

City of Montgomery  
Parks and Recreation Committee Minutes  
March 13, 2023

Staff Present

Brian Riblet, City Manager  
Tracy Henao, Asst. City Manager  
John Crowell, Police Chief  
Gary Heitkamp, Public Works Director  
Mike Rogers, Asst. Public Works Director  
Lisa Lorenz, Recreation Specialist  
Connie Gaylor, Clerk of Council

Committee Members Present

Sasha Naiman, Chair  
Chris Dobrozsi  
Mike Cappel

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The Parks and Recreation Committee of Council convened its meeting for March 13, 2023 at 3:30 p.m. with Mrs. Naiman presiding.

New Business

Pickleball Discussion

Mr. Riblet explained to the Committee that in September of 2020 the tennis courts at Dulle Park were converted to portable pickleball courts as were the courts at Swaim Park. Mr. Riblet explained that there have been complaints from residents by Dulle Park regarding the increased noise from the pickleball play and players. Mr. Riblet explained that staff began investigating best practices on noise management and obtained additional information on soundproofing material that would be installed on the chain link fencing. Mr. Riblet referenced an article on Top Trends as published by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) on dealing with pickleball noise. He added that this is becoming a national issue due to the overwhelming popularity of pickleball. He explained that like most communities the increased use of the courts has risen exponentially due to the popularity. He stated that the focus of the meeting was to find a solution that can be realized by both the surrounding property owners and the players that would be attainable in the short term. He stated that he felt further discussions on a long term solution would be expected.

Ms. Lorenz, Recreation Specialist and staff liaison to the Parks and Recreation Commission, explained that after discussing the NRPA recommendations and the research conducted by the Public Works department with the Parks and Recreation Commission that the Commission recommends supporting the restriction of the hours that pickleball could be played at both Dulle and Swaim Park. She explained that the Commission also is supportive of installing soundproofing materials at the Dulle Park courts. Ms. Lorenz explained that the Commission recommended restricting the hours on the court to between 9:00 a.m. To 8:00 p.m.

Mr. Rogers explained that included in the packets is information he obtained when researching the costs and effectiveness of the material. He explained that the manufacturer claimed that with the material installed there is an anticipated 10-15% decibel reduction. He added that while the studies show reduction in noise, the material does not eliminate noise. Mr. Rogers stated that he spoke with the Parks Director in Carmel, Indiana, who has the Acoustifence around their courts but noted that they have no sound study, and their courts are new. He stated that the Parks

Director did have positive remarks about the material. Mr. Rogers explained that the fencing could be installed in sections to help control costs and would be installed by the public works staff to save installation costs. Mr. Rogers explained that due to the weight of the fabric the chain link fencing would have to be replaced. Mr. Rogers explained that to install the acoustifence product at Dulle park, we would have to replace the existing chain link fencing, thus upgrading the size of the corner and line posts, which is estimated at \$35,590. The acoustifence product comes in various sizes and they cut the pieces to fit your fencing heights. The fencing surrounding the courts at Dulle is 10' high. A 6' X 10' piece of acoustifencing is \$650 and it would take 50 pieces to outfit 2 sides of the courts, totaling \$32,500. He stated that replacing existing chain link fencing and equipping two sides of the courts with acoustifence would total \$68,090.

Mrs. Naiman asked Mr. Rogers how many sides would need to have the material added in order to recognize noise reduction.

Mr. Rogers replied that there are two sides that directly impact residents.

Mr. Heitkamp added that the fencing would also need to be reinforced with cross fencing to withstand winds.

Mr. Dobrozsi asked if the company performed engineering design to indicate the decrease in noise by only installing the fencing on two sides.

Mr. Heitkamp replied that staff would have to reach out to the company to see if that was done. He stated that we could replace the two sides and install the acoustifence then analyze to see if more was needed.

Mr. Rogers added that the material could be cut to different lengths to accommodate the courts.

Mr. Heitkamp stated that the effectiveness of the fencing was on a case by case basis as it could very well reflect the noise and amplify it somewhere else.

Ms. Lorenz stated that in the Sun City Grand noise study it was noted that they only installed 3 sides of the fencing and it showed a 10-15% decibel reduction.

Mr. Dobrozsi asked if the noise issue was only at Dulle Park.

Mr. Riblet stated that he has not received calls from residents near the Swaim Park courts at this time. He stated that he felt whatever was designed at Dulle would be installed at Swaim Park as well to be consistent.

Mr. Cappel asked if the fencing would impact the game.

