

## Scott Johnson

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**From:** Andy Parad <aparad@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 14, 2024 5:21 PM  
**To:** Scott Johnson  
**Cc:** Fred Allyn, III; Naomi Rodriguez; diricokj@comcast.net  
**Subject:** Re: Pickleball/Playgrounds

Scott,

Thanks for the info and the picture. I see how you could squeeze 4 courts in there now at East drive. And looking at the properties Parks and Rec has to use ([Ledyard Parks, Recreation and Senior Center: Facilities](#)) I can see how limited we are.

We do need at least 4 courts at 1 location, probably 6. I saw the players on TeamReach talking about my same concern that if only 2 courts are built they will probably just use the Gales Ferry tennis court most of the time. If we're going to build something expensive, it should get use (and be visible).

As a frame of reference for growing demand, I spent a week last fall playing in Naples, FL. They have 64 public courts. The week I got there was apparently the week all the snowbirds start coming down. I was able to play as much as I wanted without hardly waiting but everyone said in the next week or two it would be play 1 game, sit a game or 2.

I'm still not certain East Drive is the best location that will get the most use. And it doesn't solve having courts available for the high school.

Given the new walkway from the high school, maybe we should look along the walkway. (I'm still not convinced they can't be built at the high school – it looks like you can reserve the courts at Stonington High during the day: [Facilities](#)). Also, it looks like Stonington is planning ahead and are offering middle school pickleball this fall. It makes sense. By the time those kids get to high school there may be teams and Stonington will be tough to beat with their head start.

There are 2 options I see along the new walkway:

Blonders obviously has the most room and would probably be an easy spot. But again, it's a bit out of the way as far visibility in town if this is going to be part of the rejuvenation efforts that have been going on for the past half a dozen years.

The best choice for highest usage and visibility would be somewhere at the Town Green. I say somewhere because the land from the GIS map appears to be pretty much used. I didn't realize the town owns less than 3 acres there now. If we had another 90 X 120 feet for 6 courts at the back of the parking lot, that would have been a great spot. Otherwise, to put 6 courts there would probably take up almost a third of the parking lot. Not sure how courts there would go over with the Farmers Market committee, but I can't imagine a dozen or two hungry pickleball players on a summer evening being bad for business. Would just have to turn up the music a bit.

Andy

On Tue, Nov 12, 2024 at 12:45 PM Scott Johnson <[Scott@ledyardrec.org](mailto:Scott@ledyardrec.org)> wrote:

Good morning Andy,

You're welcome, thanks for attending last week!

To be clear we haven't finalized the new location yet and are open to any suggestions. Looking at the properties we own, East Drive and Highlands Lake have the space to accommodate courts.

**1&2:** I attached a map showing the location and footprint of up to 4 courts(each square is a 2-court slab). Measuring everything out we would likely only accommodate 3 courts at East Drive to ensure the courts don't interfere with T-Ball. This would maintain the open space to the left of the basketball court. Regarding the bugs, unfortunately this will likely always be an issue at any property we chose because Ledyard is such a heavily wooded area.

**3:** I agree it is a remote location; the issue is the parks that are more accessible have been developed to a point there isn't space to accommodate new courts.

**4:** I also have not noticed any puddles or pooling at that location after substantial rain. The property isn't within any wetlands or consist of wetland soils that would lead to drainage concerns. In addition, the property has a slight pitch towards the pine swamp(elevation profile on the map).



**5:** Unfortunately, that is the reality with public courts being first come first serve. The reason courts across America are overloaded is because there is not enough infrastructure to meet the current demand. As more courts are installed in our area we will start to see the courts become less crowded as the demand is met. Here is an interesting article to give you an idea of what we are facing in the Parks & Rec industry regarding pickleball infrastructure. [https://recmanagement.com/articles/153900/pickleball-needs-900-million-investment-keep-demand?utm\\_source=MagnetMail&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=fuzzy%40hotmail%2Ecom&utm\\_content=082123%5FRecReport&utm\\_campaign=Pickleball%20Needs%20%24900%20Million%20Investment%20to%20Keep%20Up%20With%20Demand](https://recmanagement.com/articles/153900/pickleball-needs-900-million-investment-keep-demand?utm_source=MagnetMail&utm_medium=email&utm_term=fuzzy%40hotmail%2Ecom&utm_content=082123%5FRecReport&utm_campaign=Pickleball%20Needs%20%24900%20Million%20Investment%20to%20Keep%20Up%20With%20Demand)

