

Pickleball

September 2024

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. History of Pickleball Organization and Survey Summary..... | 1 |
| 2. Selected Survey Results..... | 2 |
| 3. Data on Growth of Pickleball Nationally..... | 8 |
| 4. Dedicated Court Study | 9 |
| 5. Northfield Parks - Activities Analysis | 11 |
| 6. Health Benefits of Pickleball for Senior..... | 12 |
| 7. Why Sechler Park..... | 14 |
| 8. Conclusion..... | 15 |

History of Organization and Survey Summary

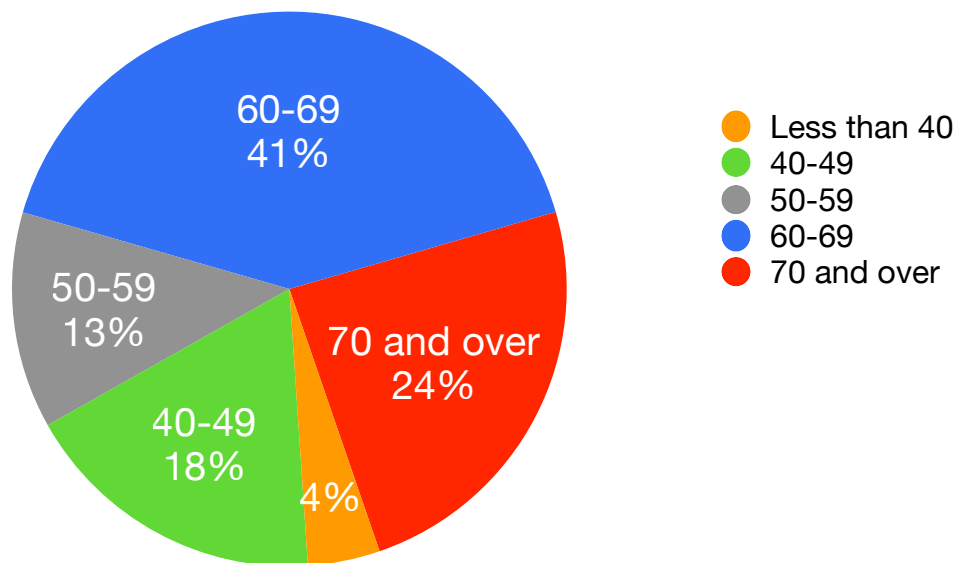
In April of 2024 a small group of pickleball players met for the first time to talk about whether organizing pickleball players in Northfield was an idea worth pursuing. At the conclusion of that meeting this steering committee decided to proceed. Time was spent collecting emails, making a survey and sending it to 105 pickleball players. Since the survey showed that respondents were interested in organizing, volunteers were sought to form a committee to explore the types of organizations available and recommend one to the group at large. That committee has met three times and is working its way to a conclusion. The original steering committee met with Mr. Fredrick's in June to share the survey results and recommend improvements to the Riverside Park courts. Ray Gainey and Bill Seeberg represented the organization at a meeting with Mr. Fredricks and consultants from Bolton & Menk in early August to advocate for additional courts to be added as part of the Long-Range Sechler Park Plan.

Currently we represent 173 Northfield pickleball players of which 83 are males and 90 are females. From our survey of the initial 105 players we learned that 65% are 60 and older and 78% are 50 and older. 82% play at least once a week and 67% play several times a week. 83% of surveyed players play at Riverside Park with the most popular times being between 7 and 11 in the morning and 3 and 7 in the afternoon/evenings. The players surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that the Riverside courts could be improved, more courts are needed in town, and more opportunities for lessons, leagues and tournaments are desired. Lastly, players identified Sechler Park as the most favored location for new courts after Riverside Park.

