

City of Gearhart
MEMORANDUM

To: Gearhart Planning Commission

From: Garrett Phillips

Date: September 2nd, 2025

Subject: GZO Amendments to Minimize Pickleball Impacts in Residential Areas

Background

Multiple Gearhart residents have approached staff and the Planning Commission requesting regulation of outdoor pickleball play in residential areas to mitigate noise impacts, with some residents specifically requesting outright prohibition near homes. In response, staff and the Planning Commission reviewed information about pickleball noise characteristics, community examples, and regulatory options. In August, 2025 City Council requested that Planning Commission and staff work on proposing GZO amendments.

Pickleball Noise

Pickleball noise is particularly impactful because it combines high-frequency, repetitive, impulsive sounds that carry farther and are more disturbing than equivalent decibel levels of other noise sources. Scientific studies demonstrate pickle ball noise impacts at distances of at least three hundred feet¹. Measurements conducted near Gearhart's courts documented paddle strike noise at:

- 78 dBA at 30 feet, and 65–73 dBA at 100 feet, exceeding Gearhart's daytime residential limit of 55 dBA.
- Even at ~280 feet, paddle strikes measured around 40–43 dBA, which is within limits but still repetitive and potentially disruptive.

¹ **BAP Acoustics**. *Noise Planning Guideline for Outdoor Pickleball Courts*. Includes **50 dBA** target rationale, measured source levels, and a **setback table** by number of courts/ground type/barriers (ISO 9613-2 modeling). [Conejo Recreation and Park District](#)

Pickleball Sound Mitigation (PSM). *Manchester-by-the-Sea Pickleball Sound Mitigation Study* (measured/predicted **65–72 dB LAFmax** at 80–220 ft; barrier analyses). [manchester.ma.us](#)

Acoustic Associates (IL). *Willowbrook Pickleball Sound Study* (measured **55 dBA at 70 ft**, ANSI +5 dB impulsive adjustment, ISO-based modeling of multi-court use). [willowbrookil.org](#)

Acentech (MA). *Hingham Pickleball Courts – Environmental Noise Study* (ISO 9613-2 model; **106 dBA** source sound power; barrier performance and residual audibility). [hingham-ma.gov](#)

Nuisance Noise Ordinance

Gearhart's ordinance prohibits unreasonable noise and sets daytime residential limits at 55 dBA. Enforcement will not fully address the unique qualities of pickleball noise. Enforcement also requires real time documentation of noise levels, and consistent enforcement is not practical with the City's resources.

Zoning Ordinance

The zoning ordinance can be used to regulate pickleball as a use, such that a pickleball court, and pickleball play would be regulated in some areas. Following is a discussion of alternatives and subject matter to consider in GZO amendments.

Alternative Approach 1: Base Zone Prohibitions and Conditions Uses

Pickleball courts and play can be prohibited in some base zones. For example, Gearhart's residential base zones already have a section titled "Prohibited Uses," and pickleball courts and play could be added to the list of prohibited uses.

Pickleball courts and play greater than some distance from existing homes could be permitted as a conditional use in some base zones.

To illustrate this example further, consider the following examples:

- A. Prohibit pickleball courts and play in all residential zones.
- B. Prohibit pickleball courts and play within three hundred feet of a dwelling or residential zoned lot in all residential zones. Allow pickleball courts greater than three hundred feet from a dwelling or residential zoned lot as a conditional use in all residential zones. than three hundred feet of dwellings in the R-1, R-2, R-3, and RCPD zones. In all other base zones, list pickleball courts and play as a conditional use.

Alternative Approach 2: Article 6 Supplementary Provisions

Pickleball courts and play can be prohibited within a certain distance of all dwellings in the City by adding a section to GZO Article 6. Pending the attorney's input, the City may be able to specify pickleball as a conditional use in all zones by using Article 6 as well.

For example, Article 6 could state that in all base zones, pickleball courts and play are prohibited within three hundred feet of a dwelling or residential zoned lot, and may be permitted as a conditional use at greater distances.

Distances as Mitigation

The City's own data collection indicates pickleball produces over forty decibels about 280 feet from the City's public courts. Example cities below prohibit pickleball completely within 150 to 250 feet of dwellings or residential zoned lots. There is other published scientific evidence to

support prohibitions of pickleball completely within base zones or more broadly throughout the City within three hundred feet of dwellings and residential zoned lots, and to require a conditional use procedure at greater distances. Using distance as a factor in the City's standards is a manageable approach.

Other Mitigation

If the Planning Commission recommends that pickle ball be permitted in some circumstances through a conditional use permit, applicants would be free to propose a variety of mitigation methods to demonstrate consistency with the City's basic conditional use approval criteria. Staff do not recommend specifying mitigation standards other than distance, such as court construction methods, vegetative screening, use of special noise reducing racquets or balls etc.... Staff also do not recommend specifying noise analysis procedures or standards. In both cases, there is no evidence that very many people will propose pickleball courts, so staff would aim to keep the GZO amendments simple.

Examples from Other Cities

The following examples are from larger cities with more lengthy and complex zoning ordinances and more staff capacity than Gearhart has. They are provided as examples particularly in regards to distance based requirements, but the examples are much more complex than what staff would aim to do in Gearhart.

City	Hours of Play	Setbacks	Lot Size	Unique Elements	More Information
Centennial, CO	8 AM– 8 PM	Prohibited within 250 ft; permits required if 250–600 ft from residence	N/A	Noise limit ≤ 47 dB at property line	Ordinance
Park City, UT	8 AM– 8 PM	≥600 ft (can reduce to 150 ft with noise study)	≥1 acre	No artificial lighting; must comply with noise ordinance; CUP required	Decision Packet (See PDF page 310 and following pages)

Next Steps

Staff requests Planning Commission discuss the following questions and direct staff to prepare specific GZO amendments. Staff will then prepare the amendments, create a PAPA notice to DLCD, and schedule a hearing.

Conceptual Alternatives

- Prohibit pickleball in residential zones.
- Prohibit pickleball within some distance of dwellings and residential zoned lots, and do not regulate it at greater distances.
- Prohibit pickleball within some distance of dwellings and residential zoned lots, and allow it through a conditional use process at greater distances.

Format/Organization Alternatives

- Use base zone text amendments
- Use Article 6 text amendments

Next Steps Alternatives

- Provide more information
- Prepare amendments for further discussion as Old Business
- Prepare amendments and schedule a hearing