**6:** To be honest I don't understand how a town only installing 2 courts vs 6 is a mistake, especially if there is one time funding available. With the cost to install a court going up 10-20% each year its more cost effective to install courts in phases. In addition, by planning for the future and installing in phases you spread out major maintenance costs. Also as mentioned in #5 our area in not close to meeting the facility demand. Until more courts are built in our area we will not get a true understanding of how many courts will truly be needed. By building in phases, we can continue to add courts as needed until the demand is met without making a costly mistake of adding too many courts.

#### **Suggestions:**

Number of Courts: As mentioned above its more cost effective to install 2 now vs waiting to install 4 due to material cost increases.

BOE/ Future HS: I agree that we will likely see pickleball become a high school sport in a few years. The BOE will ultimately have to take on the endeavor to add courts on school property. However, HS teams are not required to practice/ play matches on school property. Up until 5-6 years ago the HS soccer team practiced and played games at Blonders. As P&R we are looking to provided recreational opportunities for the community and the community would not be able to use the courts during school hours defeating the purposed.

Eliminating the GFCC Tennis Court: Eliminating the GFCC tennis courts and converting them to designated pickleball courts has been proposed multiple times. However, this is not something we would consider as it would eliminate the only tennis court on the Gales Ferry side of town. Only \$23,000 to crack repair the GF tennis courts, the over 50,000 that was discussed included other projects that were not related to pickleball.

Asphalt vs Post Tension: I agree that going with post tension over asphalt is the smart decision. I am going to submit the difference in price as a possible use for additional ARPA funds if available. Otherwise, I am going to recommend to the Commission that we wait until July 2025 so we can secure the additional funds through the P&R Capital. It makes sense to spend a little more up front for a surface that's better for the residents(joints), would cost less to maintain over time, and has a significantly longer life span.

**Playgrounds:**

Thanks for the pictures, it helped me understand the types of play element's you were referring to. As we look to replace our playscapes we can certainly look to install similar elements. I see a lot of net climber's which are a newer playscape element and most of the new structures are themed to promote "imagination".

Sincerely,

*Scott Johnson Jr*

**Director**

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**From:** Andy Parad <[aparad@gmail.com](mailto:aparad@gmail.com)>

**Sent:** Thursday, November 7, 2024 10:10 PM

**To:** Scott Johnson <[Scott@ledyardrec.org](mailto:Scott@ledyardrec.org)>

**Cc:** Fred Allyn, III <[mayor@ledyardct.org](mailto:mayor@ledyardct.org)>; Naomi Rodriguez <[NaomiR@ledyardct.org](mailto:NaomiR@ledyardct.org)>

**Subject:** Pickleball/Playgrounds

Scott,

Thanks for having the foresight to gather community members for a meeting. This was very helpful.

I am going to put the bottom line up front for pickleball (and probably too many words below). After attending the meeting tonight, stopping by the tee-ball field on East drive on the way home, and having a chance to think about it, I am personally opposed to the idea of building 2 or 3 pickleball courts at that location. Here are the reasons:

