

RESPONSE TO RFEI FOR WIXON SCHOOL DISPOSITION

I am writing to urge the consideration of pickleball at the Wixon School property as decisions are made about how to best utilize this valuable land now that the school has moved out.

Friends of Dennis Pickleball (FODP) is an organization of people who have registered with the Town of Dennis to play pickleball at the Wixon Courts at 145 Old Chatham Road, adjacent to Wixon School. As of May 30, 2023, there are 865 members, 69% of whom are Dennis residents. Residents pay \$50 per season; non-residents pay \$70.

During the official pickleball season (in 2023, May 15 through October 15), people must be registered players to participate in the organized play (9 am - 12 noon in May, June, September and October; 8 - 11 am in July and August; 5 - 7 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays). Dennis residents are accepted into the program regardless of when they register or how many people are already in the program. There is currently a waiting list of 93 non-residents.

The Wixon pickleball courts are used year-round. In mid-winter, multiple courts will be in use if the courts are dry and the temperature is above 35 F. Some winter mornings, all 14 courts re full. In the summer, demand is immense and the courts are bursting at the seams. Particularly in July and August, there are usually eight to ten groups of four waiting to get on the 14 courts.

As many people are aware, pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the country. It appeals to all ages, is easy to learn, and inexpensive to play. It is very popular with seniors, who find it both a physical activity, and a way to socialize and meet new people. In Dennis for 2023, more than 250 of the 865 registered players are new to pickleball (or at least new to Wixon) this year. We expect this demand from new players to continue to grow. FODP makes special efforts to welcome beginners to the courts, to provide instruction, set-aside courts, and encourage intermediates to play games with the beginners. We hope those beginners improve their game and continue to play pickleball.

However, this comes with a downside. The more new players adopt the sport and come out to play, the more crowded the courts are, and the longer the wait times. The 14 courts at Wixon, which seemed plentiful when they were finished in 2019, are often over-full now and will be more and more crowded in the future. Construction of additional courts at the Wixon location would provide much-needed space for increased participation in future years. **We urge decision-makers to reserve space adjacent to the current pickleball courts for future pickleball expansion.**

In addition to outdoor pickleball, FODP players eagerly anticipate being able to use the Wixon school gym for indoor pickleball in the winter months. For the past several years (excluding the Covid years), the town of Dennis has offered indoor pickleball at Ezra Baker Elementary in the evening hours, after school use. This space has helped to serve the need for indoor space on inclement days, but the gym is small and the space is challenging. FODP hopes to use the Wixon gym in the winter in future years, where Dennis could offer morning pickleball in a much larger, more functional gym, and use the gym for other youth and adult programs in the afternoons and evenings. The Wixon gyms are essential for a variety of Dennis sports programs in the winter; these programs will be severely impacted if those gyms are lost to community use.

As the Town of Dennis moves forward with considering alternate uses for the Wixon property, FODP urges decision-makers to consider pickleball needs, both indoors and outdoors, and to provide space for expansion at some point in the future.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions about pickleball in Dennis, please feel free to contact me at fodppres@gmail.com or 703-999-8921.

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