

SEPTEMBER 10, 2024

Dear Planning and Zoning Members,

I urge you to reconsider allowing the developers at 33 Alhambra to build pickleball courts on the 8th floor. The noise they will generate will make living in the area unbearable, as the sound of pickleball, a loud, repetitive popping noise, carries over long distances.

Before these courts become a reality, please take action to prevent the developers from creating such a nuisance. I was informed that the reason for these courts is to provide the owners with some amenities, but is this really necessary? It seems they are not considering, nor do they care about, the impact this will have on all the residents in the surrounding area.

"Sports can produce all kinds of unpleasant noises: referees' whistles, rancorous boos, vuvuzelas. But the most grating and disruptive sound in the entire athletic ecosystem right now may be the staccato pop-pop-pop emanating from America's rapidly multiplying pickleball courts. The sound has brought on a nationwide surge of frayed nerves and unneighborly clashes, and those, in turn, have elicited petitions, calls to the police, and last-ditch lawsuits aimed at the local parks, private clubs, and homeowners' associations that rushed to open courts during the sport's recent boom." (The New York Times, June 30, 2023, by Andrew Keh)

*"So what makes the sound of pickleball, in particular, so hard to tolerate? For answers, many have turned to Bob Unetich, a 77-year-old retired engineer and avid pickleball player, who became one of the foremost authorities on muffling the game after starting a consulting firm called Pickleball Sound Mitigation. Unetich noted that pickleball strikes from 100 feet away can reach 70 dBA, similar to the noise produced by a vacuum cleaner, while everyday background noise outdoors typically maxes out at a 'somewhat annoying' 55 dBA. But decibel levels alone do not fully capture the intensity of the annoyance. Two additional factors, the high pitch of a hard paddle hitting a plastic ball and the erratic, often frantic rhythm of the smacks, contribute to its uncanny ability to drive bystanders crazy. It creates vibrations in a range that can be extremely annoying to humans." **The New York Times, June 30, 2023, by Andrew Keh***

I would like this email to be read aloud and made part of the official record of my objection. Starting next week, I will canvass the area to inform neighbors and property owners about the developers' plans for pickleball courts at 33 Alhambra, an unnecessary addition that brings no benefit to the community.

I am enclosing recent articles for your review.

Sincerely yours,

Vicky Rua

305-934-3526

Shattered Nerves, Sleepless Nights: Pickleball Noise Is Driving Everyone Nuts

The incessant pop-pop-pop of the fast-growing sport has brought on a nationwide scourge of unneighborly clashes, petitions, calls to the police and lawsuits, with no solution in sight.

By Andrew Keh
Audio produced by Alyssa Schukar

Reporting from Arlington, Va.

June 30, 2023

It sounded like popcorn warming in a microwave: sporadic bursts that quickened, gradually, to an arrhythmic clatter.

“There it is,” Mary McKee said, staring out the front door of her home in Arlington, Va., on a recent afternoon. McKee, 43, a conference planner, moved to the neighborhood in 2005 and for the next decade and a half enjoyed a mostly tranquil existence. Then came the pickleball players. She gestured across the street to the Walter Reed Community Center, less than 100 feet from her yard, where a group of players, the first of the day, had started rallying on a repurposed tennis court. More arrived in short order, spreading out until there were six games going at once. Together they produced an hourslong ticktock cacophony that has become the unwanted soundtrack of the lives of McKee and her neighbors. “I thought maybe I could live with it, maybe it would fade into the background,” she said of the clamor, which began around the height of the coronavirus pandemic and now reverberates through her home, even when her windows are closed. “But it never did.”

Sports can produce all kinds of unpleasant noises: referees’ whistles, rancorous boos, vuvuzelas. But the most grating and disruptive sound in the entire athletic ecosystem right now may be the staccato *pop-pop-pop* emanating from America’s rapidly multiplying pickleball courts.

The sound has brought on a nationwide scourge of frayed nerves and unneighborly clashes — and those, in turn, have elicited petitions and calls to the police and last-ditch lawsuits aimed at the local parks, private clubs and homeowners associations that rushed to open courts during the sport’s recent boom.

The hubbub has given new meaning to the phrase racket sport, testing the sanity of anyone within earshot of a game.

“It’s like having a pistol range in your backyard,” said John Mancini, 82, whose Wellesley, Mass., home abuts a cluster of public courts.

“It’s a torture technique,” said Clint Ellis, 37, who lives across the street from a private club in York, Maine.

“Living here is hell,” said Debbie Nagle, 67, whose gated community in Scottsdale, Ariz., installed courts a few years ago.

Modern society is inherently inharmonious — think of children shouting, dogs barking, lawn mowers roaring. So what makes the sound of pickleball, specifically, so hard to tolerate? For answers, many have turned to Bob Unetich, 77, a retired engineer and avid pickleball player, who became one of the foremost authorities on muffling the game after starting a consulting firm called Pickleball Sound Mitigation. Unetich said that pickleball whacks from 100 feet away could reach 70 dBA (a measure of decibels), similar to some vacuum cleaners, while everyday background noise outside typically tops off at a “somewhat annoying 55.”

