

Pickleball and Tennis Court Project

Western Hills Athletic Club¹

December 19, 2024 | v.1.2

This document describes the motivation, background, and plans for an improvement and extension of the pickleball and tennis facilities at Western Hills Athletic Club (WHAC).

Context and Background

WHAC was founded in 1968 on land envisioned as part of a city park. The land was deeded to the club's shareholders in 1974, and zoned as parkland around 1990. Membership of the club is limited to 400 families, roughly the number of homes in Rollingwood. The first amenities built were a pool and a small clubhouse. The tennis courts were added in 1976, and a volleyball court and parking lot in 1983. A playscape near the pool and picnic area was installed in 2001. A concrete basketball court was installed in 2007 (and converted to a pickleball/basketball sport court in 2022). In 2014, the club expanded the clubhouse to add a locker room, lifeguard room, and the manager's office. As part of the same project, the pool and pool deck were rebuilt in 2018. The club has been contemplating the upgrade and extension of the tennis courts (and more recently pickleball) since at least 2000.

The Objectives of the Project

Motivation for the project includes the following ten objectives:

1. **Make structural changes.** The state of courts is of serious concern. Appearances aside, there are major structural problems and simply resurfacing them is only a stopgap solution. The courts' foundation is poor, the tar berm between the courts is sub-optimal, the fences are rusted, and the root structure of our massive live oak (which will stay) all require a more comprehensive approach. Arguably, the necessity of rebuilding the courts provides a good opportunity to expand and accomplish the other nine objectives listed below. A well-designed extension and upgrade positions the club well for the future.
2. **Accommodate pickleball.** Currently, the club's pickleballers play on the basketball court and on the lower tennis court. This fall, the club even added a pickleball court to the upper tennis court. At times, pickleball has been in progress on every court, perhaps at

¹ Prepared by the WHAC Board of Directors for presentation to the membership. Comments and suggestions welcome, ideally to board@whac.org. Thanks to Amanda Howe, David Cazares, Philip Keil, Catherine Graubard, and the membership of WHAC for ideas and assistance.

1968: Club founded
1974: Land deeded to the club
1976: Tennis courts
1983: Volleyball court and parking lot
2001: Playscape
2007: Basketball court
2014: Clubhouse renovation
2018: Pool refurbished
2025: Pickleball/tennis expansion(?)

Figure 1: Cracks on the lower court; in part from an adjacent live oak



Figure 2: Asphalt berm



Figure 3: Rusted fencing



the expense of basketball and tennis. Our goal is to provide space for pickleball without encroaching on basketball and tennis. Also, the hybrid pickleball/tennis courts will allow for the flexibility that is imperative for a club with more than 400 member households;

3. **Increase the utility** of the club for the community and its members by upgrading and expanding programming and facilities for tennis and pickleball;
4. **Fulfill an "8 to 80" plan** that includes activities for members and families across age groups (proverbially, those ages 8 to 80, though we have many active members outside of that range!). Currently, the club primarily serves younger children. Pickleball and tennis are popular across the life cycle and will give more members a reason to participate;
5. **Enhance the communal, "third-place" feel** of the club by developing areas to gather before and after pickleball/tennis. Currently, tennis and pickleball players gather in the parking lot. We want more people hanging out aimlessly, enjoying the club and meeting their neighbors;
6. **Foster more programmed play** at the club by providing adequate facilities for lessons, clinics, teams, tournaments, summer and holiday camps, and social tennis/pickleball events;
7. **Protect recreational play.** Programming (lessons and clinics) typically competes with member and family court time; added courts will allow sufficient court time for both member reservations and programmed play;
8. **Integrate the court and swim components** of the club; the courts are currently accessed only outside of the club. With the new design, they would be integrated during club hours while still being accessible during non-club hours;
9. **Enhance the beauty of the club** by nestling the courts within newly planted sizable trees and understory shrubs. The courts, on three tiers, will fit the hilly landscape and be embedded in an exaggerated natural setting that blends with the neighborhood (see landscape plan below).;
10. **Control drainage.** Drainage in Rollingwood is a major concern. Currently, runoff from the courts is not well contained. The new design includes a water retention system that, even with added court surface, will reduce runoff by at least ten percent compared to the status quo (the bigger the storm, the bigger the reduction);

On the idea of "8 to 80" plans, see *8 to 80 Cities: Creating Cities for All*

"Third place" is Ray Oldenburg's term from his book, *Great Good Places* (1989)

The coaching staff plans a full set of programs, which incidentally would yield additional revenue that would help offset the club's costs.

