

Pickleball Fastest Growing Sport

We are Kim Carney and Jeanine Schmidt, residents of North Haven, and in less than a year we have become Pickleball addicts. Not bad for 65 and 61-years-old.

In the 2019 Topline Participation Report, the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) estimated there now over 3.3 million Pickleball players in the US. Since 2013, USAP membership has increased from 4,000 to nearly 40,000, an almost 900% increase!

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pickleball players from the New Haven County and surrounding areas, for a fee, would use indoor courts during the winter months. With COVID in full swing, players are choosing to play on the outdoor courts in Cheshire, Wallingford, and Durham. Due to safety concerns, the preference is to remain outdoors. On any given day there are between 20 to 30 players on these outdoor courts in temperatures as low as 30° and having a great time! Even the recent snowstorm (December 2020) was not a deterrent, players cleared the snow off the courts so they could play.



The popularity of the game is rapidly growing. In August 2020, players were introduced to the TeamReach App. Originally only 20 were using this app, but as the months went by an additional 130 players have since been added. As word spreads and clinics startup, it is projected there will be even more players this spring.

The increase in Pickleball's popularity prompted new courts both at Wallingford and Cheshire parks (*Record-Journal* July 2020). See *Record-Journal* article on page 5.



Pickleball is a safe enjoyable game for players from 6-years-old to ACTIVE seniors well into their 70's. As the only equipment required is a paddle and a ball it's an inexpensive, fun game.

While driving around North Haven in search of available courts it was observed that everything was geared towards children. The North Haven Senior Center's list of activities is as follows: Yoga, Ti-Chi, Bingo, cards, and sit-er-cize (chair exercise). These are activities are

not geared towards ACTIVE Seniors, but Pickleball is and would fill the void of this much-needed option.

The ACTIVE Senior population in North Haven is growing and as the popularity of Pickleball continues to grow, how long before the Cheshire, Wallingford, and Durham courts become residents only?

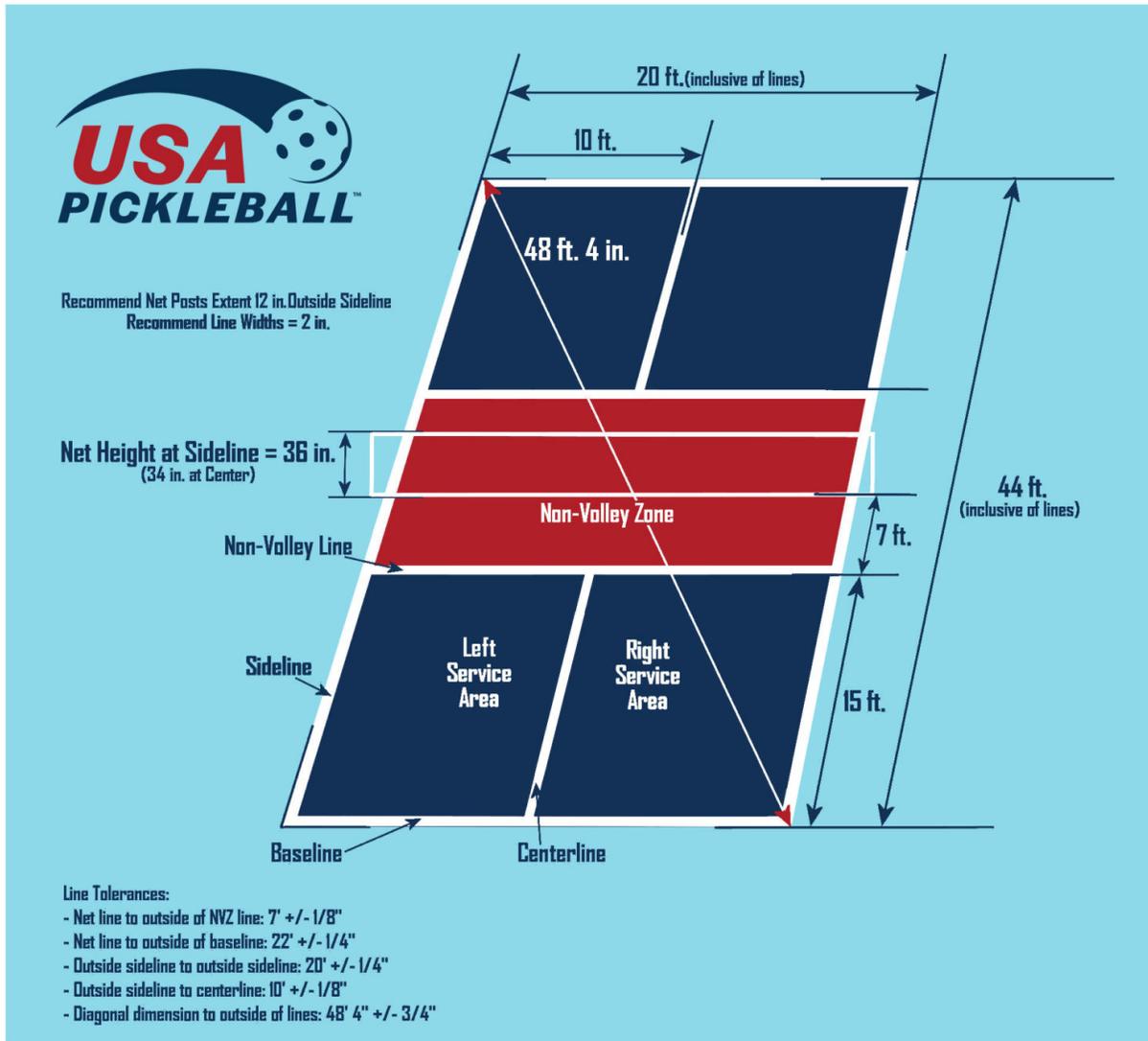
The bottom line is there is a clear need for Pickleball courts to be added to the North Haven Park and Rec. The existing parks and schoolyards have many courts and fields for traditional sports but a space for the fastest growing sport, Pickleball, is not available. Compared to baseball, football, basketball, lacrosse, and tennis, the footprint of a Pickleball court is a modest 20' by 44', (see Page 4).