But decibel readings alone are insufficient for conveying the true magnitude of any annoyance. Two factors — the high pitch of a hard paddle slamming a plastic ball and the erratic, often frantic rhythm of the smacks — also contribute to its uncanny ability to drive bystanders crazy. “It creates vibrations in a range that can be extremely annoying to humans,” Unetich said.

These bad vibrations have created an unforeseen growing pain for pickleball, which emerged from relative obscurity in recent years to become the fastest-growing sport in the country. The sounds were even dissected last month at Noise-Con 2023, the annual conference of North American noise control professionals, which featured an opening-night session called “Pickleball Noise.” “Pickleball is the topic of the year,” said Jeanette Hesedahl, vice chair for the conference. The same story, the same jarring sound, has echoed across American communities like rolling thunder.

Sue-Ellen Welfonder, 66, a best-selling romance novelist from Longboat Key, Fla., once enjoyed listening to the singing birds and the gentle swish of trees during her daily walks — her “soul balm time” — through a local park. The *thump-thump* of a tennis match never bothered her, either. But the arrival of pickleball this spring, she said, shattered her idyll.

“Pickleball has replaced leaf blowers as my No. 1 noise nuisance,” said Welfonder, who has been sketching the outlines of a new novel, set in the present day, with a couple of pickleball-loving characters: “I’m making them really nasty people.”

The complaints were equally dramatic at a Feb. 6 city council meeting in West Linn, Ore., where residents have been vexed by the constant click-clacking from Tanner Creek Park.

“One of our neighbors who lived directly across from the courts and was dying from cancer noted the pickleball noise was worse than his cancer,” Dan Lavery, a West Linn resident, said at the meeting. “Sadly, he recently passed.”

Scores of similarly suffering Americans are finding their way to a rapidly growing Facebook group, also started by Unetich, where upward of 1,000 frazzled users exchange technical advice, let off steam and engage in a sort of group therapy. “We try to keep it civil,” Unetich said, “because it gets pretty emotional.”

A few lessons have crystallized within the group. Soundproof barriers — a go-to solution for many at first — can be expensive and are often improperly deployed. New paddles and balls designed to dampen noise have had marginal uptake among players. Moving pickleball far away from human life may be the only surefire solution — but many are slow to reach that conclusion, which presents its own hurdles.

The tennis courts at the Walter Reed Community Center are now primarily used for pickleball, allowing six games to happen simultaneously. Irritated homeowners, as a result, often resort to fighting pickleball courts in the courts of law.

Last year, Rob Mastroianni, 58, and his neighbors in Falmouth, Mass., filed a lawsuit against their town claiming that the courts near their homes violated local sound ordinances. They won a temporary injunction, which has closed the facility for now. By then Mastroianni had already sold his house and moved to a different part of town to escape the noise. “I was Google Mapping the new house, making sure there were no courts nearby,” Mastroianni said.

In Arlington, McKee and her neighbors around the community center are waiting to see what happens next. They shared their pain with the county, which for now appears to be moving forward with plans to spend close to \$2 million to make the pickleball courts permanent.

The players there sympathized with the residents’ plight — but only to an extent. “If I had that home, I’d be mad, because it is annoying — it’s obnoxious,” Jordan Sawyer, 25, a dietitian from Arlington and an avid player, said between games this month. “But I don’t feel bad because I want to play, and this is the best place to play. Honestly, I just feel like it’s unfortunate. It’s unlucky for these people.”

Sawyer described herself as a “rule follower.” But McKee and the others recounted being woken up at 3 a.m. by middle-of-the-night pickleball matches. Another time they listened to a player banging a tambourine on the court, apparently to taunt those who had complained.

Armand Ciccarelli, 51, who often walks his dog, Winona, around the community center, said that anybody downplaying pickleball noise should try hearing it for 12 hours a day. “I know this seems like a small thing in the grand scheme of the world, where we’re dealing with big things, like climate change,” Ciccarelli said. “But, as you can see, it’s a nationwide problem.”



Pickleball is America’s fastest-growing sport. These people hate it.

By Nathaniel Meyersohn, CNN
Updated 8:29 AM EST, Sat March 11, 2023

New York CNN — Pop. Pop. Pop. Pop.

The sound and disruption from pickleball, America’s fastest-growing sport, is driving some neighbors, tennis players, parents of young children, and others crazy. Homeowners groups and local residents in dozens of towns and cities have rallied to limit pickleball play and block the development of new courts. They are circulating petitions, filing lawsuits, and speaking out at council and town hall meetings to slow the audible spread of pickleball frenzy across

the country. The number of people playing pickleball grew by 159% over three years to 8.9 million in 2022, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, a trade group.

The rapid spread has created dilemmas for public parks and recreation departments, which must balance competing interests with often limited space and funds. Retirement communities and country clubs also face challenges building space for people who enjoy the game, a scaled-down version of tennis with a smaller court, without antagonizing others.

Pickleball can be noisier than tennis because the game can fit more players onto the same space as a tennis court. Hits during a pickleball rally are also more frequent than tennis. And it's a more social sport, so the games tend to be louder with players bantering during and after points.