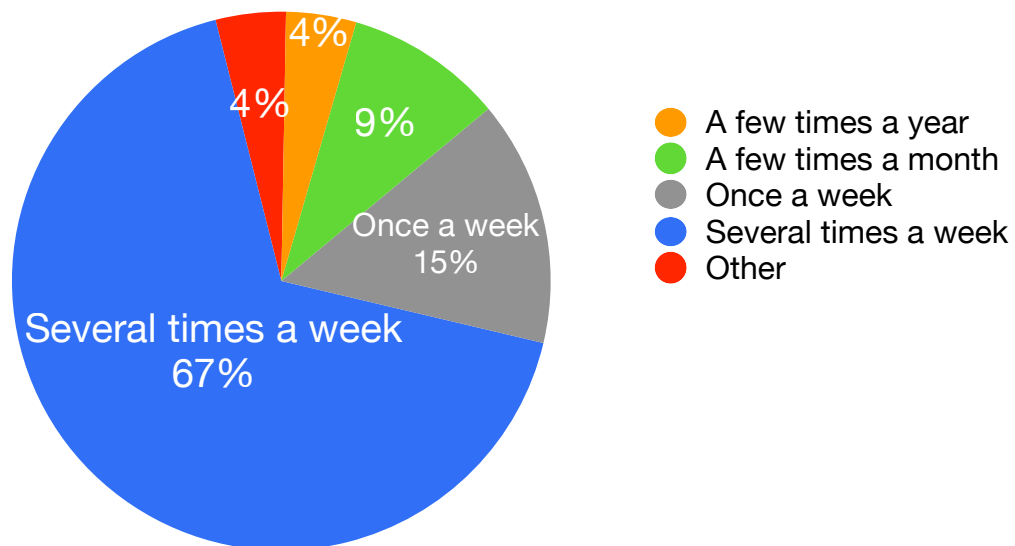
2024 Northfield Pickleball Survey

In May of 2024, approximately 105 pickleball players were asked to complete a 13 question survey to determine five things: the demographic characteristics of Northfield pickleball players, what their playing habits were, whether they were interested in forming an organization, what that organization should promote and how pickleball could be improved in Northfield. These results of the 95 people who completed the survey have been condensed for presentation to the Sechler Park Long-Range Planning committee and the Northfield Park Board.

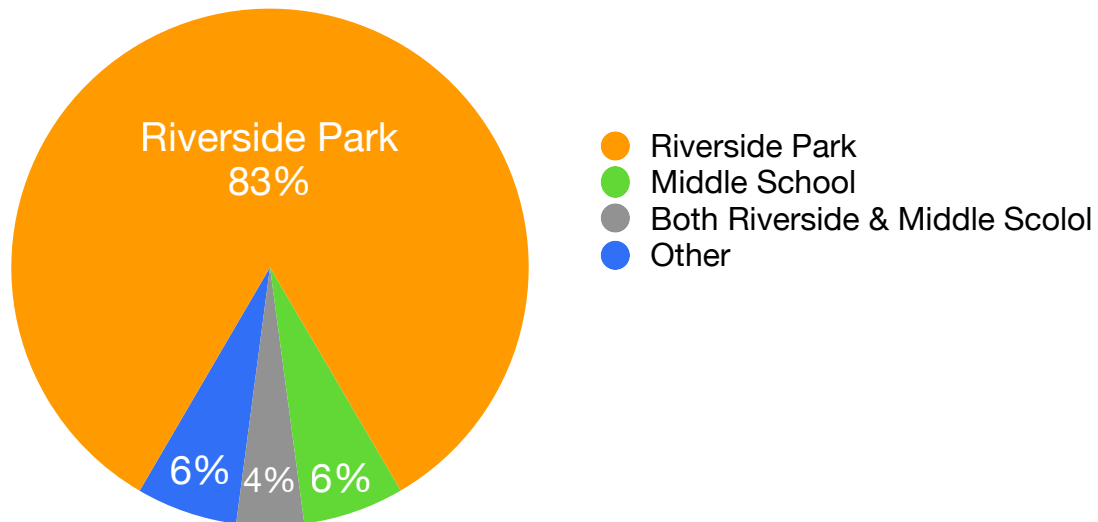
1. How old are you?



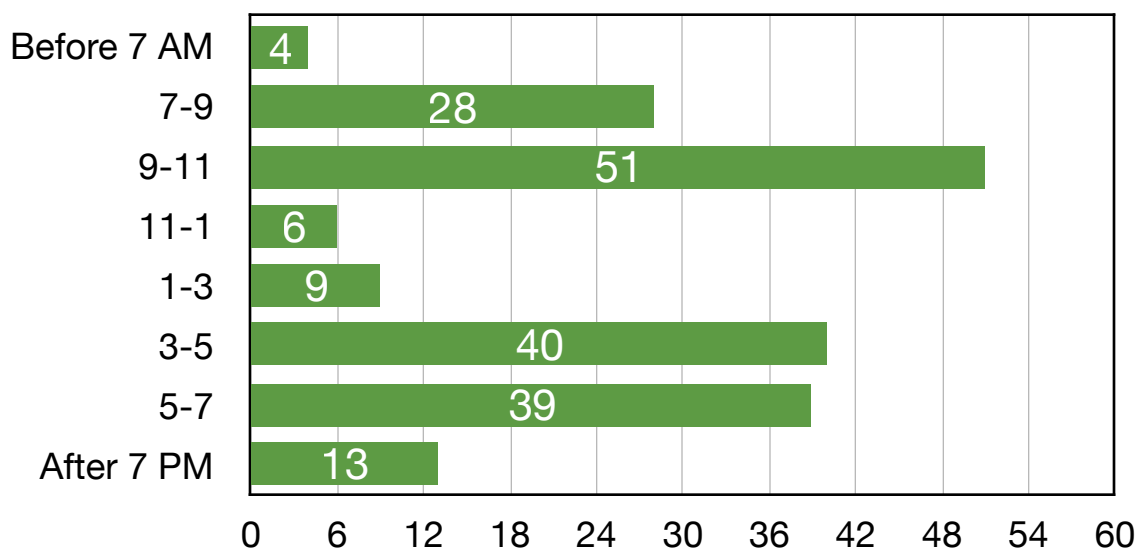
3. During the outdoor season, how often do you play?