Sincerely,

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Pickleball Court Dimensions



For best practice, USA Pickleball highly recommends those looking for detailed court construction and maintenance information, consider purchasing the [ASBA/USA Pickleball Construction Manual](#)

July 20, 2020 11:15AM

By Sean Krofssik, Record-Journal staff

Pickleball continues to grow in the area with four new courts installed recently at Wallingford's Harrison Park. The Wallingford expansion comes on the heels of Cheshire Park unveiling six dedicated pickleball courts earlier this year.

Four tennis courts at Harrison Park were lined for tennis and pickleball on June 30. A lockbox was installed on Wednesday to store the portable nets for public use.

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The growing sport is a big hit. A group of about 20 will gather multiple times a week to use the courts.

Wallingford resident and pickleball enthusiast Sally Tremaine said she's pleased to have the new courts.

"It's a nice thing that the (Wallingford) Park and Rec did for us," Tremaine said. "The more people that play, the more chance we will have for a permanent space in town. This is a good first step for Wallingford."

Indoor facilities in Rocky Hill and North Haven are also popular with area players. Many have flocked to six exclusively pickleball courts at Cheshire Park since they opened earlier this year.

"This is really exciting," Tremaine said. "A lot of us were playing indoors when the coronavirus hit. We were playing over tennis nets. It works but it's not as nice. But when Parks and Rec agreed to do this, it's fabulous."

There are a core group of 16-20 pickleballers expected on Wednesday's and Friday's from 9 to 11 a.m. at Harrison Park. New players are welcome. Players need to bring their own balls and paddles. Regular players will have the code to unlock the box where the nets are stored.

Wallingford pickleball player Bob Danielson has played for six years. He said it's not a game just for seniors.

"The sport is growing in players 50-and-under, especially the 20-to-40 year-old range," Danielson said.

Danielson has played in two U.S. Open's in Florida and captured a pair of gold medals, one in Mixed Doubles and the other in Men's Doubles. Danielson is a 4.0 skill level in the 70-75 age group.

Danielson and his wife play in Wallingford, North Branford and Cheshire.

Danielson and others appeared at the Wallingford Park and Recreation Commission meeting in November to make their case to expand the pickleball area at Harrison Park. He said Wallingford Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels was critical in the pickleball expansion.

"Kenny has done a lot for us and we appreciate it," Danielson said.

Michaels said it's important for the parks to be used.

"It's nice for our residents to have so normalcy," Michaels said. "It's good physical activity and we are catering to both our tennis and growing pickleball players."

Prior to the expansion, there were two pickleball courts at Doolittle and Harrison parks. Danielson said the Doolittle courts are seldom used for pickleball. It's Harrison that attracts the crowd. The previous Doolittle and Harrison pickleball improvements came under then Wallingford Parks and Recreation Director John Gawlak, who now serves in the same post in Cheshire.

Gawlak moved from Wallingford to Cheshire last year and spoke with the town manager about pickleball courts early in his tenure.

They quickly moved to upgrade the Cheshire Park courts.

"Pickleball has exploded," Gawlak said. "This is not a fad. It's here to stay. So we were due for a capital project at Cheshire Park and we wanted to see how many courts we could fit in. Tennis and pickleball players want their own dedicated space and they got it."

Gawlak played pickleball during his days at Southern Connecticut State University and still plays. During the pandemic, he and his family have been playing pickleball outside their Wallingford home.

Gawlak said Cheshire is considering more pickleball courts behind Dodd Middle School, if the budget allows. Looking forward, Gawlak said leagues and invitationals are being discussed.

"This sport has really taken off in Connecticut the last two years," Danielson said. "Pickleball is like the Field of Dreams, if you build it, they will come."

<https://www.myrecordjournal.com/News/Wallingford/Wallingford-News/Pickleball-comes-to-Wallingford-Cheshire.html>

