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# Lewiston pickleball courts to be ready this fall

Get excited picklers. There'll be more dedicated courts in Lewiston and Auburn for the country's fastest-growing sport.

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Matt Kasabian, left, of Main Line Fence, connects the top of a fence section Monday at the new pickle ball courts being constructed on North Temple Street in Lewiston. *Andree Kehn/Sun Journal*

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LEWISTON — After the installation of some final details next month, city staff says a new pickleball complex off North Temple Street will be ready to go.

A four-court complex adjacent to the fire department substation has been in the works for some time, and once online, the complex will add to a growing roster of options for

picklers to play one of the most popular sports in the country.

Kevin Gagne, Lewiston Public Works director, said Monday that most of the work on the complex is already complete, but that the city is waiting for a contractor to apply pavement coatings and markings for the courts. That's slated for mid-September, depending on weather, he said.

He said the wet weather doesn't work well for the painting of any lines, and especially not for a specialty product likely used by the contractor for the pickleball court layout.

Crews from Maine Line Fence were on site Monday at 55 North Temple St. to install fencing around the courts. After the lines are on, Gagne said final details like signage will be installed and the courts will be opened.

The project was funded in a previous year's capital improvement plan bond, with a budget of roughly \$336,000.

The 9.8-acre parcel was purchased by the city in 2019 for the construction of the new fire department substation, and city staff and officials supported using the remaining developable area for a recreational use.

At the time they were approved, a city memo said the courts would "provide an open, recreational area in an existing vacant portion of a property less than 0.5-mile from the McMahon Elementary School," and that the courts "will compliment the nearby neighborhood and provide further opportunities for outdoor recreation."

Mayor Carl Sheline said he's excited to see the courts finally open, especially after the popularity of the sport has become apparent community-wide.

"Lewiston is an age-friendly community and I am pleased that we are offering recreation opportunities for all residents of all ages," he said. "Pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in the country and I'm sure the North Temple courts will be popular."

Pickleball, a game modeled after tennis but using a smaller court, has exploded in popularity throughout the country due to its accessibility. With its paddles and hollow, plastic ball, it also has elements of table tennis.

A 2023 report by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association said pickleball grew 87.5% year-over-year and 158.6% over three years. It said 8.9 million people played pickleball

in 2022 and the number of new participants in 2022 exceeded the total number of pickleball players in 2021.

As of last year, there was a group of more than 300 regular picklers in Lewiston and Auburn that coordinate matches and meet-ups. According to Lewiston Recreation Director Nicole Welch, there are now more than 600 pickleball players in the “Lewiston-Auburn Teamreach Pickleball” group who are all looking to play throughout the year.


“Many of these members are from outside of Lewiston-Auburn, but will travel to the city to play,” she said. “This adds an economic development piece to these courts.”

Its rise hasn’t pleased everyone, however. As the sport has gained popularity, so have some naysayers concerned for the noise level of the constant smacking of the ball, particularly if there’s multiple games occurring at once.

It wasn’t long ago when Lewiston and Auburn had essentially zero options for people looking to play the sport. Groups in the Lewiston area have used area tennis courts with portable nets and lines, but the North Temple pickleball courts will be the first designated courts in the city.

Up until now, groups have played on the tennis courts at locations like Lewiston High School and indoors at the Lewiston Armory. In Auburn, courts near the East Auburn School were renovated late last year to include four pickleball courts. The tennis courts built at the new Edward Little High School also include lines for pickleball. During the winter, players use the Hasty Gym at Pettengill Park in Auburn.

According to the city memo, the complex is located on the southern portion of the lot, with an access drive and parking for 10 vehicles.

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