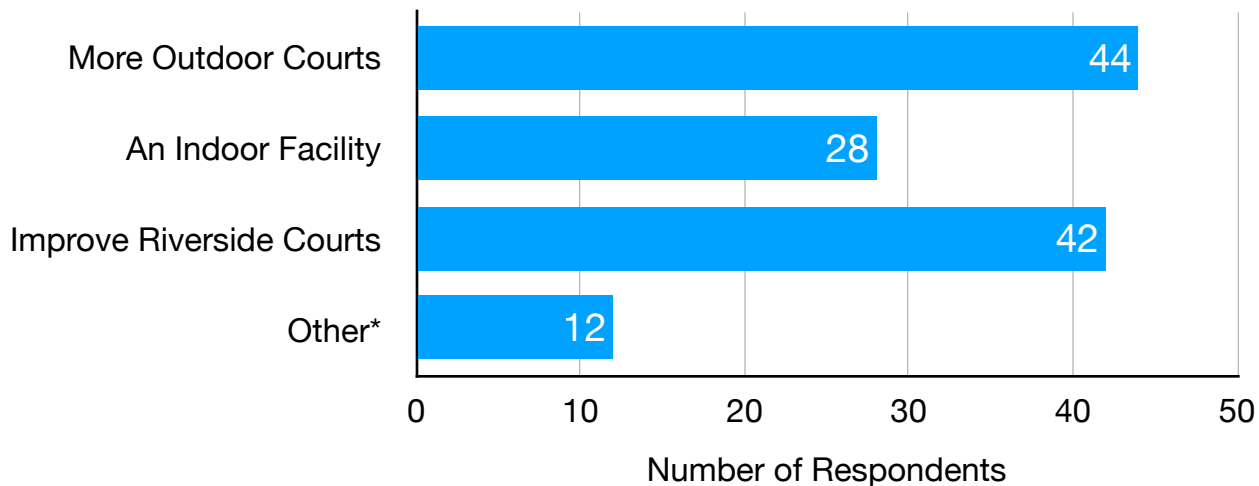
4. During the outdoor season, where do you usually play?



