also gives lessons, from beginner to advanced, at White Mountain Hotel and, along with pickleball partner Yvonne Ting of North Hampton, Mass., travels around New England to offer clinics.

In addition to setting up the tournament, Sullivan also helps organize the community center programs in town.

One advantage of the sport, many players say, is it is a great leveler and that people of different abilities can have a good game playing together.

"It's a huge range," Burkett said. "I'm in my 30s. I used to play with someone younger and someone in their 80s. It's a sport people from working age to seniors can play together and be able to play the same game."

Sullivan and his wife, Devon, both in their 30s, started playing when they moved to the valley a few years ago, he said, because they were looking for a sport neither of them had an advantage in.

Both quickly became good at pickleball, and are now high-ranking amateurs.

"Within two or three weeks, we were pretty hooked," Sullivan said. "Most people get hooked pretty quickly."

While several local courts are repurposed tennis courts that fell into disuse, the newest courts in the area are being built by the town of Conway specifically for pickleball on the site of the former Conway Rec Center at 1808 East Main St. in Center Conway.

The town had in previous years set up pickleball on one of the tennis courts at Davis Park, but Eastman said more courts were needed to meet the growing demand.





“We’ve been talking about it for a while,” Eastman said. “The big thing was funding.”

Last year, Selectman John Colbath helped secure the \$35,000 needed for the project through American Rescue Plan Act funding. Eastman said projects like this can cost more than that but the town was able to keep the cost down because the public works department did much of the work.

Colbath, an avid pickleball player, said he was a strong advocate for installing the courts.

“I did the research,” Colbath said, and when the federal government expanded the kind of projects that could receive ARPA funds to include those that promoted outdoor activities, he saw his opportunity.

He said other communities across the country are using ARPA money to install pickleball courts. Locally, “I was the first one to say, ‘Why not us?’” Colbath said.

The Center Conway courts were paved last October, but the painting and striping, as well as setting up the nets, which is being done by Advantage Tennis of St. Johnsbury, Vt., had to wait until spring.

The project has been well-received. Colbath said the No. 1 question he heard from voters at the recent town meeting voting was, “When are the courts going to be open and what are the hours going to be?” It was incredible.”

He added, “People are always asking us, are we going to build more. Right now, we need to wait and see how these go.”

The courts are expected to open soon. There are no plans to have a reservation use.



"It's first come, first served," Eastman said.

The courts are only part of larger project to rehabilitate the site after the old recreation building, once a primary school, was demolished in 2020.

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Eastman said there is also a plan to include lights at the courts as well as a landscaped park.

"We're going to incorporate the court lights into the renovation of the old rec property when we do landscaping and (install an irrigation system)," Eastman said. At that time, he said, the crews will run a conduit for two light poles.

He said the work would be done by the town highway crew this summer when they are done with their roadwork projects.

"We plan to start at the beginning of July," he said, and the work, which will include a new park on the footprint of the old building — made possible by local philanthropists Sut and Margaret Marshall — should be completed by the end of the summer.

He expects the lights will be set up on a timer to go on and off in the evening so they do not cause a nuisance in the surrounding area.

"I think it's going to be pretty cool, thanks to the generosity of Sut and Margaret Marshall," Eastman said.

"It keeps Center Conway relevant," he said.



Finally, what about that name, anyway? It goes back to its origins on Bainbridge Island in Washington state in 1965 by onetime U.S. Rep. Joel Pritchard and his friends Bill Bell and Barney McCallum, who were looking to keep their children busy over the summer. They put together the game on a badminton court with pingpong paddles and a whiffle ball. While some say it was named for the Pritchard family dog, Pickles, the USA Pickleball Association says the game was named by Pritchard's wife, Joan, after the pickle boat in crew, which made up of leftovers from other boats

For more information about Conway Rec Department programs, call (603) 901-1139, email [mike@conwayrec.com](mailto:mike@conwayrec.com) or go to [conwaynh.myrec.com](http://conwaynh.myrec.com). For more about North Conway Community Center, call (603) 356-2096 or go to [northconwaycommunitycenter.org/adult-sports](http://northconwaycommunitycenter.org/adult-sports). To learn about the White Mountain Hotel and Resort Pickleball Tournament, call (603) 356-7100 or email [info@whitemountainhotel.com](mailto:info@whitemountainhotel.com). And for more about bocce in the valley, call Tony Simone at (603) 986-6575 or email [tonysimone3@gmail.com](mailto:tonysimone3@gmail.com).

#### MORE INFORMATION

Tennis, pickleball players eye new indoor facility

Terry Leavitt