Rob Mastroianni, a resident of Falmouth, Massachusetts, sold his house and moved after the town's recreation department built pickleball courts 350 feet away from his home in a residential area. "It's a percussive pop. It pierces the air and carries," he said.

He and a group of neighbors eventually filed a lawsuit last year against the town's zoning board of appeals, claiming that the pickleball courts violated town bylaws prohibiting "daily injurious and obnoxious noise levels." Their suit said the noise from the game was "substantially impacting [their] quiet and peaceful enjoyment of their respective homes." (They won a temporary injunction and the courts are currently closed.) "It's a tough sell to be against pickleball," Mastroianni said. "But at the end of the day it was creating mental and physical health problems with neighbors butting heads."

"The constant popping 12 hours a day 7 days a week is borderline torture," one resident who lives next to a park in Vienna, Virginia, wrote to the town parks department. "We cannot use our outdoor space anymore due to pickleball and cannot open our windows." The town voted to restrict pickleball from seven to three days a week at local courts last month.

Some tennis players are also frustrated because pickleball is taking over tennis courts. The tennis industry has taken note and is working with parks and recreation departments and other facilities to make sure pickleball doesn't slow tennis' popularity, too. The number of tennis players grew 33% between 2019 and 2022, according to the United States Tennis Association (USTA).

"I say if pickleball is that popular let them build their own courts :)" tennis great Martina Navratilova tweeted last year. USTA, the governing body for US tennis, has put out guidance with best practices to ensure the two sports can co-exist and keep up with demand for each. "In an ideal world, tennis and pickleball have their own spaces," said Craig Morris, the USTA's chief executive of community tennis.

And some parents are pushing back because their kids have less space to play in the park as crowds of pickleball players grow. "Players now endlessly swarm the playground daily," said a petition in New York City to ban pickleball at a local playground with more than 3,000 signatures. "The children have been squeezed out and many have stopped going altogether."

Boom during pandemic

Pickleball, which combines elements of tennis, badminton and ping-pong, began in 1965, but only recently skyrocketed. It originally won a following in retirement communities where it was beloved for its social aspect and exercise benefits. The ball travels slower than in tennis and the court is half the size, so it's easier to play. It's also accessible for a wide range of ages and the rules are simple.

The game became more popular during the Covid-19 pandemic as people looked for safe, socially distanced ways to exercise outside. Celebrity backers like Tom Brady and increased media attention have also propelled the sport's rise, and gyms and parks have built new courts to accommodate demand.

The game can be played in singles or doubles, inside or outside on a 20-foot by 44-foot court — approximately the size of a badminton court — and lasts until one side reaches 11 points. Many people play on tennis courts that have been modified with lower nets and additional lines.

As the sport has grown, the number of places to play has also increased.

There were 11,000 places to play Pickleball at the end of 2022, an increase of around 130 new locations a month, according to USA Pickleball, the sport's national governing body.

'Pickleball Sound Mitigation'

Players use a plastic perforated ball, slightly heavier than a wiffle ball, and wooden or composite paddles that are about twice the size of ping-pong paddles.

Pickleball players love the “pop” of their paddles smashing the plastic ball, but that same sound can bother others.

“Cities should not simply convert tennis courts to pickleball. If they do that without considering sound, they’re likely to have unhappy people,” said Bob Unetich, an engineer by training who started Pickleball Sound Mitigation, a consulting firm that advises municipalities, country clubs, and upset neighbors on reducing noises associated with the game. Unetich, who is a trained pickleball referee and avid player, has advised more than 100 clients.

If there are several games going on at the same time, there can be multiple “pop” noises every second, Unetich said. Cheap pickleball paddles and balls are often the loudest. The “pitch” of pickleball hits is also more annoying to people than a tennis racquet with strings colliding with a soft tennis ball, he said. Tennis and some other common sport sounds are usually lower pitched than pickleball.

New and existing pickleball sites need to take background noise into account, Unitech said. If courts are built near homes, they should block sound with barriers, enforce the use of quieter paddles and balls, or restrict playing hours, he said. “I’m an advocate of pickleball, but if it’s right across the street from people’s homes it’s quite a problem,” he said. “The right solution is often to put the court someplace else.”

Pop. Pop. Pop. Pop.



Inspired by Gandhi, couple goes on hunger strike over pickleball noise

Rajnish and Harpreet Dhawan say noises from nearby pickleball courts have caused a variety of medical issues

By [Kyle Melnick](#)

July 26, 2023 at 2:04 a.m. EDT

Rajnish Dhawan fasted to protest the noise from pickleball courts near his home in Canada.

Rajnish Dhawan awoke about 8 a.m. Sunday and sat to eat a bowl of Cheerios inside his home in Canada. As he ate, he looked out the window and saw the nearby pickleball courts — a reminder of why the cereal would be his last meal for the foreseeable future.

