

Recreation Advisory Group (RAG)

Meeting Minutes

Date: September 15, 2025

Time: 8:00 AM

Location: City Hall / Hybrid (Microsoft Teams)

In attendance: Committee members Erin McDowell, Rohit Nanda, Michael Polacek, Stacey Clarke, and Tommy Johnson. Mike Pappas was absent. Recreation and Special Events Director Harold Layton, Assistant Recreation and Special Events Director Michelle Johnson, and Assistant City Manager Chris Hobby were also in attendance. Scott George (Design Consultant) joined via Teams.

1. Call to Order

- Pledge of Allegiance
 - Meeting called to order at 8:00 AM.
 - In attendance: Committee members (names redacted for brevity), City Staff, and Scott George (Design Consultant, via Teams).
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2. Topic: Pickleball Complex Final Design Review

2.1. Presentation by Scott George

- Scott joined virtually and presented an updated **site design layout** for the **18-court pickleball complex**.
- Updates were made based on feedback from the last RAG meeting, including:
 - Enhanced entryway concept for a "**destination feel**".
 - Modifications to court spacing, fencing, and gathering areas.

2.2. Design Highlights

- **18 Courts Total**, with flexibility to scale up/down as needed.
- **Championship Court** located in the **NW corner**, with immediate access to parking.
- Removal of **East-side parking lot**; **West-side lot** to remain.
- **Player/social areas** between courts for spectating, relaxing, and staging.
- Improved **sightlines** and **aesthetic integration** into the surrounding landscape.

2.3. Branding & Sponsorship Options

- Courts can be customized with:

- **Branded wind screens** for advertising/naming rights.
- **Custom painted logos** outside court surfaces (additional cost).
- These features support **potential revenue generation** via sponsorship.

3. Sound Mitigation Strategy

- A **question was raised** previously about noise impact.
- Updated design includes:
 - **8-foot sound barrier fencing** along the **East side** of the facility.
 - Reduces sound transmission by approximately **25 decibels**.
 - Example: If normal court sound is 60dB, only 35dB transmits through the fence.
 - Fence design uses **denser materials and wind-load rated posts** for durability and effectiveness.

4. Design Summary Recap

Feature	Notes
Court Count	18 (flexible based on budget and future growth)
Parking	Consolidated to West side; East lot removed for space optimization
Championship Court	NW Corner with premium access and viewing area
Entry Feature	Destination-style signage and landscaping planned
Fencing	6ft standard; 8ft sound fencing on East side
Shaded Areas	Added at West sidewalk and near courts for player comfort
Advertising Options	Wind screens, court naming rights, painted logos

5. Discussion

- RAG members expressed **general support** for the direction of the final design.
- Questions were asked regarding:
 - **Maintenance needs** of custom logos (Scott confirmed low upkeep).
 - **Cost differentials** between standard and sound-mitigating fencing.
 - Future **phasing** if funding is delayed (Scott confirmed modular court construction is possible).
- Recommendation made to ensure **accessibility** is factored into all sidewalks and entry areas.

4. Continued: Pickleball Complex Design Updates

4.1. Sound Mitigation and Fence Modifications

- East-side **sound panel fencing** confirmed at **8 feet** tall.
- **Double-knuckle fencing** will be used between courts to eliminate sharp edges and improve safety.
- **Optional 8-ft fencing** around the full perimeter is available as an **upgrade**.
 - Default remains 6-ft where appropriate.
 - 8-ft fencing helps contain balls and reduce noise impact.

4.2. Gates

- **Seven gates added** total for ball retrieval and improved flow:
 - Three gates along the **north side** for easy exit and ball retrieval.
 - One **dedicated gate** added at the **championship court** for direct parking access.

4.3. Site Features & Cost Breakdown

East Sidewalk & Steps

- Sidewalk connects from parking lot down to court level.
- Grade change requires **4 small steps** adjacent to an **existing shade structure**.
- All elements are **ADA-compliant** with alternative access ramps.