The northwestern part of the club will be opened up as woodland for walking, communing, and exploring

Figure 4: Existing drainage

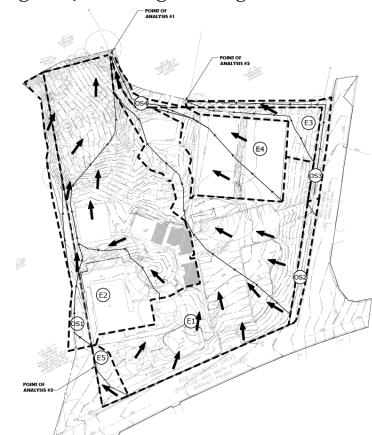




Figure 5: *Existing structures*. In 1990, the city adopted 30-ft. setback lines, to which the existing courts do not conform. WHAC worked with the Rollingwood Board of Adjustment to obtain a variance for a renovation of the old courts, and the placement of the new courts

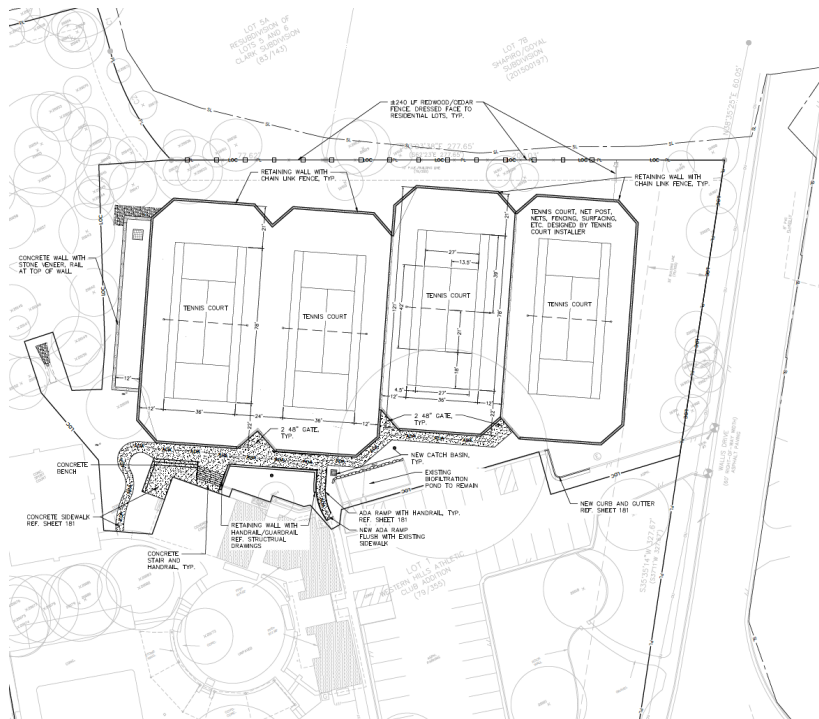


Figure 6: *Site plan*. This is part of the plan set that was submitted to the city engineers and TCEQ for permitting. In an agreement with the city's Board of Adjustment, the new courts will be slightly offset from the existing courts, in order to move the new build in conformity with the property's setback line. While the offset is necessary for zoning, it nonetheless results in some interesting spatial definition.