For nearly a year, Dhawan has complained to officials from Chilliwack — a city in British Columbia — about high-decibel noises from the three pickleball courts that are about 20 feet behind his property. **He said he and his wife have endured auditory hallucinations, heart flutters and insomnia since players started flocking to the courts in 2021.** But Dhawan, 52, said little has changed.

Since pickleball began exploding in popularity in 2019, people have griped about the noises near their homes, causing neighborhood disagreements, calls to police and lawsuits. But Dhawan and his 51-year-old wife, Harpreet, took a new stance. Inspired by Indian activist Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Dhawans decided that, starting at 9 a.m. Sunday, they wouldn't eat until the noise improved.

“We would prefer to suffer rather than continue to live the life of Second Class citizens,” the Dhawans wrote in a letter to city officials on July 20. The Dhawans moved from a Chilliwack townhouse to their current five-bedroom home in February 2017. They enjoyed sitting on their deck to watch children play on swings and neighbors walk their dogs at the park behind their home. Then, in the spring of 2019, Chilliwack added pickleball courts to the park that are visible from the Dhawans' house. The courts grew more popular when the city added a new surface in the spring of 2021. The Dhawans tried to ignore the popping noises, even playing pickleball sometimes themselves to see what the hype was about.

But last summer, Rajnish said the sounds became unbearable. He said he slept poorly, and when he did rest, he awoke in the middle of the night hallucinating the noise of a ball striking a paddle. Rajnish, an English professor at a nearby university, and Harpreet, a dental hygienist, fell behind on their work and started to see therapists for the first time.

The couple's 23-year-old daughter lives in Vancouver, B.C., but rarely visits home because of the noise, Rajnish said. The Dhawans sometimes leave their TV on high volume to muffle the sounds.

Last October, Rajnish sent his first of many letters to city officials to complain about the noise.

“You feel as if someone is consistently punching your head,” Rajnish told *The Washington Post*. “It's literally like living next to a gun range.”

A spokeswoman for the city of Chilliwack said in a statement that officials “have regularly responded” to Rajnish's grievances and “have taken substantial action to help mitigate the situation.” For instance, the spokeswoman said the city only allows pickleball play between 9 a.m. and dusk, and has recommended that players use practice foam balls after 4 p.m. Still, Rajnish said people play daily until 9 p.m. **In March, he wrote an email to the city's pickleball club that said playing on the courts near his home was “an act of aggression committed against me and my family.”**

The courts reopened in April this year — a month later than usual after a winter hiatus — because of Rajnish's complaints, the city spokeswoman said. The city covered the fence with black tarps in hopes of reducing the sound. Still, Rajnish said he canceled his two summer courses and flew to his birthplace

of Amritsar, India, to prevent his anxiety from worsening. He hoped the situation would be resolved by the time he returned.

Harpreet, who stayed behind in Chilliwack, developed similar symptoms as Rajnish, and players yelled at her when she asked them to stop playing at night, Rajnish said. On Rajnish's flight home on July 20, he drafted another letter to city officials. "As staunch followers of Mahatma Gandhi, we have decided to follow the path shown by him to deal with systemic injustice," the Dhawans wrote — using the honorific by which Gandhi was popularly known that means "great soul" — before signing the letter "the less privileged residents of Chilliwack."

The couple hung a red-and-yellow banner outside of the pickleball courts announcing their "DAILY HUNGER STRIKE AGAINST HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION BY CITY OF CHILLIWACK." After eating breakfast Sunday, the Dhawans began their hunger strike by sitting on the pickleball courts, even as some people played nearby. Harpreet felt lightheaded that night and broke her fast, but Rajnish, who felt nauseous, continued.

The couple returned to the courts about 5 a.m. Monday, holding umbrellas in the rain. Two men decided not to play after speaking with the Dhawans, Rajnish said, but a woman complained the couple was preventing people from competing. The Dhawans juggled their protest while working from home. By Monday night, Rajnish said his nausea had grown worse, and his heart rate had increased. The city had not taken action and, fearing long-term health effects, Rajnish ended his hunger strike around 10 a.m. Tuesday, after 50 hours. "I'm not Gandhi," Rajnish said. "I don't have millions of followers." He drank a glass of sharbat, a drink made from flower petals and a sweetener, and planned to eat snacks — fruit, cereal, nuts — throughout the day.

The Dhawans' problem might be solved in a few months. The city is building an indoor pickleball facility and plans to close the courts near the Dhawans' home in November. But for the Dhawans, that's not soon enough. "We shouldn't be forced to move," Rajnish said, "just because a mistake was made by the city."

The Guardian

Welcome to the pickleball backlash: noise pollution, broken bones and a tennis turf war

It is the fastest growing sport in the US and has become popular in the UK, too. But critics say it is loud, dangerous and encroaches on much-loved tennis courts

Tue 4 Jul 2023 10.48 EDT

Name: The pickleball backlash.

Age: About a year old, give or take.

Appearance: A grassroots war against the forces of pickleball.

I don't even know what pickleball is. Pickleball was invented in Washington state in 1965 – a cross between tennis and ping pong, using a playing area the same size as a doubles badminton court.

