

## Anthem Arizona Pickleball Club FMP Proposal For Six More Pickleball Courts – Cover letter

The Anthem AZ Pickleball Club (AAZPC) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to grow Pickleball (PB) in Anthem. Our volunteers create and manage AAZPC leagues, events and programs at the Anthem Community courts. (The Community Center also does its own PB programming and has a PB Pro). In 2021, AAZPC offered its members more than 30 different programs, with annual participation of more than 900 uses. [Exh.1] For a list of our (nearly 40) wonderful volunteers who made the magic happen, please see Exhibit 2. THANK YOU EVERYONE for your hard work and contribution to the success of Anthem Pickleball programming!

AAZPC also gives a big SHOUT OUT to the Anthem Community Center for its support of Anthem Pickleball! Since January 2019, key AAZPC volunteers have met monthly with the Community Center to discuss PB court usage, maintenance, programming and Phoenix area trends. These meetings have been extremely productive and have helped us better understand each other's goals. In 2021, AAZPC signed an Independent Contractor (IC) agreement with the Anthem Council. Effective January 2022, AAZPC will continue its Club programming, will pay the Community Center a fee for each paid AAZPC membership and will give the Community Center a percentage of any AAZPC fee-generating program. ACC is also a named insured on AAZPC's insurance policy.

**Background.** In 2017, AAZPC proposed the building of 12 Community PB courts as part of the 2016 Facilities Master Plan process. The ACC Board approved 10 courts -- reserving space for 2 future courts. The award-winning PB Complex opened in January 2019. At the opening celebration, AAZPC gave ACC a \$5,000 contribution towards the facility's operating expenses. **And then...Anthem PB exploded!** Even with a covid time-out, AAZPC membership has grown 160%. (And there are countless Anthem players and families who have not yet joined AAZPC).

**Today,** AAZPC proposes that Anthem build at least 6 more Community pickleball courts. This proposal arises out of a supply/demand imbalance – an imbalance that exists today and will only intensify in the future. Currently, we don't have enough pickleball courts to meet the needs of Anthem working families. The courts are full during evenings, weekends and mornings, with players waiting and wait times growing longer and longer. And, given the growth trends, Anthem families and junior players will need access to even more community courts over the next 1-2 years.

This Fall, AAZPC conducted a survey of players, asking whether Anthem should build more pickleball courts. **261 people responded. When asked whether they supported the building of more Anthem PB courts, 260 said "YES."** 258 were Anthem residents. (Three others were guests who thanked Anthem for such a wonderful experience). Survey comments expressed intense appreciation and gratitude for our beautiful courts, but noted that the courts were crowded at night. [Exh.3] As one Anthem player put it, "the courts at the community center are amazing. We have met some of our closest friends on these courts. There is opportunity for both social and competitive play. When we play early morning or evening, the courts are always full. More and more people are playing pickleball. It would be wonderful to build more courts. Pickleball is here to stay and is continuing to grow so I feel more courts are definitely needed. Thank you. The courts have been beautifully designed."

Accordingly, it is our privilege to now submit this proposal for the building of six more pickleball courts on the behalf of AAZPC and the Anthem PB community. The AAZPC FMP Committee: Gretchen Bender (chair), Joan Boyll, Rick Kesselman

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### STATEMENT OF NEED

#### ***Anthem LOVES Pickleball!***

Since the January 2019 opening of the Community Park PB complex, Anthem Pickleball has exploded! AAPZC memberships have grown by 160%. Today, AAZPC has more than 480 players.

Community Center data documents similar growth trends. The number of PB court reservations has almost doubled since 2019. In 2021, there were 10,684 total PB court reservations. [Exh.4] In 2019, average PB users per month was 1,385. In 2020, this tripled to an average of 3,038 monthly users. In 2020, total sport (PB) user numbers totaled about 30,382 (i.e., similar to Skate Park usage). [Exh.5]

The Anthem PB explosion mirrors a national phenomenon. In 2020, PB grew to 4.2 million US players. **That's the total population of OREGON! Since 2019, PB has grown more than 21%.** [Exh.6] To understand the sport's popularity (if you don't play), read the November 2021 *Vanity Fair* article "How Pickleball Won Over Everyone From Leonardo DiCaprio to Your Grandparents." [Exh.7] Watch, *The Today Team hits the pickleball court to give America's new favorite sport a shot* or NBC's *The News with Shepard Smith, Why Pickleball is seeing a Pandemic boom.* [Exh.8]

Not only has PB exponentially increased its numbers, but today's players are younger. **According to the USA Pickleball Association, the average player age is 43.5 years – i.e., the median age of Anthem residents!** The largest percentage of players (27.9%) are 8-34 years old. [Exh.6]

Anthem shows similar trends. Today, 51% of AAZPC members reside in Parkside/Villages (versus 30% in 2018); 49% reside in the Country Club. AAZPC family members more than double individual members. Since the opening of the Community Courts, the Anthem PB demographic has shifted to younger players – namely, working families and their children. Visit the courts on a weekday evening. You'll see a wide variety skills, ages and groupings.

