

What We Learned Report

Outdoor Tennis and Pickleball Strategy

October - December 2023



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Introduction

The City of Ottawa has identified the need for an outdoor tennis and pickleball strategy, which will ensure that communities across Ottawa have access to both sports. The strategy will also serve as a reference guide for future management, oversight, and development of all outdoor public and community operated tennis and pickleball courts.

The City of Ottawa has observed a steady increase in the demand for outdoor pickleball courts across Ottawa, while tennis courts continue to be well utilized. In 2021, the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan was completed and identified the following growth by 2031:

- 24 new outdoor tennis courts
- 39 new outdoor pickleball courts

Currently, the City has an inventory of over 500 outdoor tennis and pickleball courts, including combination courts (shared tennis and pickleball lines), single sport courts and municipal membership club courts.

Following an evaluation of the current public court model, the strategy will identify a clear direction and delivery model for both outdoor tennis and pickleball across the city of Ottawa. The strategy will also look to:

- Provide safe, equitable and accessible outdoor tennis and pickleball courts.
- Increase overall user and community satisfaction for offerings within the city.
- Design guidelines to support future courts.
- Inform operational decisions related to Municipal Tennis Club Agreements.
- Establish a strategy for developing new pickleball courts that considers lines on existing courts, full conversion from tennis to pickleball and construction of purpose-built pickleball courts.

Objectives

The objective of the public survey and stakeholder consultations was to collect information on residents' experience and satisfaction with the current outdoor tennis and pickleball courts and get input on guidelines for future court sittings.

Engagement

Key facts:

- 1215 survey responses were received.
 - 1191 English
 - 24 French
- 127 people attended three consultations.
- 88 comments were submitted through email.

How we engaged

Engagement on the Outdoor Tennis and Pickleball Strategy took place from October 27 to December 31, 2023. Residents were invited to participate through an online survey on [Engage Ottawa](#) or through virtual consultations.

The virtual consultations took place on November 12, December 12, and December 14. The first of the three sessions targeted stakeholders and user groups, where clubs and associations were consulted by invitation only. The following two consultations were open to the general public. In total, 127 people participated in the virtual consultations. Participants included representatives from tennis and pickleball clubs, associations, players, and non-players.

Prior to the engagement series launch, Members of Council were informed through a memo by Recreation, Cultural and Facility Services General Manager, Dan Chenier.

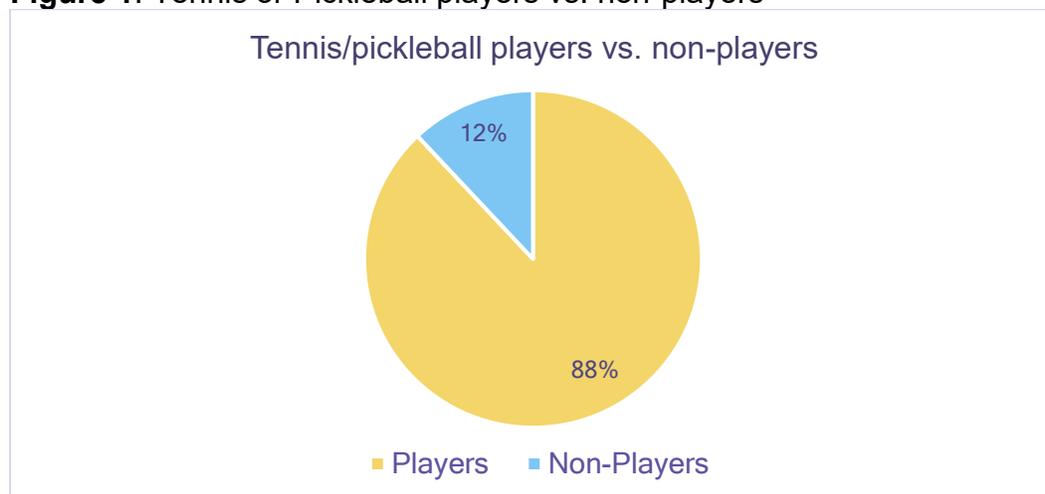
Engagement opportunities were advertised through:

- Posters in 132 facilities
- Screens in 30 facilities
- 163 QR code scans
- Radio ads on morning traffic of Live 88.5 and Kiss FM
- Social media – 2,592 impressions
- Earned media – CTV and Ottawa Citizen pickup.
- Discover Rec eblast.

