

COALITION FOR NATURE AND RECREATION AT MAGNUSON PARK



Position on Outdoor Pickleball Court Project at Magnuson Park

Adopted December 9, 2025

Issue Summary

The Coalition for Nature and Recreation at Magnuson Park is a group of diverse park users who believe the balance between recreation and nature is a defining asset of Magnuson Park that must be maintained and protected.

We are concerned by Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) plan to develop [outdoor pickleball courts at Magnuson Park](#). Funding has been committed for 8-10 courts, but SPR envisions a full buildout of 24 or more courts [1]. If developed, this would be the largest public outdoor pickleball facility within 800 miles*.

At least two locations are under serious consideration as potential sites for the pickleball facility: the E5 parking lot and the east side of the N2 parking lot.

Due to the environmental, recreational, residential, fiscal and other impacts, our coalition:

- Opposes developing any outdoor pickleball courts at E5; and
- Supports development of outdoor pickleball courts at N2 pending appropriate review and community outreach.

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*The nearest 24+ court public pickleball facility is in Las Vegas, Nevada. See pickleheads.com/search

Overview of Sites

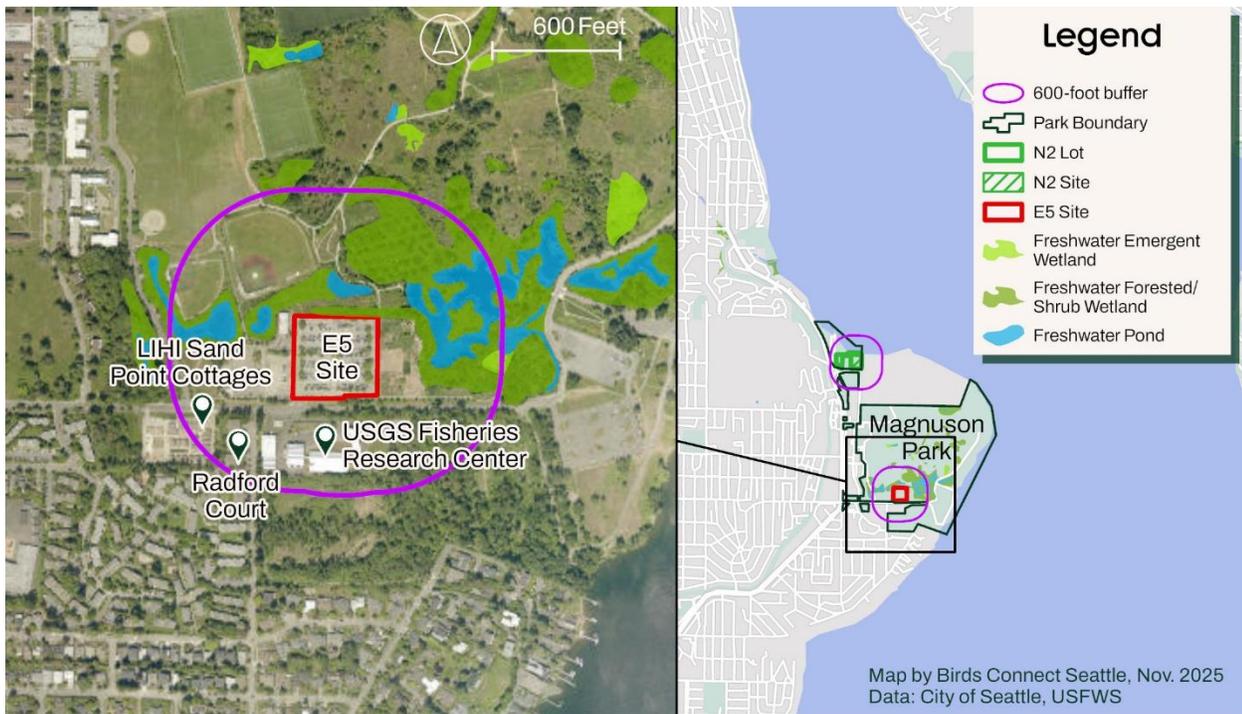


Figure 1: Overview of E5 site and surrounding environment.

