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PICKLEBALL GETTING A HOME IN MIDDLETOWN

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (JULY 18, 2022) – Four new pickleball courts are expected to be built at Linden Park in the spring.

During a meeting Monday night in Town Hall, the Town Council agreed to move forward with the pickleball courts in the southwestern part of the park at 141 West Main Road. A new playground, 300-foot by 125-foot playing field and improved parking lot were also part of the proposal.

Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said it was important to develop the full proposal, not just the pickleball courts. That's because there are so many moving pieces in play at this point potentially impacting recreational fields across the community, including the former Starlight Drive-In property on Aquidneck Avenue and the tee ball fields to north of the Oliphant administration building.

Town Engineer Warren Hall said he would be working on the designs in coming days, with the project expected to go out to bid in three months. Hall said the goal would be to start construction in the spring.

The item was on the council agenda at the recommendation of Councilman Christopher Logan, who said it was time for local leaders to make a decision on the proposal given the continued amount of interest in having dedicated pickleball courts in Middletown.

"I think we need to be proactive," council President Paul M. Rodrigues said following a discussion about the proposal. "Shawn, I appreciate your vision."

"We'd be better off doing the whole project while things are disrupted," Councilwoman Barbara A. VonVillas said.

Revised plans for the pickleball courts at Linden Park site were posted earlier in the day at "Middletown Shares," which is available at <https://mdl.town/shares> online.

According to the newest designs from Hall, the restroom structure and associated utilities were removed along with conduit for lighting.

New sound abatement panels were added to the proposal to help cut down on the noise from the popular racquet sport. According to the designs, an eight-foot-tall chain link fence with sound panels would run the entire perimeter of the four pickleball courts.

Brown said each change was brought on as a result of feedback from pickleballers and neighbors to the park.

Currently, Middletown does not have any spaces dedicated solely to pickleball.

However, temporary courts inside the street hockey rink at Howland Park have become the most popular, well-used feature of the community space at the intersection of Mitchell's Lane, Third Beach Road and Wapping Road. It's not uncommon to see every parking spot filled with cars, but no children or parents using the playground or basketball court there.

According to town records, the first request for pickleball courts came to the council in early 2020. At the time, the focus was on the former Starlight Drive-In property off Aquidneck Avenue, land now repurposed for multi-use fields. Long-term, the property is envisioned as the home for a new middle-high school should regionalization with the City of Newport be approved.

Since then, pickleball has been broached at close to 10 council meetings, with the focus on reusing Linden Park emerging as the most viable option.

During the council's last full discussion about Linden Park in December 2021, there was wide support for bringing multiple pickleball courts to the site, something that was seen as beneficial to the west side park.

The website USA Pickleball credits the origins of the sport to then U.S. Congressman Joel Pritchard from Washington state and two others in 1965. Since then, the game has grown exponentially, boasting more than 50,000 registered members and close to 8,500 permanent locations across the country.

Document Link: <https://www.middletonri.com/DocumentCenter/View/5319/nycu-pickleball>

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