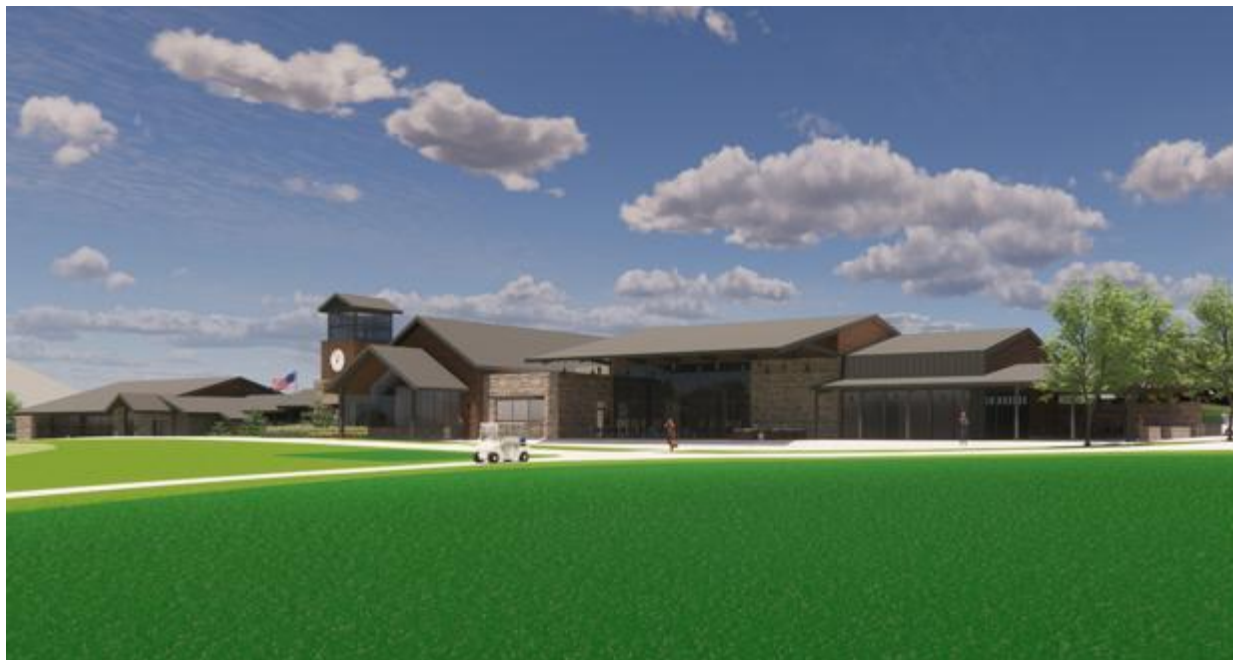


Kickingbird welcomes pickleball, plans major renovations

By: Jennifer Sharpe June 3, 2021 0



A rendering of the future Kickingbird Golf Club projected for completion in late 2022. (Courtesy of Edmond Parks and Recreation and Bockus Payne)

Kickingbird Golf Club's 50-year-old clubhouse is preparing for a new look. A major renovation to the course and clubhouse is planned starting in July 2021 that will take about 14 months to complete, according to Craig Dishman, director of parks and recreation for the city of Edmond.

Dishman anticipates that the course itself will close shortly after the construction bid gets awarded in early July, followed by the driving range and grill shutting down a few weeks later. Planned course improvements include work on the irrigation system and greens.

"The greens and the irrigation at the golf course are well over their prime, at least 20 to 25 years old. The clubhouse is 50 years old," Dishman said. "We have been there for 50 years, and it has been great, but it's time for a new clubhouse."

The entire clubhouse will be torn down to make way for a new complex that will include a new grill, clubhouse and event building, which will be available for rentals to the public.

The renovation also will include significant improvements to the parking lot, including increases to the number of available parking spaces.

Pickleball's new home

With tennis transitioning to the new Edmond Center Court facility, the courts at Kickingbird have been converted to pickleball. One tennis court can hold four pickleball courts, allowing for 32 courts at the Bryant and Danforth recreation location.

Pickleball first came to Edmond in Stevenson Park several years ago, but the facility at Kickingbird allows for significantly more courts and an indoor space. At present, there are 12 indoor courts inside the bubble and 20 outdoors courts set up at the existing Kickingbird facility.

Sherry Prince has been a USA Pickleball Ambassador since 2012. In this volunteer role, she works diligently to promote the sport in Edmond and beyond.

"I've lived in Edmond all my married life; our kids were all raised here, and I knew this town would do a fabulous job with pickleball," she said. "We have about 13 sites now in the metro, but our main hub is Kickingbird. The sport is exploding."

The rise of pickleball in the OKC metro

According to the Greater OKC Pickleball Club, the sport arrived in the Oklahoma City metro in 2009. Today the club boasts more than 1,300 members, and membership numbers are growing daily.

Outreach is a priority for the GOPC. "We are always looking for people that want to learn how to play and tell others how to play," Prince said. "I see pickleball growing like never before, and I see it popping up everywhere."

Chicken N Pickle opened its Oklahoma City location in January 2021. Andy Gensch, Head Pro at Chicken N Pickle, has been with the company from its start, and he has been impressed with how the location has been received. "Our OKC store is our fourth one in our family, and we had very high expectations for the market. It has exceeded our lofty expectations."

Gensch has been in the pickleball business for many years and has contacts nationwide. He has been awed by the size and success of the GOPC. "Oklahoma has been really progressive when it comes to pickleball. The commitment, the investment, the growth in Oklahoma has really been impressive."

The sport's appeal reaches all ages and abilities, and, as Gensch notes, it is easy to learn and easy to play. "You can be six to 86 years old and enjoy that sport. It is such a social sport; it can be as competitive as you want it to be, or it can be as recreational as you want it to be. It's truly America's fastest-growing sport right now."

The future of pickleball at Kickingbird

While the current arrangement at the Kickingbird facility allows for 32 pickleball courts, in order to create an adequate amount of parking for the new golf and event venue, the former tennis complex will be modified and the number of pickleball courts will decrease.

As Dishman explains, the bubble will remain, and the courts inside will be resurfaced into 12 permanent pickleball courts with a new heating system and new LED lighting.

To create more parking, the existing outdoor courts will be cut back, reducing the total number of outdoor pickleball courts to 12. Those will be resurfaced with permanent pickleball nets and lines as part of the overall renovation project as well.

"They'll look really sharp," Dishman said. "When we redo the courts, indoors and outdoors, they'll be top-notch, and we hope to add more in the future. We also to put pickleball lines on other courts that we have in town for basketball or tennis in some of our parks. It's a good thing for everyone; we are excited that pickleball is popular."