Mr. Rogers replied that from his research from the various cities who used the fencing that the players were all happy with the fencing.

Mr. Riblet explained that money is not currently budgeted for the acoustifencing or the new chain link fencing but if the Committee recommended the installation and Council approved it an appropriation could be done to allow for the work to be done out of the 2023 budget.

Guests and Residents

Mary Jo Byrnes, 7980 Schoolhouse Lane, was present as a representative of the pickleball residents who regularly use Dulle Park to play.

Steve Hartings, 7879 Symphony Lane- Mr. Hartings explained that his property runs behind the back of Dulle Park adjacent to the baseball field however he hears the noise from sunup to sundown. He stated that he felt the hour restriction is a step in the right direction but feels that if courts are going to be installed that it should be discussed ahead of time with the residents. He stated he felt that there were too many courts at Dulle in relation to the proximity of the homes. He stated that with four courts there would be 16 people playing at one time. He stated that the house directly to the front of the courts is only about 15 feet from the court and his is about 100 feet. He stated that it is now suggested that courts be 200 feet away from homes. He stated that the sound from pickleball cannot be turned into white noise as the average decibels range between 60-80, which is higher than what people should be hearing.

Mr. Cappel asked Chief Crowell if we have readings.

Police Chief Crowell explained that we did. He explained that he visited Mr. Hartings property to measure the decibels from the courts. He explained he did this in the morning and in the afternoon. He explained that the rating was 68 decibels, under the Noise Ordinance for that time of day. He added that he walked to the back of Dulle Park to also measure ambient noise (wind, birds) and it registered in the upper 50's. He added that the Ordinance also states that the noise must be 200 feet from the complaint, and the courts were further than that requirement.

Mr. Dobrozsi asked what the violation levels were according to our Ordinance.

Chief Crowell answered that it is 70 decibels during the day and then after 11:00 p.m. it reduces to 60.

Mr. Hartings stated that for the houses on the hill, the creek increases the noise. He stated that he has heard from residents across the street who can hear the noise in their neighborhood. He stated that all over Symphony Lane and Lakewater Drive you could hear the noise.

Tom Montchai, 7899 Symphony- Mr. Montchai expressed his frustration at the City putting pickleball in his backyard. He expressed that he felt the City added the courts with no thought to the effect it would have on neighboring residents. He stated it was very loud and that he doubted that anyone in the room would want it in their backyard. He stated that he has sent many emails to Mr. Riblet and had phone conversations as well. He stated that he had doubts about the fencing. He stated it was a function of distance and height and could be a waste of money. He stated that he felt 10 decibels is very little reduction. He stated that he felt serious engineering needed to be done before the money was spent. He feels it will still be too loud and should not be next to homes. He stated the players are there at sunrise. He stated the players are loud and yell and scream on top of the pickleball noise. He stated he cannot open his windows or sit outside. He stated the players do not understand how loud it is and asked if it was fair that the residents have to put up with the noise. He stated that he is an architect and that sound travels 360 degrees.

Mrs. Naiman stated that Mr. Montchai's neighborhood is at a higher elevation.

Mr. Montchai replied that it was and although they have added landscaping it has not helped. He stated he hoped Council would help.

Kay Gaffney, 10545 Crescendo Court- Mrs. Gaffney explained that she does hear the noise but not like Mr. Hartings and Mr. Montchai. She stated that sunrise to sundown is the truth. She added that her experience has been more directly related to a new neighbor who actually placed pickleball court markings on the street on Crescendo and they would play and block traffic. She stated that after she reported it to Mr. Riblet the markings were removed but the neighbors replaced them again. She stated she appreciated what the City has done but it is a problem. She stated that another problem that the City should consider is that now portable courts could be purchased and placed in peoples' yards. She stated that this would be a very big noise issue if they were allowed.

Ms. Naiman asked what the condition of the cul-de-sac was at this time.

Mrs. Gaffney replied that the tape was removed but due to the weather she felt that it would continue once the weather is warmer.

Mr. Cappel explained that all parks are to be used peaceably and it is hard to balance all the needs of the residents. He stated that in order to have reasonable balance that hard decisions would have to be made and that Council represents all residents.