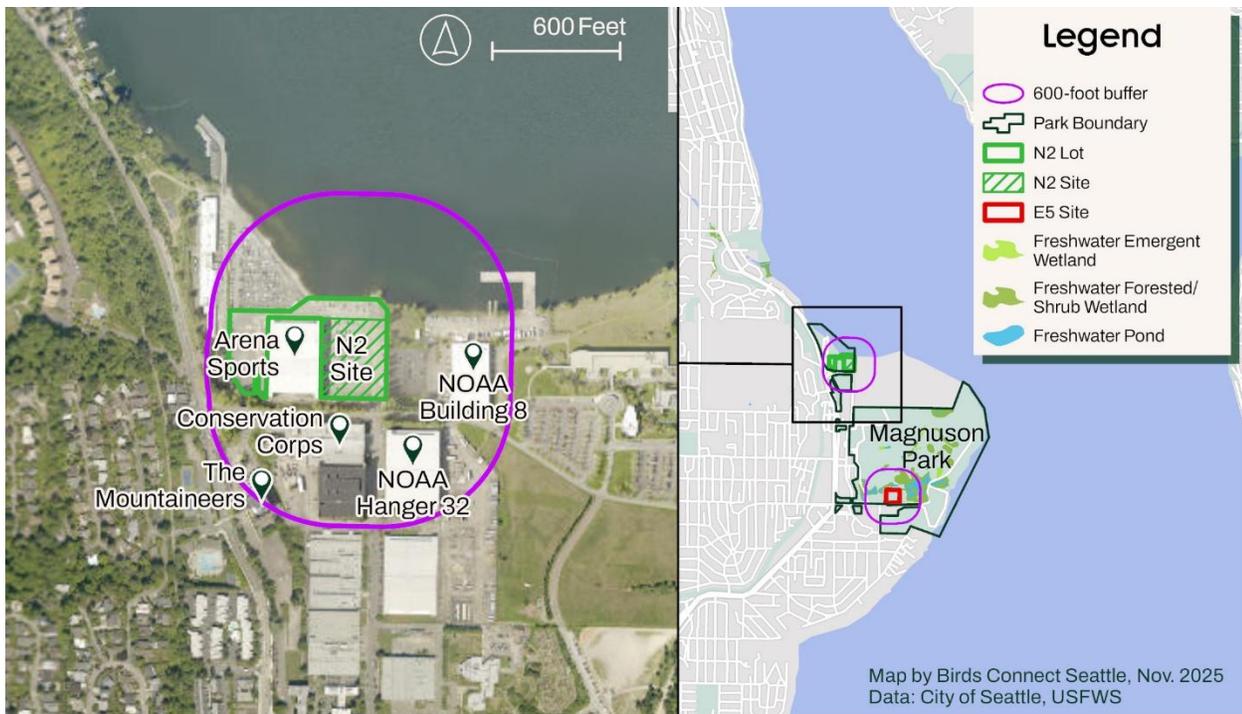


Figure 2: Overview of N2 site and surrounding environment.

Site Comparison Table

We characterized land cover within a 600-foot radius of each site and measured distances to noise-sensitive features. We used this 600-foot threshold because acoustic experts recommend that noise-sensitive areas within this distance should be evaluated by noise engineers to understand potential impacts [2]. Landcover data are from King County [3] and wetland data are from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory (NWI) [4].