5. When using the Riverside Park courts, when do you generally play?
Check all that apply.



11. If you could wave a magic wand and improve one or two things about pickleball in Northfield, what would you improve?

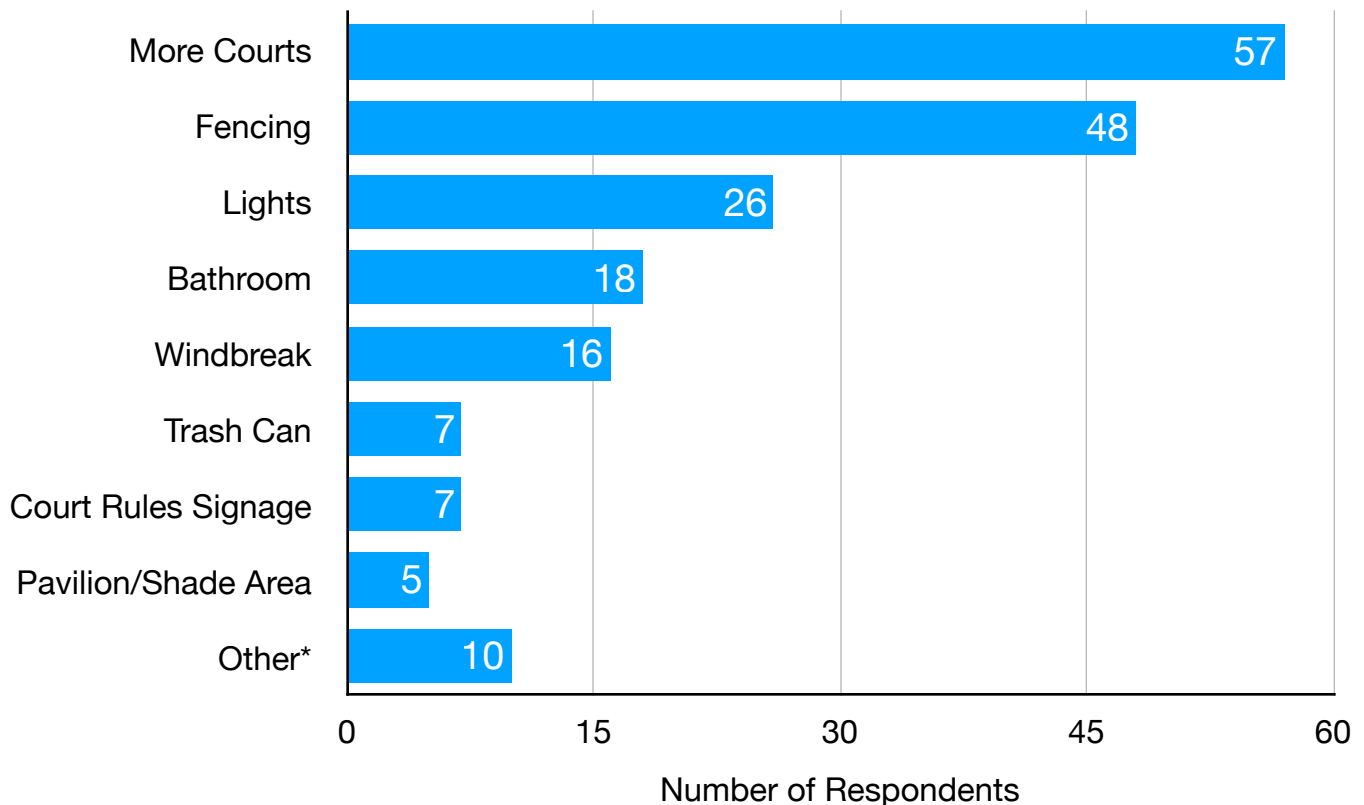


Summary

If pickleballers could wave a magic wand, they would:

- **wish for more outdoor courts**
- *wish for a dedicated indoor court facility for year round play*
- *wish for improvements to the existing courts at Riverside Park including:*
 - *additional fencing*
 - *lighting*
 - *windbreaks - either windscreens, trees or a combination*
 - *signage for courts rules particularly as it relates to sharing the courts when full*
 - *a trash can*
 - *covered area/pavilion with seating, bathroom, drinking fountain and a bulletin board*

12. If you didn't address this in the previous question, please tell us what improvements you'd like to see at the current outdoor courts at Riverside Park.



Summary:

*When asked about improvements to the current courts at Riverside Park, **survey respondents consistently pointed to the need for additional courts to meet the growing demands of the sport**, as well as, additional fencing around the current courts, lighting for evening play, windbreaks to improve playability, a bathroom, a garbage can and a covered area/pavilion with seating, court rules' signage, a drinking fountain and a bulletin board.*