Entrance Plaza & Signage

- A new **20-foot-wide entrance plaza** included for aesthetics and visitor staging.
- **Signage and landscaping allowance: \$50,000.**
 - Final design TBD — may include monument sign, lighting, seasonal landscaping.

Benches

- **16 benches** proposed (one per court).
 - Durable materials for outdoor use included in the pricing model.
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4.4. Construction Budget Overview

Item	Cost Estimate
Base Complex	\$2.5 million
Optional Features (sound fencing, signage, benches, etc.)	+\$200,000
Total (with contingencies)	\$2.7 million

Contingency includes allowances for signage, landscaping, alternate fencing, and unforeseen site conditions.

4.5. Comments & Discussion

- **Committee Member (Name not recorded):**
 - Requested clarification on the **east stair location** and **existing structures**.
 - Scott confirmed stairs are adjacent to an **existing shade pavilion** near grade drop.
 - **General Committee Feedback:**
 - Positive reception to revisions.
 - Appreciation for **collaborative design process** and **citizen input**.
 - Project viewed as a **destination-level venue** that could generate:
 - Tourism
 - Tournament traffic
 - Sponsorship revenue
 - Community pride
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5. Motion

A motion was introduced to:

Support the final pickleball complex design as presented, including the current layout, optional sound fencing on the east side, entrance plaza, and budget estimate

of \$2.7 million, with recommendations for the City to move forward with next steps toward funding, bidding, and construction.

6.1. Community & Economic Impact

- Committee members and public attendees expressed **strong appreciation** for:
 - The **City's responsiveness** to community feedback.
 - The evolving **collaborative relationship** between the Pickleball Association, City staff, and RAG.
- A member emphasized the **economic potential** of the project to support **local restaurants and small businesses**, especially during tournaments and events.
- Multiple comments echoed that the complex could become an **“anchor facility”** that contributes to city tourism and visibility.

"This is the kind of project that brings people into the city—and keeps them coming back."

6.2. Advertising & Sponsorship Opportunities

- **Sound barrier windscreens** were praised for their **dual role**:
 - Reducing noise for nearby residents.
 - Providing **ad space** for sponsors and local businesses.
- Corporate logo integration was also discussed, with flexibility in placement (windscreens, fences, or painted court edges).
- Past **sponsorship successes** cited from:
 - Soccer fields
 - Special events
 - Monthly city partnerships (e.g., Kawasaki, Ortho clinics)

"There's a real opportunity here to recover some costs through strategic sponsorships."

6.3. Design Clarifications

- It was clarified that:
 - **Shade structures** were a **top priority** for most community respondents.
 - **Championship court** continues to be a highlight and a differentiator for tournament-level play.
 - Additional **gates** were added for better access, but some members questioned if **reducing the number of gates** (especially along the bottom/north side) might help reduce costs.
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6.4. Budget Review & Value Engineering

- **Concerns were raised** regarding being over the original budget estimate.
 - Original base: ~\$2.5M
 - New estimate (with options, contingency): ~\$2.7M
- The \$70,000 **owner's contingency** was emphasized as a **flexible reserve** — not necessarily to be spent, but available for:
 - Final landscaping
 - Signage
 - Additional refinement post-construction
- Multiple committee members agreed:

"We only get one shot — so let's do it right."

- However, others voiced interest in:
 - **Reevaluating smaller cost items**, such as number of gates or benches.
 - **Optionalizing shade structures** or confirming community willingness to fundraise or sponsor them directly.

7.1. Balancing Cost and Community Input

- It was acknowledged that **every added element** in the final design stemmed from **direct citizen feedback**, including:
 - Championship court
 - Additional gates for ball retrieval
 - Expanded shade and seating
 - Enhanced signage and entrance plaza

"Every item was requested by the public. So when we talk about scaling back, we need to acknowledge that those are things people asked for."