1. The field is smaller than I remember. I am not sure there will be enough room left for tee-ball
2. Having coached on that field for about 5 years I will tell you
  - a. You need more room for tee-ball than you would think. My thought as I was sitting in the parking lot was that the only place pickleball would fit here was in the parking lot.
  - b. Often older siblings use the field for batting practice before/after practice and younger kids just run around
  - c. The mosquitos there were a problem. People will want to play in the early morning and late afternoon. The shade will be nice, as will the wind blocking of the trees. But the flying insects could be an issue that could minimize use
3. The location is remote. I know the neighbors want something there, but I'm not sure this is the best site to showcase Ledyard
4. Someone at the meeting brought up drainage and this effecting any slab put down. I don't remember puddles in the outfield being a problem, though we canceled anytime there was even the chance of a sprinkle. But it does seem like a low lying location
5. The Gales Ferry TeamReach group probably plays more than anyone and I think 4 to 12 people typically show up. Here is my experience playing at Old Saybrook where they built 3 very nice courts. Essentially we stopped playing there because we weren't guaranteed a court. Instead the few times I've made it that way, we now play at Trask which is a tennis court with lines and we bring a net. We have never tried to play at Stonington because of the same issue. It's only 2 courts. So really, in my opinion, building 2 or even 3 courts will mostly be for the most recreational people who play less and cause frustration amongst the regulars. Windham got it right with 6 courts. They have regular groups of 8 to 12 that come out and use 2 or 3 courts, but there are still courts for the rest of us who show up. I think the Gales Ferry group for the most part would still play at the tennis court is what will end up happening depending on group size/risk tolerance. The converse could also happen where the regulars dominate the courts and recreational players won't be able to play which is counter to what the goal should be as well.
6. Hearing the cost involved I think I understand why every town has done this wrong. They have a budget for funds to use, they use those funds...and don't build enough courts. Yes, you can add more



courts later, if needed. But if you know you will need more courts, this seems to be an expensive mistake

### Some suggestions

1. We think critically about the number of courts and where to put them. Don't build too few courts in the wrong place because of budgeting. Maybe 2 years of funds could be combined.
2. Talk with the Board of Ed and develop a plan for the town. I played with some UConn players a few weeks ago. Pickleball went from a club sport to a team sport in just the last few years. They will be playing at the national tournament, I think in Indiana, in the spring. A few years ago there were about 30 teams, 64 this year, and my guess would be over 100 in the spring. There is a very high likelihood this will turn into a fall sport at the high school level. To spend so much money and not take this into account would be a mistake. Maybe we still build courts in Gales Ferry even though we know the high school will need courts in the next 3 to 10 years. But there should be a plan and I didn't hear a plan tonight which for such a large expenditure and I was hoping for that.
3. I believe the difference between asphalt and post tension concrete was about \$20,000, or about 25% higher. I believe this is the company that has a 20 year warranty: [Connecticut Tennis & Basketball Court Construction | Classic Turf Company](#). Given that it's going to cost, I believe you said \$59,000 Scott, to resurface the tennis and basketball courts, the small upfront additional cost for post tension concrete from a reputable company seems like a no brainer.
4. Thinking outside the box, how much is the tennis court in Gales Ferry used for tennis, and is there another court elsewhere? Would a portion of the \$59,000 for resurfacing be better put toward pickleball (or playgrounds). If the tennis court were removed, would there be room for 4 pickleball courts (which I would probably consider the minimum) given the zoning and easement issues. Just considering all our options here
5. To go back to the high school, I would think there would be concerns about pickleball courts at the high school for public use. How do other schools deal with this? How does the high school deal with the tennis courts and are they used during school hours? I can see the argument of nuisance noise. But I can also see the benefit of having additional "good" people at the high school. The fear of school shootings is a reality. I can't see having a bunch of old people milling about being anything but a positive in this unfortunate equation.

As for playgrounds, I have much less experience there, but saw what playgrounds could be during our 7 months in New Zealand. They were community gathering places. Places for kids to get exercise. Places the kids actually wanted to go to. The most similar place around here is Poquonnock Plains. There are diverse attractions that aren't static like the typical playground. Personally, I divide playgrounds into those that are for imaginative play and those that are for adventure play. New Zealand I think has it right

that they have leaned into adventure play. As you pointed out, I'm not sure how much of this is "legal" here. I've created a drop box with some pictures:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eR8dBk2LiaeTAg3nBmiP67wqXGhUusV5?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eR8dBk2LiaeTAg3nBmiP67wqXGhUusV5?usp=drive_link)

The unnamed pictures are from Governors Island in NY. In short I would say let's not replace our 1970s playgrounds with 1970s playgrounds.

I hope this information helps.

Andy

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