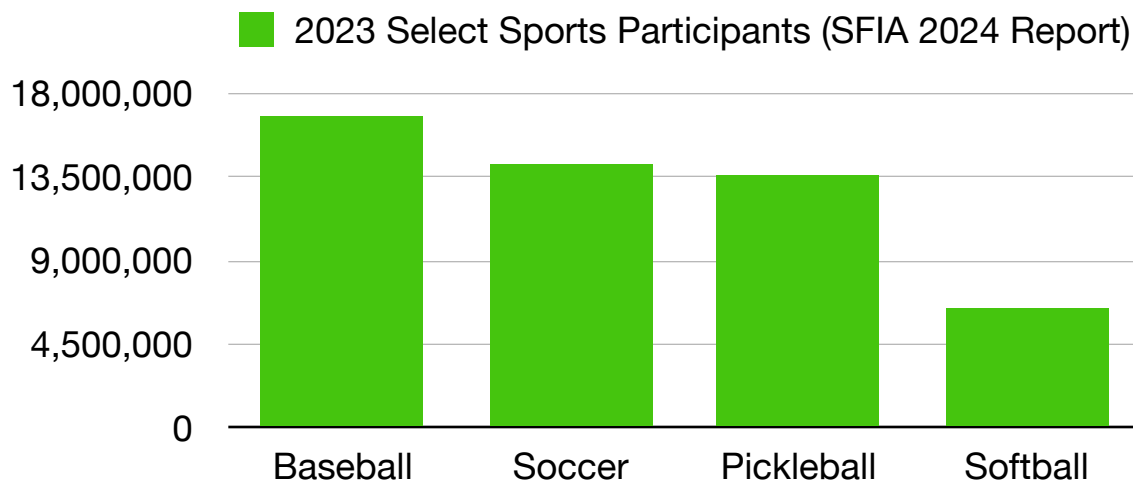
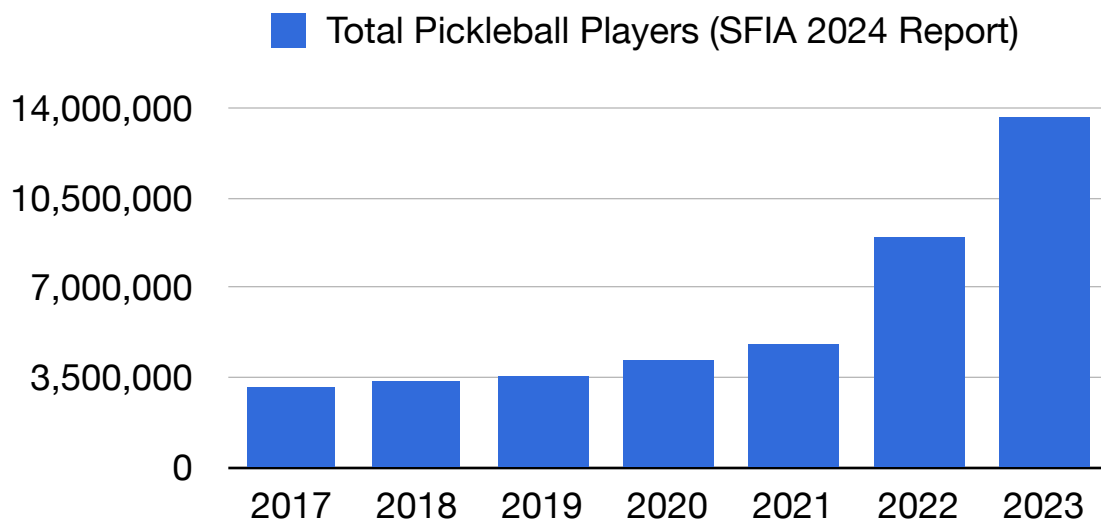
13. If the city were to build additional outdoor courts, do you have any thoughts about which park would be a good location?

95 Responents gave 22 different answers. Below is a list of any park that got three or more votes.

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Riverside Park</i> | <i>23</i> |
| <i>Sechler Park</i> | <i>12</i> |
| <i>Tyler Park</i> | <i>5</i> |
| <i>Memorial Park</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Way Park</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>By soccer fields</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Westside of town</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Washington Park</i> | <i>3</i> |
| <i>Babcock Park</i> | <i>3</i> |

Pickleball - National Participation Data

According to the 2024 Topline Participation Report from the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in America (out of 124 tracked) for the third year in a row, having grown 51.8% from 2022 to 2023 and an incredible 223.5% in three years. They report that 13.6 million Americans played pickleball last year, putting pickleball in the same league as baseball (16.7 million) and outdoor soccer (14.1 million). More significant for those in the pickleball equipment and apparel space as well as municipalities across the US considering building dedicated pickleball courts, is that there was a 111% increase in “core” participants, meaning those who take part frequently enough to reflect a passion for the sport. According to SFIA’s CEO, Tom Cove, this unprecedented “core” increase is predictive of the staying power of pickleball’s popularity.



Study of Minnesota Cities with Dedicated Pickleball Courts*

Second Edition, May 2024

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to compare Northfield to like-sized Minnesota cities in terms of access to dedicated outdoor pickleball courts.

Methodology - The study began by identifying Minnesota cities with populations between 10,000 and 30,000. The online database <https://www.minnesota-demographics.com/cities_by_population> was used to determine those cities. The internet was then searched to try to determine the number of dedicated outdoor pickleball courts in each community. This was not always easy as there appears to be no definitive clearinghouse for this kind of information. Multiple websites including city government sites were searched. Whenever possible the information was verified by studying google map's satellite imagery. After determining population and dedicated court numbers, the number of courts per 10,000 citizens was calculated. Most numbers are rounded.

Conclusions: 71 communities in Minnesota with populations between 10,000 and 30,000 were identified. Of those 71 cities, 60 (85%) have built dedicated pickleball courts to meet the growing demands of the sport. Northfield's rank of 50 out of the 60 cities places them in the lowest quartile. With four dedicated courts for its population of 21,000, it has approximately 1.9 courts for every 10,000 citizens. Contrast this with the average of the cities in the upper quartile. Those 15 towns have an average of 5.99 courts for every 10,000 citizens. The average for all 60 cities is 3.61 courts per 10,000 citizens. If Northfield were to meet this average it would need to have 7.58 dedicated outdoor courts.