Ms. Byrnes discussed the proposed time restrictions with the Committee and stated that the courts are not used a lot during the middle of the day due to the heat, but the use would increase when people got off work around 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. She asked the Committee if they wanted to take a \$60,000 gamble on installing the acoustifence. She suggested moving all pickleball courts to Weller Park. She asked what the cost would be to do that rather than investing in the four courts at Dulle Park. She stated she would recommend doing 8 courts at Weller. She stated the difference between the use at Dulle Park and Swaim Park is that Dulle Park is looked at as open play whereas Swaim is used more for family use. She stated that the challenge with the Weller Park courts at this time is that there is no fence, and the court is situated to where players are playing into the sun. She stated there was better parking at Weller. Ms. Byrnes added that if the hours are restricted at Dulle it would take oversight to enforce that and did the police want to deal with that.

Mr. Hastings asked how many people drive in from other cities and recommended used Pfeiffer Park to be utilized.

Ms. Byrnes stated that as there were no restrooms or parking at Pfeiffer it would not be a good consideration at this time.

Mrs. Naiman asked what impact the sound fencing would have.

Ms. Byrnes asked if the fencing would absorb heat and not allow the breeze in to help cool the players. She asked if there was any negative feedback from the manufacturer or the cities that were referenced.

Mr. Hastings stated that he loved the idea of utilizing Weller Park as a permanent location for pickleball as it is away from residents and the sound would dissipate.

Mr. Riblet addressed Mr. Montchai's thoughts of the initial installation of the pickleball courts not being given careful consideration. He explained that staff began discussing the installation in 2017 and 2018 when the trends in recreation were just beginning to show interest in the sport. He explained that at that time there was no concrete information about the noise and the probable popularity of the sport. He stated it became very popular during the pandemic as people were drawn to being able to be outside and found a new activity that provided that opportunity. He added that the noise is not the only challenge but with the courts being located next to Terwilliger Lodge that parking was now a conflict when someone rents the lodge and needs parking for their rental.

Mr. Riblet stated that he was pleased to hear Ms. Byrnes suggest Weller Park and felt it was a great option to move the courts there. He explained that a long term solution would be to add additional courts and parking to accommodate the players. He stated that short term restricting the hours and installing programmable locks would be a potential transition until budgeting could allow for the move to Weller Park if that is what Council supports.

Mr. Dobrozsi stated that he thinks it is great that more people are in the parks for any reason.

Ms. Byrnes added that the midday hours are not open play. She stated that up to about 10:00 a.m. it is open play, and most players leave and then after 5:00 p.m. it becomes open play again.

Mrs. Naiman stated she felt the goal would be to create space for pickleball and not be disruptive to residents.

Mr. Hastings asked what would happen if Weller ended up being too loud.

The Committee discussed the distance to residences from the courts.

Mrs. Naiman asked what the next steps would be from this point at Weller Park.

Mr. Riblet explained that staff would need to look at the current size of the courts, condition of the existing asphalt of the parking lot and fencing to begin identifying budget needs to make the move to Weller Park. He stated there is no money earmarked for that in the current budget. Ms. Byrnes asked the Committee to consider not changing the hours to begin at 9:00 a.m. as it is beginning to get too hot.

Ms. Lorenz asked which was more important to Ms. Byrnes.

Ms. Byrnes replied that people love this game, so they are probably not going to be willing to change. She stated she could anticipate issues if the gates were locked.

Mrs. Gaffney reminded the Committee that the noise is heard all day every day.

Ms. Byrnes reminded the Committee that open play is usually until 10:30 a.m. and then picks up again at 4:00 pm. She stated that Swaim is not open play.

Mr. Riblet replied that an immediate solution for Dulle Park is to restrict hours as getting the fencing and researching the costs at Weller Park will take some time to complete.

Mr. Dobrozsi stated that limiting the hours is a sound solution. He added that he would like to see a specific sound analysis for Dulle Park.

Ms. Byrnes replied that she felt adding locks will make residents mad.

Mr. Montchai stated he felt that the City should keep tennis at Swaim and Dulle and move all pickleball to Weller.

Mrs. Naiman made the recommendation to make the restricted hours from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at Dulle and Swaim Parks. Mr. Cappel seconded. The Committee unanimously agreed.

Mrs. Naiman asked staff to begin researching moving pickleball to Weller Park.

Mr. Riblet stated the first step is to find and install timed locks for the gates, getting more scientific information on the fencing to be installed, and then to focus on obtaining information on Weller Park.

### Minutes

Mr. Dobrozsi moved to approve the minutes from the March 13, 2023 Parks and Recreation meeting. Mr. Cappel seconded. The Committee unanimously agreed.

### Other Business

There was no other business

### Adjournment

Mr. Cappel moved for adjournment. Mr. Dobrozsi seconded. The Committee unanimously agreed. The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

  
Chair