	E5 site	N2 site
Current use	Parking lot	Parking lot
Approved future use	Youth baseball field	none
Distance to residential structures	350 feet	610 feet
Number of housing units within 600 feet	24-44 [†]	0
Distance to freshwater wetland	95 feet	1,000 feet
Distance to open water	1,450 feet	100 feet
Distance to nature trail	0 feet	800 feet
% forested area within 600 feet	44%	7%
% impervious surfaces within 600 feet	34%	61%
# of trees needed to remove and replace	Up to 43	0

About the E5 Site

E5 (Figure 1) is a 322-stall parking lot in the south section of Magnuson Park, constructed of concrete panels laid during World War II. The parking lot provides access to Field 8, Field 9, wetland trails, and service and maintenance areas for SPR. The lot is used by Cycle Cross, Club Northwest, and other organizations that host fund-raising races in Magnuson Park, and it also provides overflow parking when boat ramp lots are full.

The site was a wetland before the Navy graded the Sand Point Peninsula to create an airfield runway. From the mid-2000s until recently, it was leased to Children's Hospital as a park-and-ride lot. That lease was not renewed in 2025.

The E5 lot is in an area of Magnuson Park that has undergone significant environmental restoration. To the north, east, and west of the lot are acres of restored freshwater wetlands. To the south and southeast are the forested areas of Promontory Point. Canopy cover within an area extending 600 feet around E5 is 44%, much higher than average for the city and for Magnuson Park generally, and 34% imperviousness, much lower than average for the city.

The site was approved by Seattle City Council in 2006 to be developed into a lighted youth baseball field, which has not yet been built.

[†] Exact number of housing units within 600 feet would depend on the design and configuration of courts, which have not been shared publicly as of November 2025.

About the N2 Site

N2 (Figure 2) is a large, paved parking lot in the north section of Magnuson Park that surrounds Arena Sports to the east and west with approximately 580 parking spaces, 428 on the east and 156 on the west [5]. It was constructed in 1937 when Sand Point Naval Station filled three acres of Pontiac Bay to build a new seaplane hangar (Building 27, now Arena Sports) and adjacent tarmac.

The east side of N2 is another possible site for outdoor pickleball courts. The N2 lot is in a mixed-use area with businesses, food vendors, recreational facilities, and more. It is close to open water on Lake Washington, but farther from higher quality wetlands and forests. The closest wetland area is approximately 1,000 feet away on the NOAA campus. This wetland is not represented in the National Wetland Inventory database. The closest NWI-mapped wetland is more than 2,000 feet away. Canopy cover within an area extending 600 feet around N2 is very low at just 7% and imperviousness is high at 61%

A 2008 concession agreement obligates the City to maintain a minimum of 300 parking stalls within the N2 lot area [6] and a tri-party agreement between SPR, Arena Sports, and Building 11 establishes rules, rights, and responsibilities for parking among these stakeholders [7].

Why the E5 Site is the Wrong Location

Environmental Impacts

The south and east sections of Magnuson Park have undergone extensive environmental restoration and contain significantly more natural land cover than the park's north end, which retains the largely industrial character from its navy base days. The E5 site is directly adjacent to federally protected restored wetlands constructed to mitigate environmental impacts from construction of the athletic fields at Magnuson Park. These restored wetlands are now one of the largest freshwater wetland complexes in the city—a particularly significant feature given Seattle's wetland scarcity.

Most of Seattle's historic wetlands were drained, filled, and developed as the city grew. Today, Seattle has just 341 acres of freshwater ponds, emergent wetlands, forested wetlands, and riverine wetlands [4]. To put this in perspective, all of these remaining freshwater wetlands could fit within Magnuson Park with room to spare. Despite their limited extent, these wetlands support highly diverse and unique communities of birds, amphibians, and beneficial insects, making their protection critically important.

There are 12 acres of these wetland habitats within 600 feet of E5. That's nearly 4% of Seattle's sum total of these habitat types. We have a duty to protect and be responsible stewards of these limited habitats. There are no wetlands within 600 feet of N2; the closest known wetland area on the NOAA campus is about 1,000 feet away, and the closest NWI-mapped wetland is more than 2,000 feet away.