- Committee members voiced the **importance of being fiscally responsible**, especially given inflation and competing projects.

"It's our job to find that balance — to be respectful of the budget, but also honor the public's voice."

7.2. Suggested Approach: Good / Better / Best Options

Several members supported presenting **tiered recommendations** to City Council:

- **Option A (Base Plan)**
 - Includes 16 courts, parking, base fencing, and infrastructure.
 - ~ **\$1.3M**

- **Option B (Enhanced Plan – “Better”)**
 - Adds sound barriers, some shade, limited signage, and benches.
 - ~ **\$2.0M** (estimated)
- **Option C (Full Plan – “Best”)**
 - Includes championship court, full 20-ft entrance plaza, extended shade, sponsorship elements, and additional gates.
 - ~ **\$2.5M – \$2.7M**

“We did this with the splash pad project too — present three levels and let Council weigh in on the best value at this time.”

7.3. Budget Clarifications from City Staff

City staff clarified key funding elements:

- This project is funded via **SPLOST** (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax).
- The **pickleball project has its own budget** approved by voters.
- **Contingency funds** and **excess revenue** from higher-than-expected collections are available **without impacting other projects**.
- Any **unused funds** remain available for future projects within the same voter-approved SPLOST category.

“We’ve completed nearly every project voters approved — and we still have contingency funding available. This is a well-positioned project.”

7.4. Broader Vision and Master Plan Alignment

- Members emphasized that this project aligns with the broader **Southside Revitalization Plan**, including:
 - Previous investments in the splash pad
 - Playground upgrades
 - Future walking trails and community features

“We’re not just building courts — we’re building a regional destination and a community anchor for the Southside.”

7.5. Potential Areas for Cost Trimming (if needed)

The following were discussed as areas that **could be removed or delayed**, if Council sought to reduce scope:

- Championship Court (single-court estimate ~\$60K–\$70K)
- Entrance Plaza Signage Allowance (\$50K)
- Reducing gates from 7 to 4
- Scale back some fencing height or extent of sound barrier
- Reduce number of benches or shade structures

“If Council wants to scale back, we suggest these items are least critical to basic function and safety.”

8.1. Total Cost Overview

- The **full build-out** (with all alternates except bleachers) totals approximately **\$2.732 million**.
 - Items included in the alternate list accounted for approximately **\$885,000**.
 - Largest cost items debated:
 - **Championship Court:** ~\$75,000
 - **Dividing Fences:** ~\$130,000
 - **Shade Structures (16 canopies):** Significant portion of remaining alternate budget
 - **Entrance Monument Sign:** ~\$50,000
 - **Eight-foot perimeter fencing (vs. 6 ft):** ~\$35,000
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8.2. Motion Process Recommendation

A suggestion was made and accepted to proceed as follows:

- **Motion made** to recommend full project as presented.
 - If not unanimously approved, committee would:
 - Discuss and vote on which elements to remove
 - Make a new motion with revised scope
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8.3. Motion to Recommend Full Design

- **Motion Made:** To recommend the full project as presented (minus bleachers)
- **Seconded:** Yes
- **Vote Held:** Mixed — not unanimous

Because the vote was not unanimous, discussion resumed on potential modifications to meet budget concerns while preserving core value.

8.4. Elements Considered for Removal or Revision

Several ideas were debated to reduce cost while retaining quality:

- **Remove Championship Court**
 - Pros: Saves ~\$75K
 - Cons: Highly requested by public and association; may cause community pushback
- **Reduce Shade Structures**
 - Consider reducing from 16 to 4-6, especially in key locations (e.g., corners and gathering areas)
 - Acknowledged as important for Georgia heat and comfort during extended play
- **Remove/Reduce Dividing Fences**
 - Cost: ~\$130K
 - Mixed views: Enhances safety and ball containment, but seen as optional by some
- **Reduce Perimeter Fencing Height**
 - Option to go from 8 ft to standard 6 ft to save ~\$35K
- **Entrance Monument Signage**
 - Viewed as a “nice to have” but less critical than court-related infrastructure

“Some of this is about aesthetics — it’s important, but if it’s a choice between playability and polish, we need to prioritize function.”