Addendum: Of the 11 cities with populations between 10,00 and 30,000 that don't currently have dedicated pickleball courts, two are in the process of soliciting bids for new courts, and six of the 11 have community rec. centers with year round indoor pickleball options. Since this study was first conducted in May of 2023 five more cities between 10 and 30k have built their first dedicated courts. In that same time span 31 additional courts were built, increasing the total number of courts from 324 to 355. Since cities are only adding courts and not eliminating existing courts, the number of courts per 10k is increasing from year to year. Last year the average was 3.45 and this year it is 3.61 courts per 10,000. This trend is likely to continue in the future.

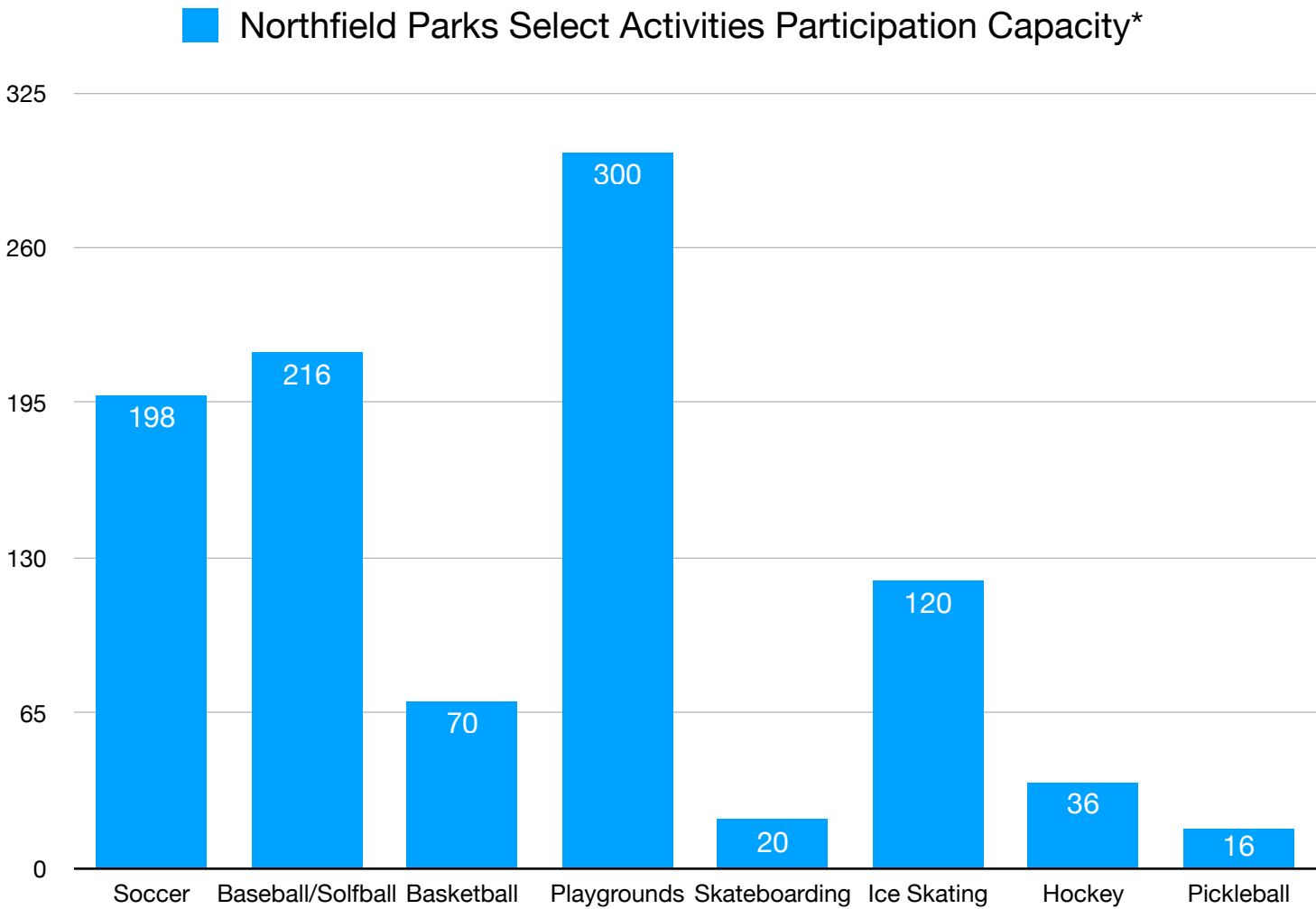
* This informal study was conducted in May of 2024 by Bill Seeberg. Although every attempt was made to be 100% accurate, because the information was hard to discover and verify and is now several months old, it would not be surprising if a few inaccuracies are present. Seeberg will be happy to correct any inaccuracies that are discovered.