Is it fun? It's the fastest growing sport in the US, with the number of players doubling between 2021 and 2022 to about 9 million, and forecast to reach 22 million this year.

It sounds as if everybody is crazy about pickleball. Not everybody. With the sport taking over parks and recreation centres across the US, a pickleball backlash is under way.

What is it that the spoilsports object to? Above all, the noise.

The cheering, you mean? Not likely. Pickleball remains, for the most part, a game that's a lot more fun to play than it is to watch. It's the noise of the ball.

The ball? Are you serious? When the rigid plastic paddle strikes the hard plastic ball, it produces a sharp popping sound. Multiply it by thousands of hits across thousands of brand new pickleball courts, all day and far into the night, and you end up with a lot of disgruntled local residents.

That sounds a bit petty to me. You haven't heard the sound. "It's like having a pistol range in your backyard," one Massachusetts resident told the New York Times.

It can't be that bad. One player who has set up a firm called Pickleball Sound Mitigation conceded that it "creates vibrations in a range that can be extremely annoying to humans", at a decibel level similar to some vacuum cleaners.

Oh. What can be done? Noise mitigation efforts have been proposed, but uptake is slow. Some of those affected have sought remedy in law, and won temporary injunctions.

Is it just about the noise? No, there have also been clashes – even fights – with tennis players.

Why? Are they purists? Pickleball courts installed to accommodate the craze often take up space once occupied by tennis courts.

I can see that's annoying. Where that hasn't happened, pickleball addicts sometimes chalk their court measurements on to tennis courts.

This pickleball is beginning to sound like a bit of a blight. As a popular activity for elderly people and the previously inactive, pickleball has also led to a lot of injuries. One report estimates it could cost Americans up to \$500m in medical bills this year alone.

I take back blight. It sounds more like a curse. Let's hope pickleball never comes to Britain. Too late – it's already here, with an estimated 270 venues across the UK.

Do say: "Anything that keeps people active is worth a national epidemic of noise pollution and broken wrists."

Don't say: "Don't worry, that's not pickleball – just a bunch of guns going off next door."

Betsy Reed

Editor, Guardian US

The Boston Globe

'It's loud and it's repetitive.' Some Wellesley residents sour on pickleball and its 'pop pop pop.'

Pickleball courts have been set up at Sprague Fields near homes where neighbors have been complaining about pickleball players making too much noise.

Barry Chin / The Boston Globe

By Emily Sweeney, The Boston Globe

updated on March 3, 2023

Noisy. Intrusive. Annoying.

That's how Wellesley resident John Maccini describes the sound of pickleball being played at the Sprague Fields near his home.

“You have no idea how annoying pickleball can be,” Maccini said in a phone interview. “It’s loud, and it’s repetitive. I can’t sit on my porch and read anymore. It’s totally stressful. My quality of life has been ruined.”

He's not the only one complaining. Other neighbors who live near the Sprague courts are also frustrated, so much so that the Wellesley Recreation Commission will hold a hearing Friday morning to hear grievances about the paddle sport, which continues to grow in popularity. Or maybe that should be “pop”-ularity? A pickleball match is marked by “pop-pop-pop” sounds as the perforated plastic ball is thwacked back and forth over a net by paddle-wielding players.

Pickleball is a relatively young sport, only invented in 1965. But what began as a casual backyard game has mushroomed into a sport that's played all over the country on badminton-sized courts. Today pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in the United States. Its popularity skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with participation nearly doubling from 4.8 million players in 2021 to 8.9 million in 2022, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. As the sport has grown, so has the number of places to play. According to USA Pickleball, the sport's national governing body, the known places to play pickleball totaled 10,724 at the end of 2022, an increase of approximately 130 new locations per month.

Wellesley is not the only community dealing with pickleball noise complaints. Last June some residents in Provincetown expressed their displeasure with the sounds of the sport.

“It is driving us nuts,” one resident told the select board, according to a report in the Provincetown Independent.

The Wall Street Journal reported about a similar situation on Cape Cod in June, after residents who live near public pickleball courts in Falmouth filed a lawsuit against the town's zoning board of appeals, claiming that pickleball violates town bylaws that prohibit “injurious and obnoxious noise levels.”

Rob Mastroianni, one of the Falmouth residents who filed the lawsuit, said a court date is scheduled for January 2024 and a temporary injunction halts pickleball playing at those courts until then. **“It’s simply the noise. It’s a percussive popping noise,”** Mastroianni said in a phone interview.

Mastroianni ultimately sold his house and moved because he couldn't deal with the constant noise anymore. He said 50 to 60 people would show up at the pickleball courts with beach chairs and play all day long. “I moved to North Falmouth,” he said. Mastroianni groused that players' enthusiasm for the sport is almost cultish. “These pickleballers are so evangelistic,” he said. “It's like you can't take away their right to play pickleball They're such a powerful group. They're a very vocal group.” Mastroianni said the battle was “awful.” “I'm like a pariah. Because I'm shutting down' people's fun,” he said. “We're not against pickleballers.”

