

Tucson Area Pickleball (TAP) Position Statement on Udall Park

Tucson Area Pickleball's board (TAP) respectfully submits the following concerns regarding the proposed implementation of user fees and third-party management at the Udall Park pickleball courts.

Cost Recovery and Equity of Access

The City has indicated a need to recover costs associated with the Udall facility; however, current operational costs specific to the pickleball courts are minimal. There is no dedicated on-site staffing, and maintenance is largely limited to shared amenities such as restrooms, which serve all park users. Numerous other recreational park amenities including the dog park, splash pad, bocce courts, walking paths, fields, and basketball courts are provided free of charge. The City does charge fees for competition – pickleball, soccer, softball, etc. But no outdoor recreational activity (that we are aware of) is charged for recreational play. Imposing fees solely on recreational pickleball users raises significant concerns regarding fairness and equitable access to public recreational resources. Charging for pickleball alone does not support TPRD's mission statement: ***...Building a healthy, inclusive, and connected community through safe parks, fun programs, and enriching experiences for residents of all ages.***

Community and Public Health Impact

The Udall pickleball courts serve as an important community hub, particularly for seniors, families, and youth. Participation supports physical health, mental well-being, and social connection. The introduction of daily fees will create financial barriers, disproportionately impacting those on fixed or limited incomes. Many families who currently utilize the facility together may no longer be able to afford participation, thereby diminishing access to a valuable public resource.

Concerns Regarding Proposed Management Model

TAP has concerns regarding the proposed third-party management structure. The current operator of the City's tennis/pickleball facilities has demonstrated inconsistent maintenance and operational practices, including deteriorating court conditions, inadequate lighting, prolonged use of temporary equipment (nets at Reffkin) and inconsistent fee collection procedures (Himmel). These issues raise questions about the effectiveness and accountability of the proposed management approach.

TAP Investment and Partnership Efforts

TAP has contributed approximately \$55,000 in improvements to the Udall facility, including shade structures, seating, a dozen nets, and a water station. TAP has also expressed willingness to fund court resurfacing and contribute to future maintenance. These efforts were undertaken in good faith as part of a collaborative partnership with

the City. TAP is concerned that the current proposal was advanced without prior consultation or any effort to find a solution that works for all parties.

Economic and Usage Considerations

Implementation of user fees and timed court usage is likely to significantly reduce participation at Udall, as evidenced by decreased utilization at other fee-based facilities such as Kino Sports Complex. There are many other pay-to play options for players in Tucson. Reduced usage would drastically undermine projected revenue estimates, which appear to assume near-constant court occupancy. The courts are generally full for about 6 hours per day in winter and less in the summer. Additionally, the City or its contractor would incur new costs related to access control infrastructure, staffing, maintenance, and necessary lighting upgrades to meet current safety standards. Finally, the proposal to charge for each 1.5 hours of play will destroy the drop-in feature of Udall, where players can come at any time, put their paddle on the rack, and find a game. This drop-in feature with extended play is the heart of the Udall program.

Regional Comparisons and Community Viability

Many municipalities throughout Arizona, including Phoenix, Gilbert, Tempe, and Oro Valley, offer free public pickleball facilities, often with a greater number of courts that support robust community engagement. The City's proposal provides only two, smaller, venues with 3 courts. This will not replicate the scale or community environment currently present at Udall. This loss places Tucson at a competitive disadvantage regionally and will decrease the economic boost Tucson receives from winter visitors who come here specifically to play pickleball at Udall.

Conclusion and Recommendation

TAP respectfully urges the City of Tucson and the Parks & Recreation Department to reconsider the proposed fee and management structure and to engage in collaborative dialogue with TAP. TAP remains willing to support ongoing maintenance and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the facility, provided that public access remains free. We are willing to listen to what Parks & Recreation's needs and hopes are for this amenity.

Should the City of Tucson proceed with this third-party management and fee proposal's implementation, TAP will be compelled to withdraw its financial support for the Udall pickleball courts.

Tucson Area Pickleball Inc. Board of Directors