

Pickleball...Tennis...Dog Parks—Oh My!?

By Mayor Boot

In 2017 District of Summerland recreation staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission began the comprehensive process of developing a new Parks and Recreation Master Plan—a document that assists Council and staff in making informed decisions on the future direction of recreation facilities, parks and open spaces in Summerland.

The District then engaged Lees & Associates to prepare a draft Master Plan. After updating the draft plan to include valued input and feedback received from several months of community engagement, on June 25, 2018 Council adopted the final plan.

Based on the level of engagement, it is clear that active, healthy lifestyles are important to Summerland residents and visitors. Physical activity and healthy lifestyles are also important to Council as we believe recreational opportunities are a key piece to making Summerland an even better place to live. (“Active Lifestyles” is one of the six themes in our 2019-2022 Strategic Priorities.)

Although District-owned recreational facilities and some activities were suspended for a period of time due to COVID-19, staff has made the necessary operational adjustments to ensure residents and visitors can use these facilities safely. Lakeshore pathways and Summerland’s trails network remained open throughout 2020 to encourage physical activity and the mental and emotional benefits associated with exercise and being out of doors.

Many recommendations on how the District of Summerland could introduce, improve or expand recreational programming and facilities (both indoors and outdoors) are made in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. These include three outdoor recreational spaces: pickleball courts, tennis courts and off-leash dog parks. While all of these amenities currently exist in Summerland, in 2020 Council agreed to allocate budget funds to explore how and where these recommendations could be realized. We also accepted staff’s recommendation to combine the work of identifying locations for pickleball and tennis courts and an off-leash dog park. This is because public-owned land needs to be identified for each activity and the search could not exclude or diminish the need of any of the three recreational activities.

Over the course of 2019 and 2020, decisions were made by Council on recommendations that came forward from staff, again after seeking input from Summerland residents. A location for a third off-leash dog area (one currently exists at the municipality’s Peach Orchard Beach and at the BC Parks’ Sunoka Beach) has proven to be more challenging than the solution to increasing numbers of courts for tennis and pickleball players.

Again, due to COVID-19 the District’s 2020 implementation plans were slowed, but on January 19, 2021 Council gave preliminary approval (subject to three readings and final approval) to the District’s 2021 - 2025 General Capital Budget. It includes 2021 funding for the geotechnical work to ensure the feasibility of constructing a new tennis court on the Lakeshore Racquets Club site (on property leased from the Province); converting one multi-use court to four pickleball courts at Peach Orchard Campground (a municipal campground); and exploring the opportunity of a fenced off-leash dog park at the Fosbery Road or Dale Meadows Park location.

Yes, it has taken compromise (thank you for that) and patience, but the District is committed to getting these new recreational facilities underway. District staff continues to operate under the provincial health directives and will continue to ensure we—and our furry friends—are safe as we pursue active lifestyles.