Maccini, who lives near the courts in Wellesley, said the sound of a pickleball being hit is much louder than a tennis ball. **“It's like a sharp snap, and more rapid,” Maccini said.**

Wellesley resident Chris Garris also lives near the Sprague courts. He can hear the noise of pickleball games in his home even when the windows are shut. “In the summertime, it’s mostly the ball,” Garris said in a phone interview. “You hear a sharp ping, and it happens all day, from sunup to sundown.” Garris says the pickleball courts should be moved to a different location.

“They should put the courts further away from homes, in an area away from residents,” he said.

Wellesley Recreation Director Matt Chin said when it comes to finding a solution to the town’s pickleball problem, “it’s not for me decide.” That’s why the five elected members of the Wellesley Recreation Commission are holding a hearing on Friday, he said. “Everyone’s going to have their say,” Chin said, “and hopefully the Recreation Commission can figure out a way to remedy this in some way.”

The logo for The Wall Street Journal, consisting of the text "THE WALL STREET JOURNAL." in white, serif, all-caps font on a black rectangular background.

‘It’s Been Awkward.’ Pickleball Is Pitting Neighbor Against Neighbor in Noise-Conscious Communities.

Local homeowners associations are serving up bans on the sport, despite its growing popularity.

By [E.B. Solomont](#)

Nov. 30, 2022 at 2:00 pm ET

It was fun and games at first. But when pickleballers took over the tennis court at River Canyon Estates in Bend, Ore., for hours on end, bringing boom boxes, hurling profanities and letting dogs run loose—not to mention the constant *pok-pok-pok* of balls hitting paddles—the neighbors said enough is enough.

Fearing a lawsuit, the board of the homeowners association enlisted a professional mediator. It commissioned a sound study and considered ways to reduce pickleball noise—to no avail. In February, the board banned pickleball from the community’s tennis court.

“We had to make a really tough decision,” said David Finkel, a former HOA president at River Canyon. **“But the bottom line is, you can’t believe the noise pickleball makes. The people who are pickleball advocates just choose to believe it’s not that friggin’ noisy.”**

A mashup of tennis, ping pong and badminton, pickleball is one of the fastest-growing sports in the U.S., with legions of fans and a growing list of celebrity backers, including NFL quarterback [Tom Brady](#) and basketball superstar [LeBron James](#). **It has also become a lightning rod for controversy within some residential communities, where exuberant shouting, competition for court time and the telltale sound of players whacking Wiffle-like balls with paddles has pit neighbors against each other, leading to name-calling and yelling, even lawsuits.**

Pickleball dates to the 1960s, but its popularity skyrocketed during Covid as more people discovered the easy-to-learn sport, which is often played outdoors. There were about 4.8 million players in the U.S. in 2021, up 39% from 2019, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. Residential communities rushed to build courts or to retrofit tennis courts to accommodate the influx of players. (Four pickleball courts can fit on a single tennis court by adding lines and nets.)

“Tennis was the rage, now it’s pickleball,” said Robert Ducharme, an attorney in New Hampshire who advises condominium and HOA boards. He said more communities are adding pickleball to keep residents engaged. Pickleball evangelists say the sport is a fun way for players of all ages to exercise safely, socialize and get their competitive juices flowing. Some call it addictive, and pickleball rivalries have been known to escalate on and off the court.

At Cinco Ranch, a master-planned community in Katy, Texas, where homes cost \$350,000 to more than \$1 million, tennis and pickleball players have faced off over court time and etiquette. Things came to a head recently over plans to paint pickleball lines on an existing tennis court. A group of tennis players argued in a petition that pickleball causes overcrowding, especially during tournament-style games, leading to excessive wear-and-tear on the courts. “Families [playing tennis] don’t like to play beside these large groups,” while competitive players “cannot focus with pickle balls coming on and off their court constantly,” the petition said.

Lilah Poltz, 41, a pickleball player at Cinco Ranch who advocated for the court re-stripping, said it has all become “quite political.” At a recent HOA board meeting, Ms. Poltz, who works in marketing, said about 10 people came to oppose pickleball, including one woman who kept referring to pickleball players as “pests.” “It’s been awkward. And it’s been uncomfortable because these are your neighbors. You want to get along,” Ms. Poltz said.

There are about 10,600 registered pickleball venues in the U.S., including more than 1,000 new venues added in 2021 and more than 900 added in 2020, according to USA Pickleball, the sport’s governing body. Many residential communities are leaning into the sport, and courts are seen as a valuable asset. The portion of for-sale listings that mention pickleball rose 86% in October 2022 from October 2021, according to Zillow.

At River Canyon Estates, where homes sold for nearly \$400,000 to about \$1.4 million over the past two years, the tipping point in the pickleball brouhaha came last year, when a group of pickleball players proposed re-stripping a single tennis court to create four pickleball courts. Adrian Bennett III, who sold a townhouse facing the court last year for \$599,000, said large groups of pickleball players converged on the once-sleepy court, some bringing thermoses he suspected weren’t filled with water. “Things got pretty much out of control,” said Mr. Bennett, 81, who added that he didn’t sell his home because of the noise, although he certainly wasn’t a fan of it. **“It was rather obnoxious to have them playing there.”**

A study commissioned by the HOA found the sound level from the pickleball court topped 65 decibels at several nearby homes. By comparison, a normal conversation is about 60 decibels and a hairdryer is roughly 90 decibels. Tennis hits are typically about 14 decibels lower than pickleball and make a lower-pitch sound, said Bob Unetich, a referee who has a consulting business focused on noise mitigation. Pickleball’s higher-pitch sound is more annoying to the human ear, he added.