Rank of 60 Cities with Dedicated Courts

| Rank | City | Population (thousands) | Dedicated Outdoor Courts | Courts per 10,000 |
|------|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Detroit Lakes | 10 | 9 | 9 |
| 2 | Grand Rapids | 11.3 | 10 | 8.85 |
| 3 | Cambridge | 10.5 | 8 | 7.62 |
| 4 | Stillwater | 19.2 | 14 | 7.29 |
| 5 | Victoria | 11.5 | 8 | 6.96 |
| 6 | Cloquet | 12.6 | 8 | 6.35 |
| 7 | Anoka | 18 | 11 | 6.11 |
| 8 | Alexandria | 15 | 8 | 5.33 |
| 9 | Mendota Heights | 11.6 | 6 | 5.17 |
| 10 | St. Peter | 12.3 | 6 | 4.88 |
| 11 | Vadnals Heights | 12.6 | 6 | 4.76 |
| 12 | Rogers | 13.6 | 6 | 4.41 |
| 13 | Lake Elmo | 13.8 | 6 | 4.35 |
| 14 | Sauk Rapids | 13.8 | 6 | 4.35 |
| 15 | Rosemount | 27.6 | 12 | 4.35 |
| 16 | New Ulm | 13.9 | 6 | 4.32 |
| 17 | Champlin | 22.9 | 9 | 3.93 |
| 18 | Dayton | 10.2 | 4 | 3.92 |
| 19 | Little Canada | 10.3 | 4 | 3.88 |
| 20 | New Hope | 20.7 | 8 | 3.86 |
| 21 | Chanhausen | 25.9 | 10 | 3.86 |
| 22 | Bemidji | 15.7 | 6 | 3.82 |
| 23 | Hibbing | 16 | 6 | 3.75 |
| 24 | Crystal | 21.9 | 8 | 3.65 |
| 25 | Hastings | 22.1 | 8 | 3.62 |
| 26 | Red Wing | 16.8 | 6 | 3.57 |
| 27 | Sartell | 19.7 | 7 | 3.55 |
| 28 | Fergus Falls | 11.4 | 4 coming by August | 3.51 |
| 29 | Brainerd | 14.6 | 5 | 3.42 |
| 30 | North Branch | 11.8 | 4 approved summer of '24 | 3.39 |
| 31 | Forest Lake | 20.7 | 7 | 3.38 |
| 32 | Albert Lea | 18.3 | 6 | 3.28 |
| 33 | Chaska | 29 | 9 | 3.10 |
| 34 | Shoreview | 26.4 | 8 | 3.03 |
| 35 | Worthington | 13.6 | 4 | 2.94 |
| 36 | Elk River | 27.3 | 8 | 2.93 |
| 37 | Willmar | 21.3 | 6 | 2.87 |
| 38 | St. Michael | 21 | 6 | 2.86 |
| 39 | Prior Lake | 28 | 8 | 2.86 |
| 40 | Golden Valley | 21.2 | 6 | 2.83 |
| 41 | W. St. Paul | 21.7 | 6 | 2.76 |
| 42 | Hopkins | 18.6 | 5 | 2.69 |
| 43 | Lino Lakes | 22.4 | 6 | 2.68 |
| 44 | Farmington | 23.9 | 6 | 2.51 |
| 45 | Buffalo | 16.5 | 4 | 2.42 |
| 46 | Ham Lake | 16.7 | 4 | 2.40 |
| 47 | Owatonna | 26.5 | 6 | 2.26 |
| 48 | Ramsey | 28.6 | 6 | 2.10 |
| 49 | Fairmont | 10.2 | 2 | 1.96 |
| 50 | Northfield | 21 | 4 | 1.90 |
| 51 | Ostego | 23.2 | 4 | 1.72 |
| 52 | East Bethel | 12.2 | 2 | 1.64 |
| 53 | Faribault | 24.6 | 4 | 1.63 |
| 54 | Mounds View | 12.8 | 2 | 1.56 |
| 55 | Winona | 26 | 4 | 1.54 |
| 56 | Waconia | 13.7 | 2 | 1.46 |
| 57 | Oakdale | 28.2 | 4 | 1.42 |
| 58 | Hugo | 16.5 | 2 | 1.21 |
| 59 | S. St. Paul | 20.7 | 2 | 0.97 |
| 60 | Columbia Heights | 22.3 | 1 | 0.45 |
| | AVERAGE | | | 3.61 |

Northfield Park Activities

Northfield Parks offer a number of activities for people to enjoy. Soccer, baseball, softball, skateboarding, ice skating, hockey, pickleball, playground fun and basketball are eight of the most prominent. It is our contention that most of these activities cater to the younger part of Northfield’s population and that activities for those over 50 are lacking. The graph below shows the number of people who could enjoy each park activity at one time. Given the choice of the eight graphed activities, its our belief that seniors and pre-seniors (people 50 and older) would overwhelmingly choose pickleball and that very few would choose one of the other seven activities. If that’s true, just 16 of the over-50 crowd could enjoy their preferred park activity while 960 younger folks were enjoying theirs. This 16 out of 976 participation rate represents just 1.6% of the parks’ selected activity capacity. When you consider that 30% of Northfield’s population falls in the 50-and-over crowd, this hardly seems fair. We think it’s clear that our parks need more activities geared toward people 50 and over.