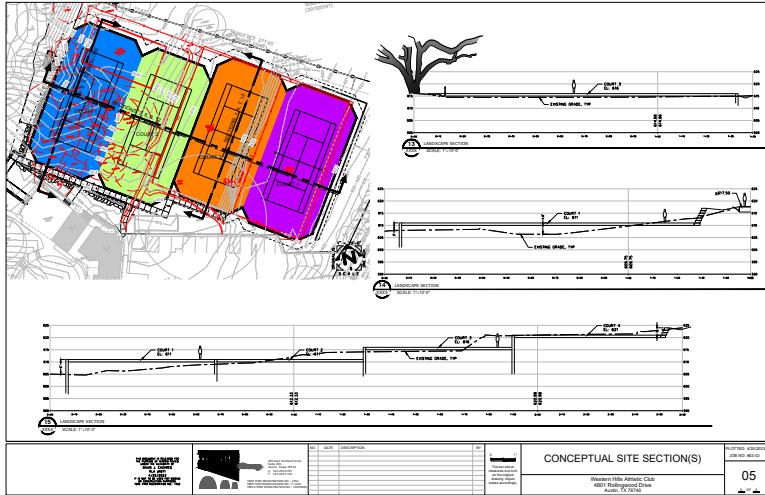


Figure 7: *A three-tiered plan.* The plan conceives four courts spread across three tiers (a bottom tier with two courts and two upper tiers with one court each). The elevation drops steadily across the property, and tiering steps the courts down more gracefully. An original plan from six years ago has the four courts on one tier, with a rather large retaining wall on the downhill side. We experimented with one-, two-, three-, and four-tier designs. The three-tier design seems to fit the landscape most naturally.

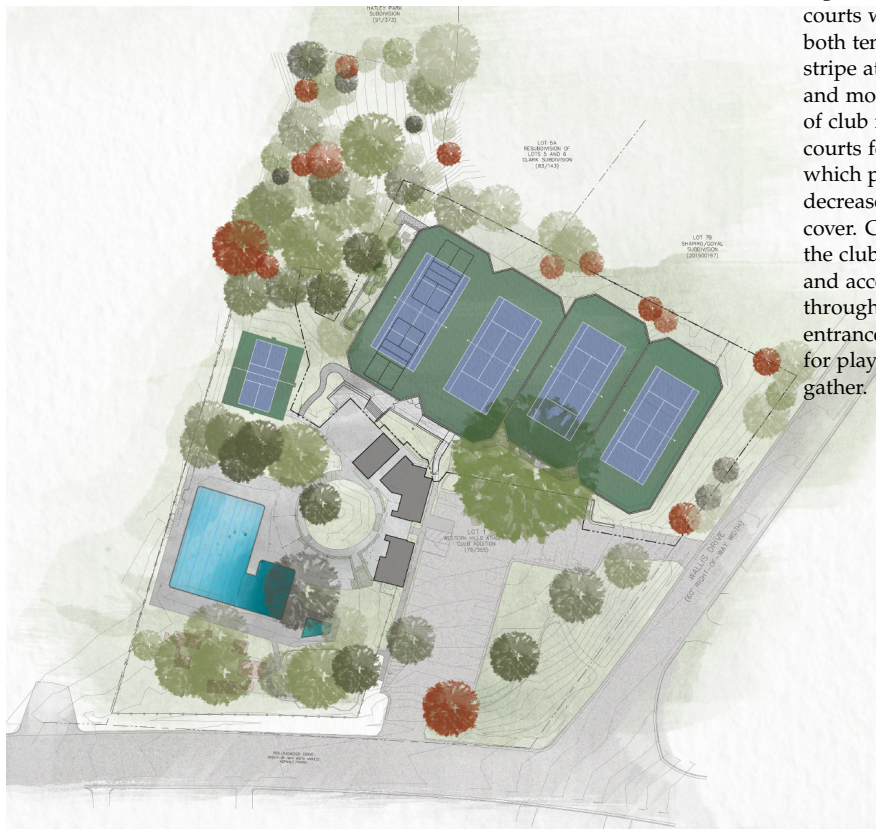


Figure 8: *Rendering of the site plan.* The courts will allow for the potential of both tennis and pickleball. We plan to stripe at least one court for pickleball, and more depending upon the interest of club members in ensuing years. The courts feature “California corners,” which push balls back to players and decrease the amount of impervious cover. Courts will be accessible from the club itself when the club is open and accessible from outside the club through a digital entry system. At the entrance to the courts will be a space for players and the teaching staff to gather.