Who participated?

The engagement was targeted to Ottawa residents, community-operated clubs and associations involved with either tennis or pickleball. More information on survey respondents, such as players vs non-players, the racquet sport of preference and those who identify as belonging to equity and inclusion groups is show in Figure 1 to 3.

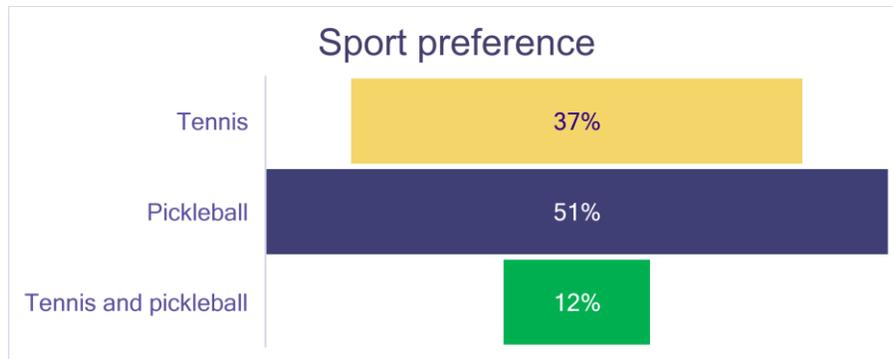
Figure 1: Tennis or Pickleball players vs. non-players



Of 1215 survey respondents, 1069 (88%) of survey respondents indicated that they play either tennis or pickleball. The remaining 146 (12%) respondents indicated that they do not play either sport.

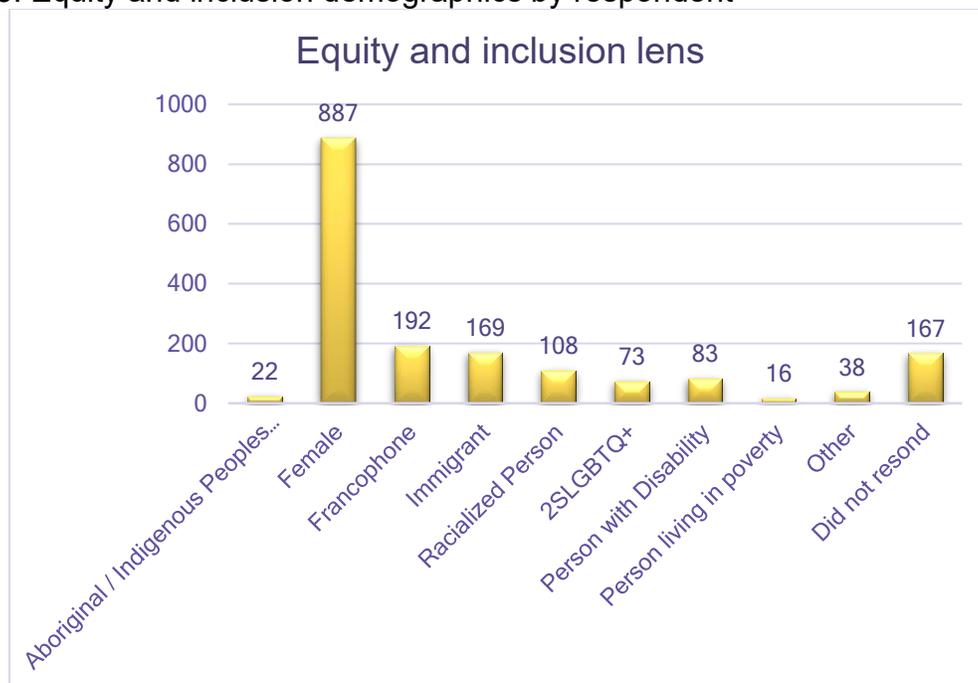


Figure 2: What is the respondents' sport of preference?



Survey respondents were asked their racquet sport of preference. The majority (51%) play pickleball, followed by 37% that play tennis and 12% play both sports.

Figure 3: Equity and inclusion demographics by respondent



Survey respondents were asked if they identify as someone belonging to equity and inclusion groups. Respondents could select multiple options. Of the 1215 that

responded, 887 (73%) identify as female, followed by 192 (15%) who identify as Francophone, and 192 (16%) identify as immigrant.