Most importantly, the Anthem PB courts create and build a warm community spirit. Survey responses repeatedly expressed gratitude for the opportunity to play, to meet and socialize with friends and neighbors. [Exh.3] One survey participant said it best, "I Absolutely Love how much Pickleball has brought our community together. We are in need of more courts as this sport has become more and more popular and all ages can play the game. A great way to have fun with friends and family."

***Problem: We do not have enough courts to meet the current demands of Anthem working families or to meet the growth expected over the next 1-5 years.***

Unfortunately, the current demand for Anthem Pickleball exceeds the available court times at peak hours. As with other Anthem amenities, the peak PB times for Anthem working families are afterschool, evenings and weekends. Currently, morning use of the courts (generally 6am – 10 am) is full, with people waiting to play. Evening/nighttime and weekend morning play is full, with high reservation levels and people waiting to play. This shortfall most adversely impacts working families and youth. Survey comments repeatedly reference crowded courts at night and on weekends. [Exh.3] One comment is representative, but heartbreaking: "It's difficult to get time to play. Maybe I'm picking bad times to come, but trying to play on the weekends with our kids is difficult."

## ***The Problem Will Intensify in the Future as Anthem Pickleball Continues to Grow.***

To understand the future of Anthem PB, just follow the money... [See Exh.27]

### **Did you know that the Chicago Cubs Bullpen plays Pickleball during major league games?**

[Exh.9] Pickleball is now ingrained in our social culture, with celebrities, a u-tube channel, magazines, songs and even a chain of PB restaurants (Chicken N Pickle)! [Exh.10] Businesses are investing BIG in Pickleball. In 2021, **CBS Sports** made the first live PB broadcast on national television; the **Tennis Channel** provided live coverage of the Orlando Cup [Exh.11]; and **CBS Sports Network** aired the 2021 Tournaments of Champions all day on December 26. In 2021, a second Pickleball magazine entered the market. [Exh.13]. Traditional "Tennis" shoe companies, such as K-Swiss, ASICS, FILA, Wilson, and Acacia, now design and sell shoes specifically for Pickleball. According to the Director of Research at the Tennis Channel, Google Trends shows that interest in Pickleball has more than doubled versus last year at the same time. [Exh.12]

Tournament purses grow, particularly with the advent of two new pro tours throughout the US, Europe and Canada and with the 2021 launch of Major League Pickleball whose goal is "to help players maximize earning opportunities." [Exh.14] No one said it better than the #1 ranked player, University of Maryland, Senior Ben Johns, age 22 – **a few years ago, he earned about \$50,000. Today, his PB income is about \$250,000.** [Exh.8 (*Shepard Smith report*)]

Arizona, and the greater Phoenix area, remain an epicenter of the Pickleball World. Here, the corporate investment in pickleball is stunning. **Legacy Sports Village -- Bell Bank Park** (Mesa) just opened. It has 41 pickleball courts, including 4 medal courts with spectator stands, a stadium court that seats 2,500, plus streaming and video on demand. [Exh.15] Anthem resident Ryan Trefry is Legacy's Director of PB. **Pickleball Kingdom**, the first and largest indoor pickleball facility, will open soon in Chandler. [Exh.16] In Prescott, **Espire Sports** purchased a former Sears store, converting it to a multisport and fitness complex. The facility includes 24 indoor/outdoor pickleball courts and opens in 2022. The companion boutique hotel opens next year. [Exh.15] **Electric Pickle** – the "Topgolf of Pickleball" – comes to Tempe in late 2022. [Exh.17] And we've got the inside scoop -- **Chicken N Pickle** is scouting for a Phoenix location!