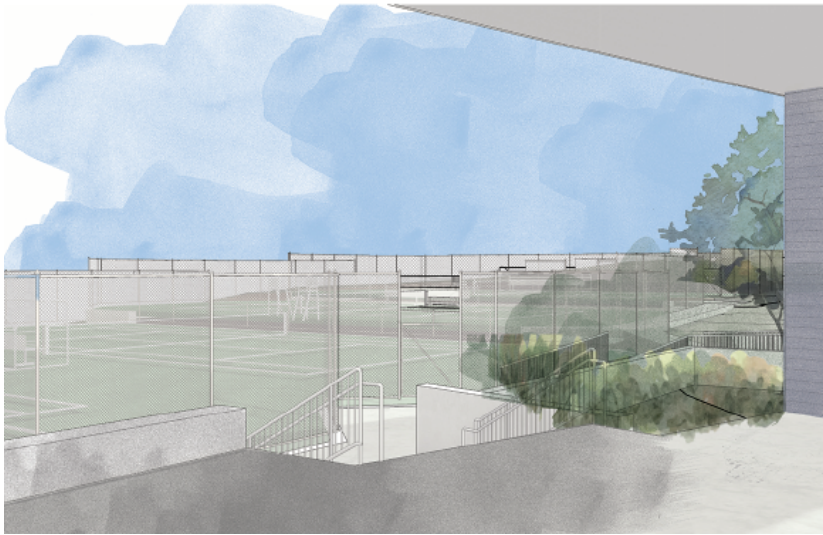


Figure 9: *View from the patio*. The patio will be a nice area to gather and view the courts. It could potentially include a desk for racquet staff and for swim events.

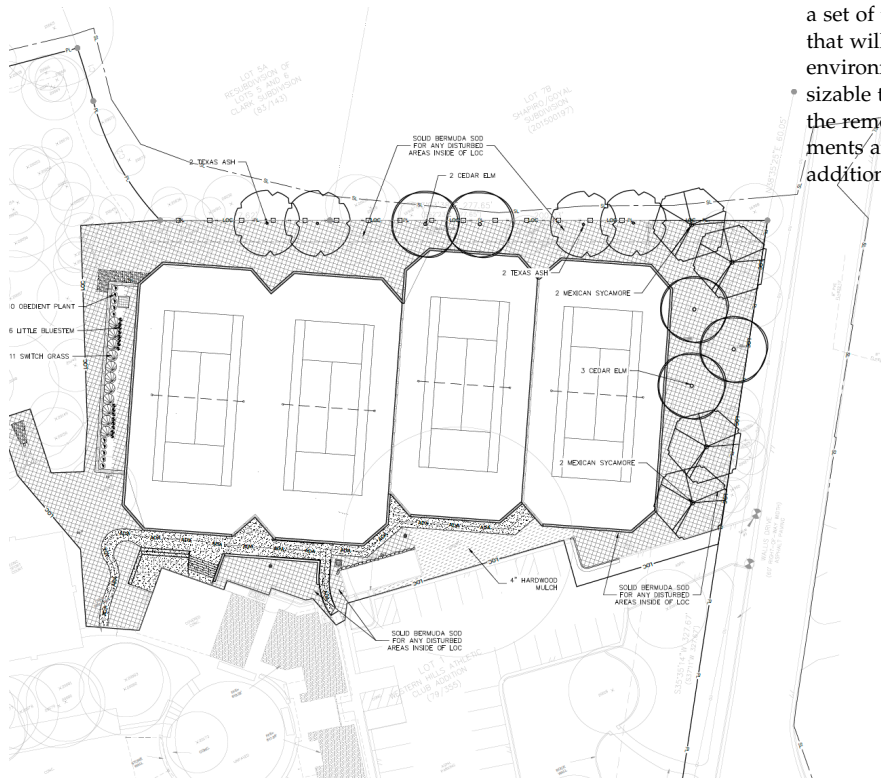


Figure 10: *Landscape Plan*. Landscape architects with MWM have suggested a set of trees and understory shrubs that will nestle the courts in the natural environment. A major focus is to plant sizable trees that will compensate for the removal of existing trees. Comments and suggestions for different or additional plantings are invited.