Respondents of the survey represented a diverse age range. The largest segment (45.4% or 548 respondents) represented the 55-69 age range, followed by 32% (386) from the 35-54 age range, while those over 70 years of age represented 14.2% (171) of respondents.

Targeted consultations were hosted with the following groups:

- Municipal tennis & pickleball clubs
- National Capital Tennis Association
- Ottawa Pickleball Association
- RA Centre
- Pickleball Canada
- Algonquin College

Results and feedback

Feedback from the public survey and consultation sessions was themed into 5 categories:

- Court standards
- Noise mitigation
- Maintenance and lifecycle
- Access, equity, and inclusion
- Equipment and infrastructure

1. Court standards

Online survey respondents and consultation participants were asked to provide feedback on court standards, below are the key learnings.

Key learnings:

- 35% of survey respondents prefer double courts.
- 68% of survey respondents, if given the choice, would prefer to have single sport courts (either tennis or pickleball).
- Combination courts are suitable if times are scheduled. Combination courts are suitable for high-density areas.
- Pickleball players are more willing to travel for their sport.
- Pickleball players tend to travel in larger groups.
- Respondents suggested creating larger hubs for pickleball courts.
- Courts in the community should reflect demand.

2. Noise mitigation

One of the most common complaints with pickleball is the noise that is generated when the ball hits the paddle. Participants offered feedback for improvements, or ways to mitigate the issue.

Improvements:

- There should be 150 metres between courts and residences.
- Majority of respondents are not in favour of sound barriers but suggested that they be considered on a case-by-case basis.

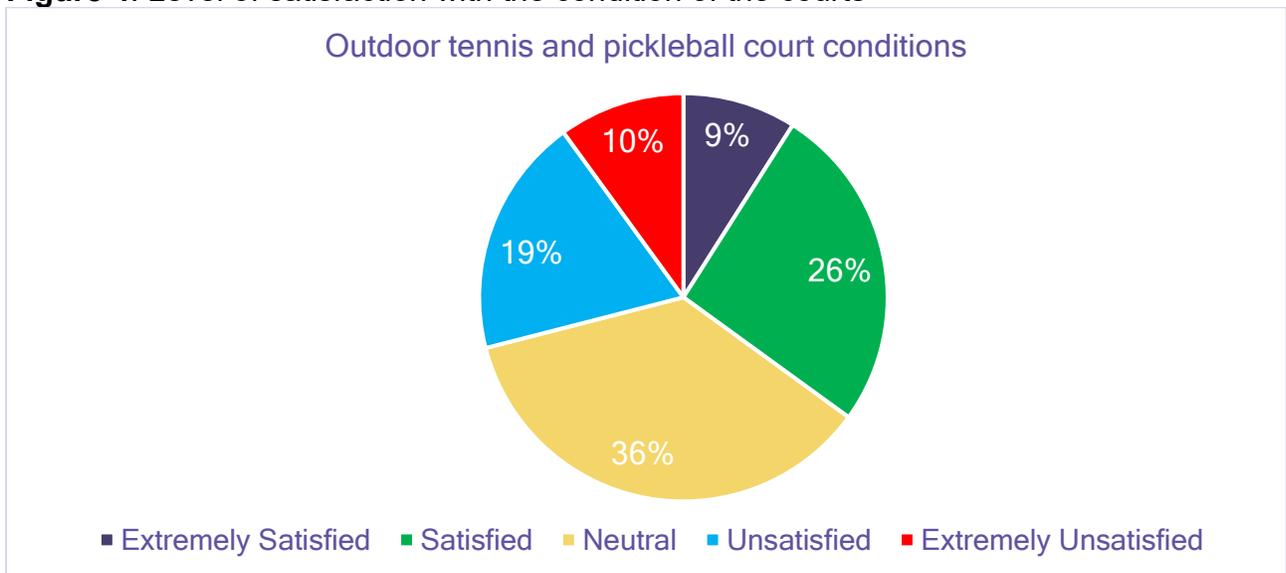
Mitigation Strategies:

- Where the 150-metre distance requirement could not be met, a schedule would allow for specific pickleball times.
- Where noise has been mentioned as an issue, designated pickleball times could help.

3. Maintenance and lifecycle

Survey respondents and consultation participants were asked about their satisfaction with outdoor court maintenance and lifecycle. Survey respondents provided the following levels of satisfaction:

Figure 4: Level of satisfaction with the condition of the courts



The majority of survey respondents (71%) indicated that they were extremely satisfied, satisfied or neutral about the conditions of outdoor courts, while 29% were unsatisfied.