* It should be noted that although some of these same activities are also offered by Northfield’s schools, school facilities are not part of this analysis. Also because we did not know enough to estimate participation capacity at the Northfield pool, we did not include swimming in our analysis.

Health Benefits of Pickleball for Seniors

Balance and Agility

Pickleball involves quick movements, changes in direction and rapid reflexes. These actions challenge balance and agility, which are essential for preventing falls and maintaining mobility. Regular play can improve seniors' proprioception (awareness of body position) and coordination, reducing the risk of falls and enhancing overall stability.

Cardiovascular Health

Pickleball involves continuous movement, including brisk walking, jogging and quick lateral movements. These activities increase heart rate, improve blood circulation and strengthen the cardiovascular system. Regular pickleball play can help seniors maintain a healthy heart and reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Cognitive Function

Physical activities that require mental engagement, such as pickleball, have been shown to have positive effects on cognitive function. The strategic thinking, decision-making and quick reactions involved in pickleball stimulate the brain and enhance mental acuity. Regular participation in the game can help improve memory, concentration and overall cognitive abilities.

Joint Health and Flexibility

The low-impact nature of pickleball is particularly beneficial for seniors with joint issues, such as arthritis. Compared to higher-impact sports like tennis, pickleball puts less stress on the joints, making it easier for seniors to participate without exacerbating existing joint pain. The dynamic movements in pickleball also contribute to joint flexibility and range of motion, helping seniors maintain joint health and reduce stiffness.

Mood and Mental Well-Being

Participating in any form of exercise releases endorphins, the body's natural mood-boosting chemicals. Pickleball's combination of physical activity, social interaction and enjoyment can have a positive impact on seniors' mental well-being. It can help reduce stress, anxiety and symptoms of depression, promoting a sense of happiness and overall psychological health.

Muscular Strength and Endurance

Playing pickleball requires using various muscle groups, including those in the legs, arms, shoulders and core. The repetitive nature of swinging the paddle and moving around the court helps build muscular strength and endurance. Seniors who regularly play pickleball can experience improved overall muscle tone and strength, enhancing their ability to perform daily activities with ease.

Social Engagement

Loneliness and isolation are common challenges among seniors. Pickleball provides an excellent avenue for social interaction and building connections with others. Playing with friends, joining local pickleball clubs, or participating in organized tournaments can foster a sense of community, belonging and social support, contributing to improved mental and emotional well-being.

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Why Sechler Park?

Sechler Park matches most of our criteria for an ideal pickleball court location:

1. Locate courts away from residential neighborhoods to mitigate noise and lighting issues
2. Locate near parking or where there's room to add parking
3. Locate in park accessible by car and near bike path
4. Locate in a park large enough for future expansion
5. Locate on site that allows for courts to be built on north-south axis
6. Locate on site with infrastructure for bathroom and court lighting
7. Locate on well draining, level lowlands rather than uplands to mitigate wind issues
8. Locate near natural windbreaks particularly to the S, SE, N and NW, which are the prevailing wind directions in the spring, summer and fall.

Conclusion

Northfield pickleball players are enormously grateful for the four courts the city has provided at Riverside Park. Those courts are well used and have allowed the pickleball community to grow and thrive. In a survey that included 95 Northfield pickleball players conducted in May of 2024, players expressed a desire for Northfield to build additional courts and to improve the Riverside Park courts by adding proper pickleball fencing.

Whether one looks at the anecdotal observations of local players or at national statistics published by organizations like the Sports and Fitness Industry Association, it seems clear that pickleball participation is growing both here in Northfield and across the nation. With this growth comes the need for cities to build new dedicated courts to meet the increasing demand. The Study of Minnesota Cities with Dedicated Pickleball Courts conducted by Bill Seeberg suggests that Northfield ranks near the bottom when compared to other similarly sized cities in term of the number of dedicated pickleball courts per 10,000 citizens. A look at Northfield park activities points to a lack of activities geared toward people over 50. When one considers the many well-documented health benefits of pickleball for senior citizens, the lack of park activities for that age group, the growth of the game both nationally and locally, and the number of courts in Northfield when compared to other like-sized cities it seems logical to build more courts in our city parks.