



### **May you live in interesting times.**

And the past two years have been very interesting. Let me elaborate: At the AGM in September 2019, the club found itself having a Board of 9 members mostly wide-eyed rookie Board members, and so the learning and planning began.

By early 2020 we had:

- figured out how to run the club
- planned three tournaments – one never held before
- figured out that there was a better way than having a ratings committee and planned to replace it with a performance-based system
- built a strong relationship with the City of Surrey
- implemented a new member management and event registration system
- planned a new player development program including a during-play mentoring program; and
- had both Steve Deakin and Mark Renneson lined up for external clinics.

Over the winter of 2019/20 our membership numbers fell a bit, but we expected some fall-off. All in all we were certain that 2020 was going to be a great season!

And then the pandemic hit, and we were faced with the evolving Provincial Health Office restrictions and so we:

- Initially postponed and then canceled the Spring Launch tournament
- then the start of the season
- then the new Mid-Summer Slam tournament
- all of our external clinics
- the Grip 'n Rip, and
- then the entire season.

In September 2020 we all entered the Annual General Meeting very disappointed, but the Board had lots of unimplemented plans. Because of the uncertainty from the pandemic, we expected our membership numbers for 2021 to fall further and then climb. We budgeted for 200 members, down from 325 at the peak in 2019. They ended falling to 170 especially as many of the higher skilled players left to form their own small playing groups at Greenaway and Delta.

Also, in mid-2020 the City told us that we would no longer get free guaranteed access to the courts and that we would have to rent them at a cost that would work out to almost \$80 per member.



Fortunately, most of the remaining members stuck with the club in 2020 and so, we were able to use the club's accumulated surplus to reduce the impact of the club's operating costs and the court rental fees in 2021, offering what we called "loyalty discounts" to returning members and also mitigating some of the court rental costs.

In the 2020 AGM we lost the 2 veteran members of the Board of Directors – so down to 7 for 2021 - but we had those great plans and a workable budget based on (hopefully) 200 members.

But the continuing pandemic restrictions in early 2021 were not kind to us and we began (again) looking at possible delays. Our membership languished around 170. Fortunately, the COVID vaccination programs began to show results and, after having to cancel our Spring Launch tournament and delay the start of the season, we were finally able to open our season at the beginning of June. And then, on July 5, we moved to playing on the new, dedicated pickleball courts.

So here we are, almost at the end of the 2021 playing season – weather permitting, we'll continue to October 2<sup>nd</sup> by the way – getting us back to almost "normal". Since the beginning of June we have:

- Scheduled over 320 court hours per week supported very well by our new session registration system
- In mid-season, we negotiated a reduced fee rental agreement with the City, which will allow us to predict and contain member fees going forward
- Tweaked the playing schedule several times to reflect member suggestions
- Successfully transitioned to using the new dedicated courts
- Held two tremendously successful tournaments, one of which was held for the first time
  - The tournaments, by the way, generate profits which we use to reduce the impact of operating fees and court rental fees – you'll see that in the budget material
- Solicited several sponsorship and partnership arrangements which provide members with purchase discounts, enhance the net revenue of tournaments and provide the club with some royalty income
- Introduced (and tweaked) our new performance-play ratings which replaces the old Ratings Committee approach, the direction most pickleball clubs in Canada are taking



- Began tracking member's club ratings on pickleballbrackets.com thanks to a long-term contract negotiated by Pickleball Canada
- Provided twice weekly mentoring sessions for levels up to 3.5
- Provided several beginner clinics (thank you Doug King)
- Sponsored several days of clinics by Mark Renneson – unfortunately Steve Deakin's professional playing schedule this year did not allow him to hold the clinics we had scheduled with him
- Held two refereeing clinics and saw one of our own (Ross Priebe) achieve his refereeing certification
- Increased our membership from 170 in March to over 350 today

We also explored the idea of a lower mainland pickleball league with several other clubs but abandoned the idea for at least the next year due to the lack of preparedness of the other clubs. We also started exploring the possibility of offering fall/winter indoor pickleball. And those discussions continue.

Which takes us to looking forward to 2022:

- As has been the trend, we expect our membership numbers to fall initially as memberships renew in April, and then climbing due to the growing interest in pickleball. We have budgeted (conservatively) at the 300-member level.
- The demographic of the club members will likely change. We expect the newer members to be primarily at the lower skill levels and also much younger
- We again will be scheduling over 320 court hours weekly based on the newly negotiated agreement with the City of Surrey
- Our Rated play (performance-based ratings) approach will have to continue to evolve. We are forming a "Placement Committee", anchored by a Board member, but hopefully made up primarily of members who can participate in how best to adjust our implementation of the nationally-evolving performance-play ratings
- We will hold 3 tournaments, two of them (Mid-Summer Slam and Grip 'n Rip) will be sanctioned by Pickleball Canada
- We will again arrange for external clinics (Mark Renneson is a definite and we'll again look to bring in Steve Deakin)
- We will again have a mentoring program (and look at Pickleball Canada's upcoming Coaching program – which is being run by Mark Renneson)
- We will look for more and more members getting involved in refereeing



- We will search out more partnerships and sponsorships
- We will continue to explore the possibility of inter-club leagues
- We will continue to investigate providing winter indoor pickleball
- We will explore offering youth/junior programs

But, is that all there is? No.

Except for some minor changes in 2019, the club's mission and bylaws have not changed since it was first formed. The key mission "to work with the City to develop dedicated pickleball courts" has largely been met, at least here in South Surrey. Many of the vision and mission statements are now out of date. It is time to reconsider what we are and will be as a club. What do we want to be when we grow up? Do we want more of the same? Do we want to be a Vernon-like club (year-round, covered facility, but at a cost of \$80 per member per month)? Do we want to be a multi-location club? Or do we want to be something else?

And so, now it is time for us to take the time to think and plan. To go through a strategic planning process for the club. We want - we need - significant member involvement in thinking through where we are, what the opportunities and challenges are, where we want to get to and how to take the club there over the next several years. If you are interested in participating, please let us know. We start right after the formation of the new Board.

And with that, I would like to thank all the current Board members for their dedication and hard work over the past two years. It has been an uncertain time for members and a very uncertain and frustrating time for board members and the club. However, the club came out of it with what we think was a very good re-start, due to the patience of the members, the efforts the Board members and the work of dozens of member volunteers.

And so a special thank you goes out to the members, to those that stuck with the club even though we couldn't play, to those who came back and rejoined the club, to those who decided club play was for them and joined us, to those who offered suggestions and/or criticisms. Overall, those who continue to work to improving the club and making it a success.

Thank you all. Here's to a great 2022!

Respectfully submitted

Ken Nowlan