Part of the problem was that several homes were within 65 feet of the court, said Terry Smith, another former HOA president who lives a few houses down from the court and said he could hear pickleball “quite easily” upstairs in his home. To be effective, a sound barrier around the court would have to be 16 to 20 feet high, he said. Even then, he added, the board could be sued—and would likely lose.

In Naples, Fla., earlier this year, residents sued the homeowners association at Village Walk, an 850-home community where prices range from \$535,000 to about \$900,000, over expenses tied to three new pickleball courts. In the suit, plaintiff Meredith Carr alleged the HOA spent more than \$100,000 in restricted reserve funds for new recreational facilities—including the courts—without residents' approval.

Ms. Carr is part of a group of mostly anonymous residents called VW Stop Spending, which opposed an HOA fee increase last year and has published blog posts critical of the HOA board's leadership. "It's not that I'm against pickleball by any means, it's the principle," said Ms. Carr, 53, who owns a two-bedroom villa at Village Walk. "The president thinks she's above the law."

Diane Green-Kelly, the HOA board president, rebutted the characterization. The HOA fee increase was in line with inflation, she said, and that money went toward operating expenses. (Money for the courts, she added, came from another fund.) Also, the board held several town hall meetings about pickleball. Based on resident feedback, it conducted a sound study and installed Acoustiblok panels to minimize noise. Ms. Green-Kelly said the courts have been full, and she hasn't received any noise complaints.

"I can't tell you it just rolls off my back. They're very personal about it," Ms. Green-Kelly, a trial lawyer by trade, said of the criticism. "We've had to just learn to try to ignore it." She said the courts are valuable to the community as a whole. Without them, she added, "we might be dying on the vine because we weren't keeping up with what people wanted."

Pelican Preserve in Fort Myers, Fla., walked the same fine line last year as it tried to meet pickleball demand while satisfying residents concerned about the noise. The 2,500-home community had six pickleball courts that were constantly packed, said Frank Robers, president of the HOA board. A proposed location of six additional courts, however, was rejected by homeowners.

Romeo and Susan DeMarco, who paid \$407,000 for their four-bedroom home in 2019, were among those objecting. Their house, which is adjacent to a nature preserve, is about 400 feet from the proposed courts. "We kind of thought of it as a dripping faucet," said Mr. DeMarco, 75, of pickleball's constant noise.

After several impassioned discussions, he said, the board ultimately identified another location. Mr. Robers said the HOA spent about \$100,000 to relocate a softball field and build the new pickleball courts in its place. "At the end of the day, honestly, we decided for the good of the community and these residents," he said. "It was worth doing."

Roy Seaverson, 65, a retired dentist who lives at Sun City Grand in Surprise, Ariz., said he and his wife, Julie Seaverson, 64, did their research before buying a \$735,000 house close to their community's pickleball courts in 2014. He said they walked around the neighborhood to gauge the sound level, which they deemed a nonissue. Mr. Seaverson, who plays pickleball five or six times a week, said the house is on a golf course, and although the couple was drawn to the home for its views, the proximity to pickleball is a bonus. "We definitely talk about how we feel fortunate being close enough that you can walk down and you're right there," he said.

Troy Konz, 62, president of Sun City Grand's pickleball club, said the sport is a top draw for the 9,800-home community, which has 11 tennis courts and 22 pickleball courts that are packed from about 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. The pickleball club has nearly 1,800 members, up from around 900 in 2016, said Mr. Konz, a former high-school athlete who called pickleball easy to play, great exercise and incredibly social.

Mr. Konz said Sun City Grand has refined its noise-mitigation efforts over the years, including regular sound studies and wind screens. It allows only certain paddles to be used on its courts. And he admitted

that for years, the community's pickleball and tennis clubs clashed over court time. Only recently did they make peace with each other, he said.

"We got together and said, enough is enough, why are we fighting?" Mr. Konz said. They also have united over a common enemy: a faction of homeowners who would like to see the tennis court converted for basketball.

The logo for The Wall Street Journal, consisting of the text "THE WALL STREET JOURNAL." in white, uppercase letters on a black rectangular background.

Thwack. Pop. Whack. Pickleball Noises Turn Neighbors Into Activists.

Angry residents return serve by videotaping players, hiring sound-control consultants, fighting at Town Hall

By James Fanelli

June 28, 2022 at 9:35 am ET

Pickleball, a genetic cross of tennis and ping pong played on a badminton-size court, is in a bit of a pickle. The sport dates back to the 1960s but took off in recent years, especially during the pandemic. It's the fastest-growing sport in America and is especially hot with the over-55 crowd, who, thanks to the game's smaller dimensions, don't have to run around like Rafael Nadal.