Consultation participants in both public sessions stated that the current courts are generally satisfactory for recreational play, but did mention some maintenance concerns, such as:

- Cracks
- Slopes
- Bubbles

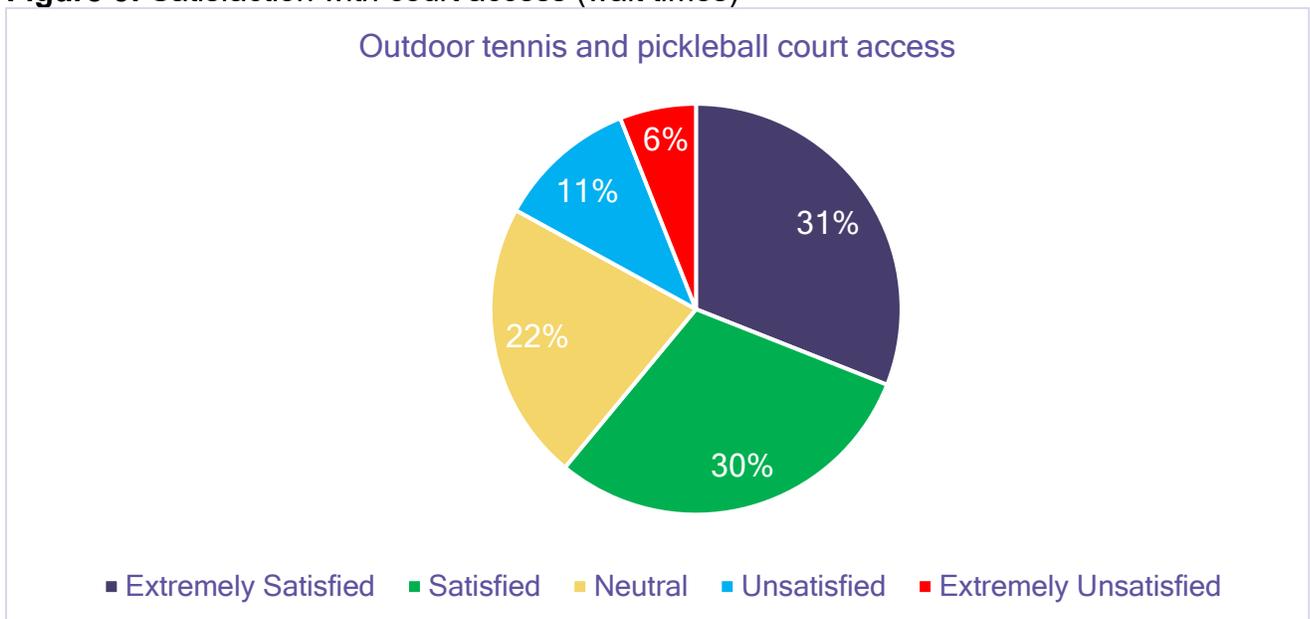
4. Access, equity and inclusion

(a) Access

(i) *Wait times on public courts:*

Survey respondents and participants of the consultation sessions were asked about the wait times at the outdoor courts. The following figure (Figure 5) demonstrates the level of satisfaction with current wait times.

Figure 5: Satisfaction with court access (wait times)



When asked about court access, most survey respondents (61%) stated that they were satisfied or extremely satisfied, 22% remained neutral and 17% were unsatisfied or extremely unsatisfied.

The majority of consultation participants felt it was acceptable to wait for up to 30 minutes for a court and suggested using a booking tool to avoid longer wait times. Further, participants noted the more social nature of pickleball vs tennis, which results in larger groups gathering and playing for extended periods. This has impacted the wait times for tennis players who, as a result, must wait longer for the use of combination courts.