Figure 11: The new courts would retain and showcase a magnificent live oak, which will grace the entrance to the courts. The tiering of the courts has been designed to accommodate the tree. The roots of the trees present challenges for any renovation of the courts, whether simple resurfacing or the restructuring we envision here.



Figure 12: *New drainage plan.* The drainage plan actually improves upon the drainage of the courts, even with two *new* courts. The bottom courts function as a retention basin in heavy storms, and a rain garden at the west side of the courts filter all drained water.

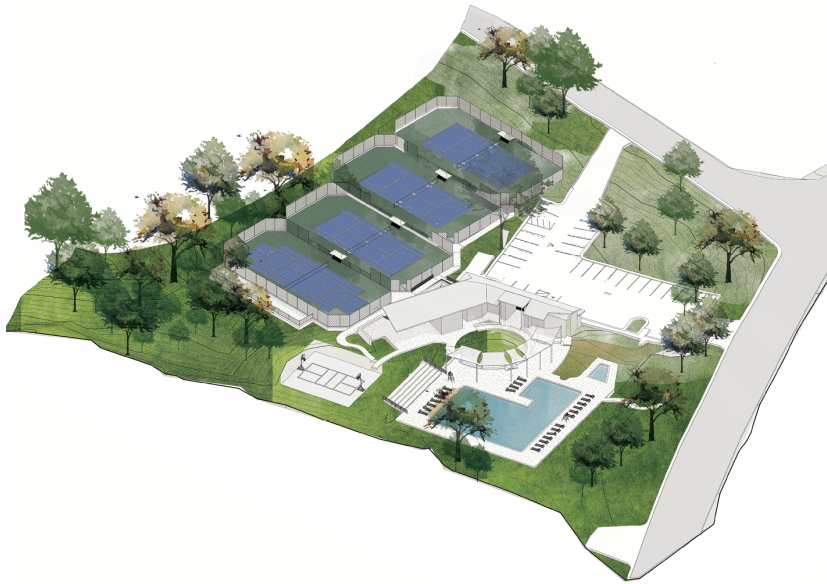


Figure 13: *A birdseye view from the southwest.* The building information models provide for some interesting perspectives on the site. More of these are available.

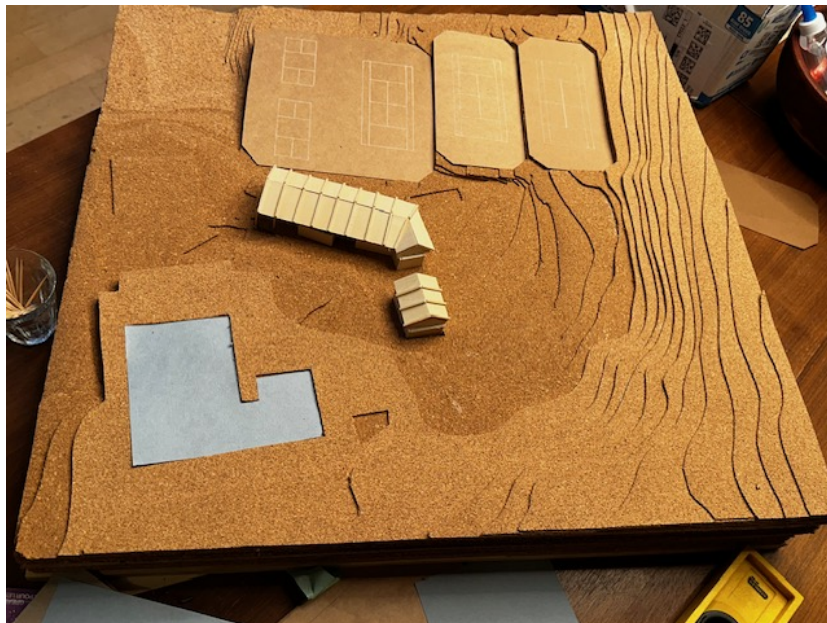


Figure 14: *Physical Model.* A high school member of the club built a model of the plan in order to visualize the ideas. The finished version of the model is installed at the entrance to the club.