But there's a problem that is driving some communities to distraction: Plastic perforated pickleballs make a sound like no other when whacked with the game's solid, rectangular paddles. Think of clucking one's tongue—but through a bullhorn.

"No one can completely understand what it's like to sit on your back deck hearing that pop, pop, pop," said Rob Mastroianni, a Falmouth, Mass., resident whose bungalow is just a few hundred feet from five public courts that opened at a school in late 2020.

Mr. Mastroianni, 57 years old, is among a half-dozen residents on his street who filed a public-nuisance lawsuit this year against the town's zoning board of appeals, contending the nearby pickleball play violates town bylaws that prohibit **"injurious and obnoxious noise levels."**

Towns around the country are facing similar showdowns. Some are limiting hours of play or changing ordinances to address noise. Others, like Falmouth, are returning serve against legal claims. Parks and recreation departments also face the challenge of accommodating the demand for pickleball courts, potentially at the expense of tennis enthusiasts, and making tough decisions over how to use scarce green space.

Pickleballers, who are often evangelical about the sport, know how to organize, making them a formidable constituent bloc in lobbying for new facilities. They often outnumber the small groups of complaining

residents. “We have a lot more votes than they do,” said Braden Keith, 35, who runs Philadelphia’s largest pickleball Meetup group, with 1,500 members.

Currently, the city’s only dedicated outdoor pickleball courts are at the Water Tower Recreation Center in the neighborhood of Chestnut Hill, but players have been pushing local elected officials to fund more locations. Philadelphia Parks & Recreation started a pilot program in March to limit court hours at Water Tower after nearby rowhouse residents brought noise complaints and threatened legal action. They said they support pickleball play but not near their homes.

Sarah Bettien-Ash, who lives in one of the rowhouses, said that before the pilot program, people would start playing at 7 a.m., waking her family up. Adding insult to injury, she said, pickleballers have asked her to fetch errant balls near her backyard. “One time I chucked the ball madly into the court. I’m not proud of that,” Ms. Bettien-Ash said.

A spokeswoman for Philadelphia Parks & Recreation said the department is working to expand the number of available courts to meet the demand for the sport and address the concerns of neighbors. Mr. Keith, the man who runs a pickleball players’ group, said the residents haven’t been willing to compromise on a solution, such as the installation of sound barriers.

He conceded that without sound mitigation, pickleball noise might be grating. **“I don’t think I would want to live there,”** he said.

Pickleball was born out of boredom on Bainbridge Island, Wash., in the summer of 1965, when the late congressman Joel Pritchard and a businessman friend used table tennis paddles and a plastic ball to create an activity for their families. The sport now counts millions of participants. Between 2019 and 2021, the number rose 37% to 4.8 million, according to a report by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association.

USA Pickleball, the sport’s national governing body, said registered pickleball sites have doubled to 10,000 over the past five years. The group says only a very small percentage receive noise complaints, and those that do are generally tennis or basketball courts converted to pickleball use in confined residential areas. USA Pickleball said it works with groups and municipalities to identify court locations away from sensitive areas and advises on noise mitigation.

Pickleball strokes create a high-pitched sound that human ears are sensitive to, said Bob Unetich, a referee who runs a consulting business that helps mitigate the noise.

He suggests building courts farther from homes and says sound curtains—mats hung from fences—help a lot, too. There are paddles and balls that produce quieter sounds, but he said persuading players to switch equipment can be difficult.

“They love the sound of that hard pop. It’s a winning sound,” he said.

In Falmouth, Mr. Mastroianni said he and his neighbors hired a sound-control consultant, who submitted a report to the zoning board of appeals showing the noise was above what state and local ordinances permit. In denying their request to stop play, the board said pickleball provided an educational benefit and noted that the town had already limited the courts’ open hours and offered to build sound-attenuation blankets. The residents say the blankets won’t fully stop the noise.

Mr. Mastroianni said anti-pickleball noise signs have been stolen from his yard, he and other plaintiffs have been called killjoys, and pickleballers have confronted him when he video-recorded them to capture the sound. “We’re all reluctant warriors in this,” he said.

Sometimes the drama around the sport isn't over the noise. Last month in Exeter, N.H., scores of residents attended a town board meeting over a proposal to convert three tennis courts into eight pickleball courts at a park. Pickleball players were set to move forward with the conversion after raising about \$35,000 to cover the costs, but opponents alleged that proper government procedures hadn't been followed. "The pickleball community acted sneaky and underhanded," one resident wrote to the board.

Niko Papakonstantis, chairman of Exeter's select board, blamed a communication breakdown for the confusion. "This is not a referendum about pickleball or tennis," he told the crowd. "They're both great sports." The board voted this month to convert one tennis court into two semi-permanent pickleball courts and to explore buying or converting other land for pickleball play. Dick Matthews, the president of the Exeter Pickleball Club, who helped lead the fundraising effort, said the park's tennis courts are never fully used.

"It's just about change, that's all," Mr. Matthews said. "They say, 'Don't take things that are mine, even though I don't use them.'