

Southeastern Michigan Pickleball Association (SMPA) and the City of Royal Oak: A Partnership for Community Growth

Introduction

Since 2010, the Southeastern Michigan Pickleball Association (SMPA) has been an integral part of Royal Oak's recreational landscape, transforming unused tennis courts into vibrant pickleball complexes that attract players from across the region. After gaining status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization **run entirely by volunteers** in 2016, SMPA has worked alongside the City of Royal Oak to maintain and improve these courts, organize programming, and host events that contribute to the city's reputation as a pickleball hub.

Continuing this partnership between SMPA and the City of Royal Oak would solidify and streamline this longstanding collaboration, ensuring sustained benefits for the community, local businesses, and city recreational programs.

History of Collaboration

The roots of this partnership date back to 2010 when Royal Oak resident Pat Sullivan, with community and city support, led the conversion of dilapidated tennis courts into the Whittier Park Pickleball Complex. This initiative expanded in 2014 when SMPA volunteers, using tournament proceeds and city assistance, transformed additional tennis courts at Upton Park into pickleball courts. In 2017, SMPA funded a volunteer-driven effort to fully repaint and restore the Whittier Park courts, ensuring their long-term usability. In the summer of 2024, severe wind damage resulted in the collapse of fences at Upton Park, rendering the courts unsafe for play. Since SMPA has a regular presence at the courts, they notified the city immediately and worked closely with DPS to reorganize court usage. Additionally, SMPA fully funded and replaced all of the nets at Upton Park with professional, custom-sized nets to accommodate the non-standard net post spacings, further improving the playability and longevity of the courts. Over the years, SMPA has facilitated programming, maintenance, and improvements, ensuring that Royal Oak's courts remain premier facilities for both residents and visitors.

Benefits of our Continued Partnership

1. Sustainable Recreation Management

SMPA plays a crucial role in organizing programming for the city's 15 pickleball courts, including:

- Hosting **mixer events** that foster community engagement.
- Managing **structured ladder leagues**, with over **500 recreation enthusiasts annually**.
- Ensuring court availability through well-balanced scheduling at Whittier and Upton Parks.

2. Economic Impact on Royal Oak

- The **annual Royal Oak Classic Pickleball Tournament** attracts 200-300 players from **across the Midwest and Canada**, bringing foot traffic to **Royal Oak's businesses**.
- Local businesses, recognizing this economic benefit, have actively supported SMPA by providing **discount coupons for players, and other amenities**.
- Tournament participants and visiting players contribute to local restaurants, hotels, and shops, generating revenue for the city.

3. Volunteer-Driven Facility Maintenance

- SMPA members **maintain court cleanliness**, including **leaf removal, weed control, and net repairs**.
- SMPA **coordinates with the city** for larger projects such as resurfacing and fence repairs, which SMPA has funded for years.

4. Relief for City Resources

- SMPA funds and maintains **portable restroom facilities** at Whittier and Upton Parks, benefiting all park users.
- SMPA proactively monitors court conditions, scheduling timely repairs before issues escalate.

5. Enhancing Royal Oak's Recreational Identity

- Since 2010, Royal Oak has been a leader in recognizing the growth of pickleball. A continued partnership would reinforce its reputation as a premier pickleball destination.
- SMPA's **proven track record of reliable programming and facility upkeep** aligns with the city's vision for sustainable recreational offerings.

Conclusion

Continuing the partnership between SMPA and the City of Royal Oak would ensure the **further success and growth of pickleball in the community**. SMPA's dedication to **programming, maintenance, and community engagement** makes it an invaluable partner in maintaining and enhancing Royal Oak's pickleball facilities. By leveraging volunteer support, tournament-driven economic benefits, and responsible facility management, this partnership will uphold **Royal Oak's legacy as a leader in recreational excellence**.

SMPA is committed to working alongside the city to ensure **a thriving, accessible, and well-maintained pickleball environment** that benefits residents and visitors alike.