8.5. Concerns and Big Picture Considerations

- Repeated emphasis that this is a **long-term capital project**, and certain elements (like shade and dividing fences) would be costly or logistically difficult to add later.
- Fear of **community backlash** if requested items (like championship court) are removed.
- Concern that cutting too much could result in a project perceived as “unfinished” or not matching expectations.

“If we cut too much now, it may cost more to add it back later — and the facility may lose the excitement and credibility we’ve worked to build.”

8.6. Clarifications on Process

- Council will have the **final say** on scope and budget.
- Advisory Committee's role is to recommend a configuration and explain rationale.
- Council **can accept, modify, or reject** the recommendation.
- If Council rejects the project as proposed, it may be **delayed by six months**.

“Our job is to make a responsible recommendation — Council’s job is to weigh that against funding and policy priorities.”

9.1 Key Points Raised

- **Dividing fences** were reaffirmed as **non-negotiable** due to **safety and liability concerns**, especially with increasing family and youth participation.
- **Shade structures** were deemed essential for year-round, all-day use, especially considering Georgia’s heat.
 - Alternative ideas discussed included:
 - Using **simpler shade structures**
 - Concentrating shade in **central “plaza” areas** rather than every court
 - Leveraging **existing bleachers** with **temporary canopies** for events

9.2 Championship Court Decision

- The **Championship Court** was ultimately **removed** from the current plan.
 - Primary reasons:
 - High cost (~\$75,000)
 - Can be **simulated** using existing bleachers and one of the wider standard courts for tournament use
 - Not deemed critical in **Phase 1**

9.3 Budget-Reducing Modifications Accepted

The committee agreed to **remove or modify** the following elements from the proposed scope in order to bring costs down while preserving core functionality:

Item Removed or Modified	Reason	Est. Savings
Championship Court (including special fencing, canopy, bleachers)	Not essential for initial phase	~\$75,000
Sound Panel Fence Upgrade	Limited benefit for cost	~\$35,000
Total Canopies Reduced (from 16 to ~6)	Retain shade in high-use areas only	~\$100,000+
Simpler Shade Options / Pavilion-based social space	Prioritize essential, communal shade over aesthetic enhancements	TBD

9.4 Final Budget Summary

- **Original total (with all alternates except bleachers): ~\$2.732 million**

- **Final recommended total (after modifications): \$2.417 million**
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10. Final Motion and Vote

Motion: To approve and recommend the pickleball project plan at a budget of **\$2.417 million**, reflecting:

- Removal of the Championship Court
 - Reduction in canopy count and complexity
 - Removal of sound panel fence upgrade
 - Retention of dividing fences and essential shade areas
 - No new bleachers included

 - **Motion Made By:** [Name not specified in transcript]
 - **Seconded By:** [Name not specified]
 - **Vote Result:** **Unanimous Approval**
 - All committee members agreed to present the plan as a **unified recommendation** to City Council
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11. Council Presentation Strategy

- The committee emphasized the importance of presenting a **single, unified recommendation** to Council.
 - The presentation will:
 - Highlight compromises made
 - Explain rationale for retained features (safety, community use, long-term viability)
 - Outline potential for **future enhancements** (e.g., Championship Court in Phase 2)
 - The Council retains the authority to:
 - Accept the recommendation
 - Adjust scope
 - Delay or reject the proposal (note: rejection triggers a **6-month delay**)
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20. Adjournment

- **Meeting Adjourned**
- **Next Steps:**
 - Recommendation to be submitted to Council by Thursday
 - Await Council response for funding decision and next phase planning

Kim Lindsey, Recording Secretary

Erin McDowell

Erin McDowell, Chairwoman