At first, pickleball grew organically – just because it is fun! Friends introduced friends. Neighbors encouraged neighbors. Today, the sport also has formal institutions, systems and "infrastructure" that insure and support future growth. In the last several years, we've seen the building of more (and more) pickleball courts, the introduction of 2-3 pro tours, the adoption of a professional certification and coaching organization and the development of League play modeled after the US Tennis Association. We've seen significant institutional developments in Youth opportunities and programs. Most notably, in 2018, the Amateur Athletics Union (AAU) added pickleball to its list of youth sports and included PB at the AAU Junior Olympics. [Exh.14]. AAU youth leagues and tournaments are starting to develop. **This is a very exciting time for the sport of pickleball so, please take the time to read our Research Memo: Institutional Growth in the Sport of Pickleball Since 2018.** [Exh.14]

The Anthem experience mirrors these national trends. We've seen systematic growth in professional instruction and first-class equipment. In 2019, Anthem resident David Smith became the designated PB pro at Anthem Country Club; in 2019, AAZPC volunteers taught more than 140 Anthem residents to play; in 2020, the Community Center contracted with Ryan Trefry as an IC PB pro, offering regular weekly lessons and leagues. Four Anthem players are certified Professional Pickleball Registered coaches. Anthemite Dave Furman, is a sponsored professional player; Dennis Ayotte and Dave Armstrong are Gearbox sponsored tournament players. Four Anthem players rep PB equipment

manufacturers. Anthem teen, Maddie Toren, gets more than 1 million views of her pickleball Tik Tok videos and she was recently featured in Pickleball Magazine! **For more about Maddie, check out Exhibit 18!**

Likewise, Anthem Tournament participation has increased. At the end of 2018, approximately 38 Anthem residents participated in a tournament listed on pickleballtournaments.com. Today, about 90 Anthem residents have played in a tournament. In 2022, Anthem fields two women's teams in the APPL West Valley League. Anthem now has one USAPA certified referee (Andy Olson), one level 2 referee (Maddie Toren, age 17) and one level 1 referee (Joan Boyll).

**And, most importantly, in November 2021, Anthem held its first open tournament – with nearly 350 registered players!!!!**

In sum, given our past performance, the future trends, and the infrastructure growing nationally and at home, Anthem Pickleball's future growth is assured.

### **SOLUTION: LET'S BUILD AT LEAST 6 MORE ANTHEM COMMUNITY COURTS**

#### **Project Narrative: Keep It Simple**

AAZPC proposes that Anthem build a minimum of 6 additional pickleball courts. We are not seeking more seating areas or more benches. Shaded or covered courts are not requested due to technology challenges, land issues and Arizona standards of play.

Despite some player suggestions, our proposal does not request the building of closer restrooms. Usable space might be limited and the priority is clear -- **more courts**. Additionally, based on our research, walking time to the Tennis Court restroom is consistent with acceptable proximity standards for other Anthem amenities and at other pickleball facilities. [Exh.19].

#### **Goals, Objectives, Project Rational & Community Demographics**

***The PB Expansion Project Makes Economic and Demographic Sense – It Is a Financially Responsible Way to Positively Serve A Significant Number and Variety of Anthem Residents.***

From a public spending perspective, adding more PB courts makes sense. Unlike our 2017 proposal, building more courts does not require “a leap of faith.” Anthem PB has a proven success record. And, we have systems to grow that success. We don't have to speculate. We know. The courts are needed. More courts will be used.

We also know that the courts provide exceptional value as an amenity. Of the recent enhancement projects, Anthem PB courts have been the least expensive to build and the least expensive to operate. [Exh.20] The 10 court PB complex cost \$817,000 to build and \$15,000 to operate. Once built, the courts are self-sustaining. Significant organizing and programming is done by players or IC's; court reservation and clinic fees cover annual operating expenses. [See Exh.21] Usage is high. And unlike our fields or the All Wheels Park, PB courts are used when school is in session and when many residents are at work. (Visit the courts at 10 am – they are full! (Particularly, M-W-F)).

***Anthem's demographics support the building of more courts.***

We love pickleball because the demographic range is wide and long. The Community Center starts teaching players at age 10. The oldest Anthem player (that we know of) is a very fit 85. This age range covers more than 80% of the Anthem residents.

**15% of Anthem residents are in the 10-19 age range.** [Exh.22] Pickleball is an easy sport for this group to try and learn. Like basketball or volleyball, financial entry thresholds are relatively low. The cost of the first paddle and balls is less than \$100. (That's less than a new bike helmet!). You don't need to be a talented athlete or have a specific body type. It's a relatively easy sport to learn. 1-2 sessions and you're ready to play. Or just go out and hit the ball. If you like it, learn the rules! Join the Pickleball Club and come to Open Play!