(ii) *Municipal membership club courts:*

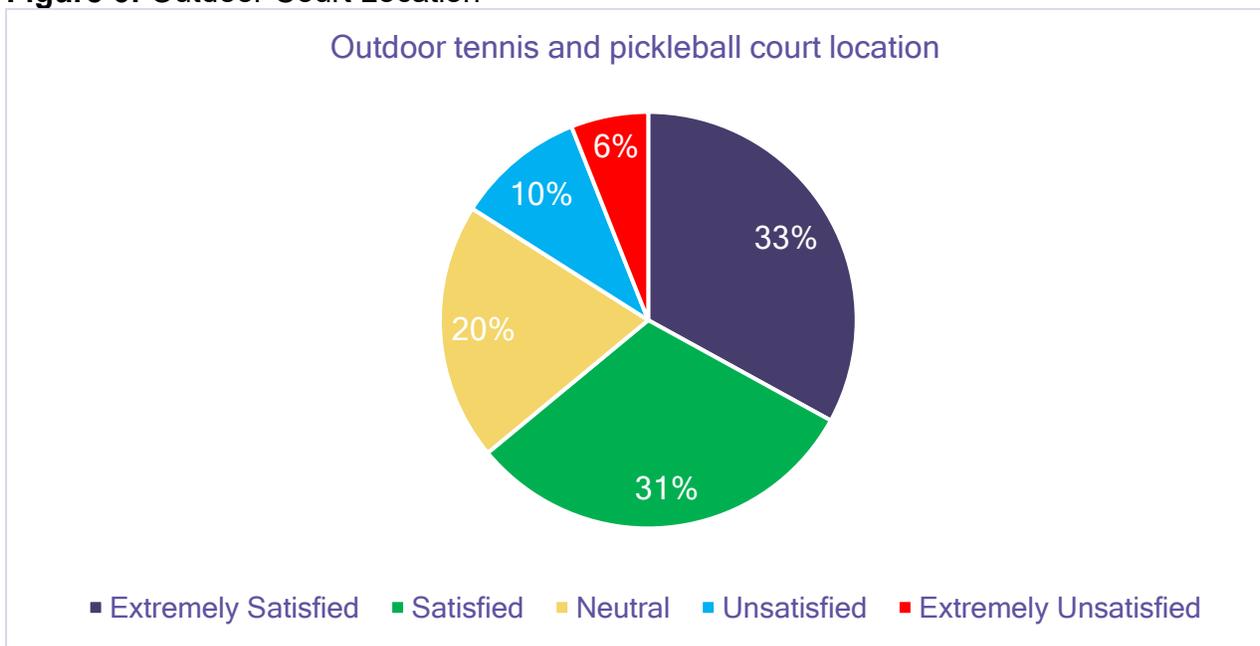
The following feedback regarding access municipal membership club courts was shared through consultations and survey responses:

- Consultation participants indicated that wait times at municipal membership clubs are not a concern, following the implementation of an online booking tool.
- Many survey respondents indicated that municipal membership clubs, especially those that offer pickleball, are oversubscribed with long waitlists. Further, many agreed that there is a need for additional pickleball membership clubs.
- Most felt that municipal membership club fees were reasonable and affordable for the season (May-September).

(b) Location of courts

The following figure (Figure 6) demonstrates the overall level of satisfaction with the location of courts from survey respondents.

Figure 6: Outdoor Court Location



Most survey respondents (64%) indicated that they were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the current location of courts while 20% remained neutral and 16% were unsatisfied or extremely unsatisfied.

Consultation participants were asked about the current location of courts. Most participants stated that they prefer to play locally but are willing to travel for better court conditions and lower wait times. When asked how far they would travel, the majority of pickleball players indicated that they would travel 10 km or more, and tennis players indicated that they would travel one to five km to play on outdoor courts.

5. Equipment and infrastructure

When asked about the equipment and infrastructure needed to play tennis and pickleball, the project team learned the following:

- Regarding combined courts, the tennis nets are in poor condition due to the adjustments needed to play pickleball.
- Lighting should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- It was suggested to use alternative courts for pickleball, such as basketball courts, or outdoor hockey slabs.
- More washrooms are needed.
- Parking is important.
- Shade and wind protection are needed.
- Practice boards or walls are desired.

Next steps

This engagement series will be used to inform and create an overall outdoor tennis and pickleball strategy. This strategy will help to ensure safe, equitable and accessible outdoor courts. The goal is to increase overall user and community satisfaction through clear design guidelines, to inform operational decisions, and to determine how, when, where and if courts should be converted or designed strictly for pickleball use.

The draft strategy is anticipated to be available on Engage Ottawa for residents in Q3 2024. Residents and stakeholders are encouraged to stay informed through Engage Ottawa (www.engage.ottawa.ca/tennis_pickleball) and by contacting the project team at tennis_pickleball@ottawa.ca.