

Pickleball Memorandum

In summer 2025, in response to requests from some Gearhart residents, City Council and Planning Commission asked staff to draft zoning ordinance amendments to regulate pickleball in order to manage noise impacts on Gearhart residents. This direction was premised on staff's recommendation that regulating pickleball with the zoning ordinance would be more feasible than doing so with the existing nuisance noise ordinance, because enforcing the nuisance noise ordinance requires staff to perform a site visit to record pickleball noise volume.

Based on discussion with the Planning Commission, staff drafted amendments that would have prohibited pickleball throughout most of the city, and Planning Commission held a hearing to consider the amendments. There was significant testimony in outright opposition to the amendments, testimony suggesting that the proposed regulation should be more limited in scope, and testimony that raised technical concerns around how to define pickleball and how to enforce an ordinance that regulates it. Planning Commission requested a continuation of the hearing and redrafting of the proposed amendments to respond to testimony.

Staff then drafted new amendments that would make outdoor pickleball a conditional use throughout the City, and that would not regulate indoor pickleball. However, staff have not found a solution to define pickleball as a unique use such that enforcement will not rely on staff having to perform site visits to take audio/video recordings of people playing pickleball to demonstrate that a court is a pickleball court, or staff having to enter private property to take precise dimensional measurements of court striping. Without a solution to this issue, one of the main reasons for using the zoning ordinance instead of the nuisance ordinance to manage pickleball noise is no longer true. Staff also have concerns about our capacity to manage appeals if that issue is not resolved, and about our capacity to administer the amendments if they were adopted and withstood appeal.

Therefor at this time, staff are requesting Planning Commission's direction on whether to 1) bring draft amendments to a hearing as they are, 2) continue searching for best practices in how other communities administer and enforce zoning regulations of pickleball and report back on any promising approaches, or 3) stop the pickleball zoning amendment project with the expectation that staff will be responsive to requests to administer the nuisance noise ordinance with respect to pickleball. Staff's recommendation at this time is #3.