**64% of Anthem residents are 20-69.** [Exh.22] Anthem has a wide variety of amenities – with playgrounds, a water park, 33 neighborhood parks, about 13 fields, two splash parks, a rock climbing wall, a train, and, of course, soon a new-world class All Wheels park. Yet, sometimes we can overlook the fact that the Anthem demographic extends far beyond those facilities. **64% of Anthem residents are 20-69.** They **pay for** and (hopefully) use Anthem amenities. They will remain pickleball players for a long time. Unlike some sports, picklers don't outgrow the sport. They don't stop when they graduate or when they turn 30 or even 60. They don't retire from the sport; they just move to a different age bracket.

#### ***Six new courts will increase the Anthem Happiness Index.***

Six new courts will increase play opportunities and will help make the court experience more friendly for novice, casual and family players. The avid, experienced players can easily understand and follow the rules to reserve or “drop in” to the courts. Understandably, others can feel intimidated – especially when courts are crowded. Our guests always comment positively on the warm community vibe and wonderful feeling of seeing all ages, especially families, playing pickleball. We want to build upon the unique neighborly quality of Anthem pickleball. As one survey commented, “We play pickleball almost every day or night. I am always amazed at how crowded the courts are and the number of new faces that are coming out. What a great way to build a closer community! More courts would only enhance this!!”

#### **We can do this! Budgets, Funding & Timeline**

As Anthem residents, we feel extremely fortunate to live in a community that not only is fiscally responsible, but that also is committed to community enhancement. We continue to improve and expand Anthem amenities based on current and future community needs. We value the need to stay competitive and in tune with Greater Phoenix area development trends. More pickleball courts help maintain and grow our home values. As one resident noted, “As a realtor I'm seeing more clients that are looking specifically for Pickleball communities as well as Pickleball in close proximity. Pickleball is making communities more desirable and driving the buyers to those communities.” [Exh.3]

**Timing.** Based on our previous court construction experience, we estimate that, at the earliest, our proposed court expansion would be complete in **January 2024.** [Exh.23] By that time, family and youth demands will be even greater than today.

**Funding & Costs.** Anthem's Enhancement Fund and the PB operating income more than cover the costs of more pickleball courts. We estimate that the construction cost of 6 additional courts will be \$420,000-\$600,000. [Exh.24]. Those costs would be covered by the Anthem Enhancement Fund, which will be \$1,350,000 by the end of 2022. (That Fund appears to be funded at about \$1million every year).

We estimate that total operating cost for the existing **and** new courts will be \$20,000. (Current operating costs are \$15,000). Like now, operating costs would be fully covered by court reservation fees, Community Center clinics, leagues, lesson fees, tournament registration fees and AAZPC quarterly payments to the Rec Center based on paid membership levels. [Exh.24]

### **Land/space requirements and proposed locations**

One Anthem pickleball court, including fencing, measures about 63.5 feet long and 34.5 feet wide. Due to the sun, courts are placed in a north/south orientation.

The preferred solution is to build more pickleball courts as close to the existing complex and/or the Community Center as possible. This satisfies the need for parking and restrooms.

### **Potential areas to build closest to the existing complex [Exh.25]:**

- A. 2 courts can be built on the grassy area immediately behind the “kiosk.” AAZPC proposed this in 2017. Although the Board declined, it reserved that space for future pickleball expansion.
- B. 1 court could potentially be built to the east of court 1. This would require some sidewalk redesign.
- C. 2-3 courts could potentially be built on the grassy areas to the north northeast of courts 9 & 10. It is our understanding that this area has been considered in the past for other potential amenities.

### **Other? Potential area just across the bridge from the existing courts**

This area appears to be able to accommodate 4 courts, placed end to end, in a north/south orientation. While these are close to fields, from what we have observed, they would not interfere with any fields. [Memo from Rick Kesselman, 10/28/2021, and photos, Exh. 26]

### **Other potential locations are:**

- Open spaces at Opportunity Way
- Hastings Field – Advantages: 1) would not need to build parking or restrooms; 2) we believe there have been technology developments that would prevent any potential noise issues.

### **Conclusion**

Expanding our PB Courts makes sense:

- it solves the existing supply/demand problem and plans for future growth
- it increase the Anthem “happiness” index
- it embodies sound civic management principles
- and, it provides value from a community enhancement perspective

If Anthem wants to stay competitive as a destination city for families, to maintain its reputation as an active, vibrant community and to continue to fulfill its promise of “life in abundance,” building more pickleball courts is a smart, economical solution that should be a priority.