



SPOTLIGHT ON SPLOST; “WHAT IS PICKLEBALL AND WHY IS IT ON THE SPLOST?”

Pickleball is a popular paddle sport created for all ages and skill levels. The rules are simple and the game is easy for beginners to learn, but can develop into a quick, fast-paced, competitive game for experienced players. It is a fun sport that combines elements of tennis, badminton and ping-pong. It is played both indoors or outdoors on a badminton-sized court and a slightly modified tennis net (think of it as a smaller-sized tennis court). It is played with a paddle and a plastic ball, and has widespread appeal. The USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) indicates that there are now pickleball facilities in all fifty states. Many kids and teenagers play it in physical education classes in middle and high schools. Seniors enjoy the social aspects and the ability to stay active in towns and retirement communities. Tennis, racquetball and ping pong players love the competitive nature of the sport and regularly participate in competitive tournaments.

Pickleball competition, like other sports programs, has health and wellness (exercise, fitness, and well-being) benefits. It helps develop reflex and coordination skills, as well as quickness and agility. Playing pickleball also helps to improve muscular strength and endurance, and increases cardiovascular activity. The evolution of the sport speaks not only to its popularity, but to the benefits of being physically active.

The development of pickleball facilities in Spalding County will provide new and exciting health and fitness programming that will benefit the population and enhance the local economy. When approved, the County would build 18 dedicated pickleball courts (including fences, nets, and lighting), as well as ancillary facilities, such as shade structures, benches, bleachers, fountains, concession stand, parking, and so on). It is important to note that 18 pickleball courts will fit in the space of just six tennis courts.

This proposed SPLOST project is about seizing a window of opportunity –one that could be gone by this time next year, considering the growth of the sport and the rapidly expanding venues across the region and country - for Griffin-Spalding County to become a premier venue to hold local, statewide, regional (the southeast region of US and/or the eastern seaboard). Perhaps even national tournaments, that attract hundreds of players and their families who will stay in our motels, dine at our restaurants, and shop in our stores for 2-3 days at a time, will become an economic reality for Griffin-Spalding County.

Rapid Growth of Sport

Pickleball was created during the summer of 1965 on Bainbridge Island - a short ferry ride from Seattle, Washington. The original purpose of the game was to provide a sport for the entire family, according to co-inventors U.S. Congressman Joel Pritchard, William Bell, and Barney McCallum. Pickles was the family dog that would chase after the errant balls and then hide in the bushes, thus “Pickle's ball”, which was later shortened to the namesake of Pickleball.

Now, the USAPA estimates there are at least 10,000 pickleball courts in North America, with an average of 62 new places to play pickleball debuting, across the U.S. and Canada, each month! According to the USAPA, there are currently about 3,000 places to play pickleball in the country and 45 pickleball venues in Georgia. Since 2010, the number of pickleball facilities has increased 62 percent and the USA Pickleball Association's membership has risen 64 percent. It is now estimated that 2.5 million people currently play pickleball, with that number projected to hit 8 million by 2018.

The Atlantic-South Regional Tournament (part of the USAPA structure, which includes the states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina and North Carolina) had their third event in 2015. The Georgia Golden Olympics introduced pickleball in 2013, the Georgia State Games debuted the sport in 2015, and Spalding County unveiled pickleball for the first time ever in 2015.

Many of the nation's largest homebuilders are now providing pickleball courts in their developments. Pickleball is growing throughout the country, in the southeast region of the United States, and in Georgia.



Pickleball tournaments will generate visitors, tourism and revenue – all good for our local businesses, governance and citizenry. Tournaments will enhance/improve our local economy by providing additional income for merchants, restaurants, hotels, and revenue/tax income for Spalding County. Pickleball programming will improve the quality of life in Spalding County, providing health, exercise, fitness, and well-being, in a popular sports program for the county population. Pickleball is a multi-generational (and family fun) sport that will appeal to a diverse population and will provide positive activity for Spalding County youth.

Pickleball will be low cost, as well, with nominal annual operating and maintenance costs of approximately \$3,400 per year, and nominal equipment costs (items replaced at three year intervals).

A single pickleball tournament can have a significant impact on the local economy: 200 participants (with a \$25 entry fee) can generate gross tournament proceeds of \$5,000; 200 tournament visitors can spend at least \$52,000 at hotels and restaurants during a two-night stay; plus, additional retail store spending, gas purchases, and consumption taxes add to the economics of the sport, as well.

While this project can be a significant improvement to our parks and recreation landscape, it is also important to remember that it comprises less than 2% of the \$50.4 million projected for SPLOST collections over 6 years. Yet, it's the only project on the list that has the potential to bring hundreds of visitors to our community several times each year, and with almost no ongoing maintenance and operational cost for the facility after construction -- a most important criteria for any SPLOST project.

Also, keep in mind that approximately thirty percent (30%) of sales tax revenue in the county comes from sales of goods and services to persons and businesses who do not reside in the county. So, a successful SPLOST will ensure that users and patrons outside the Spalding County taxpayer base will help to share the burden of project costs.

The proposed facility will, in essence, put Spalding County on the map as the premier location for the sport of pickleball in Georgia. Pickleball is an inclusive, accessible, non-elitist sport that transcends social and economic barriers. The time is right, the benefits of this game are irrefutable (both physical and economical), and the opportunity is now for Spalding County to be a frontrunner in the sport -- there is no other such dedicated pickleball facility in our state.