Developing lighted, outdoor pickleball courts at E5 adjacent to wetlands is contrary to good environmental stewardship because:

Noise pollution disrupts wildlife. Pickleball generates sound levels equivalent to freeway noise, which will propagate hundreds of feet into the wetlands. Noise caused by human activity is a recognized environmental pollutant that negatively affects wildlife behavior, reproduction, and physiology [8]. Pickleball noise would interfere with bird communication, disrupt predator-prey

dynamics, reduce reproductive success, increase physiological stress, and cause avoidance or displacement of sensitive species from otherwise suitable habitat. Intentionally introducing this pollution adjacent to meticulously restored wetlands undermines the environmental objectives that justified the public investment.

Light pollution also harms wildlife. Lighted courts would disrupt natural circadian rhythms and alter predator-prey dynamics for species that are active at dusk and night [9]. Bats are particularly vulnerable. *Myotis* species, which are found in the park, will avoid brightly lit areas, which reduces and fragments their foraging habitat [10]. To protect wildlife habitat, we need to reduce artificial light at night, not expand it.

Habitat connectivity would be compromised. Magnuson Park's wetland restoration plan explicitly prioritized maintaining physical connectivity between habitats [11]. Introducing high activity, high noise facility, possibly with high walls or fencing to mitigate sound, would create a new barrier in the system and alter wildlife movement from Promontory Point through the wetlands and beyond.

Tree canopy loss at E5 carries environmental and financial costs. Developing courts at E5 would require removal of up to 43 small to medium trees currently growing throughout the lot [12]. These trees reduce urban heat island effects and contribute to city-wide tree canopy cover. City requirements mandate 3:1 tree replacement [13], translating to more than \$500,000 in planting and establishment costs at approximately \$4,000 per tree [14]. Developing at the N2 site would not require any tree removal, eliminating this impact and cost entirely.‡

Wild spaces need buffer zones, not hard edges. Abrupt transitions where natural habitat meets hardscape create edge effects that degrade habitat quality beyond the immediate boundary. Hard edges are more exposed to temperature extremes, with heat radiating from pavement and reduced shade causing greater fluctuations. Hard edges also change wind and air flow dynamics that can alter the microclimates that sensitive species depend on. Noise and light pollution from human activities penetrate farther without vegetative buffers to absorb them. Ideally, wildlife areas should transition gradually to built environments through buffer zones of less intensive use.

Recreation and Nature Access Impacts

Developing courts at E5 would negatively impact other recreationists in the south section of Magnuson Park.

Lost youth baseball field access. After contentious community discussions, the Seattle City Council approved a Magnuson Park Master Plan that explicitly designated the E5 lot for development into a youth baseball field. This was a hard-won compromise among competing park uses [15]. Converting the site to pickleball courts would not only break faith with that planning process but would also eliminate a promised recreational facility for Seattle's youth.

Increased noise would diminish nature experiences and wildlife observation. Enjoyment of natural areas is the number one reason people visit Seattle parks, with 74% of residents visiting natural

‡ The environmental and financial costs associated with tree removal and replacement will also apply to development of a youth baseball field at the E5 site.

areas 10 times or more per year. Compare that to just 16% of people who visit sport courts 10 or more times per year [16].

This speaks to the importance of access to urban nature as a public health necessity. Decades of research have shown that time spent in urban green spaces provides measurable benefits to physical and mental health, including reduced stress, anxiety, and depression. These spaces also encourage physical activity and foster social connections among community members.

Visitors to urban green spaces prefer relaxing natural environments [17]. Studies show that access to nearby green spaces can buffer residents from long-term noise annoyance in urban neighborhoods, with economic analyses confirming that quiet parks are valued more highly than noisy ones [18]. Laboratory research has found that park soundscapes featuring diverse bird species are associated with greater perceived restorativeness, suggesting that the acoustic environment influences the healing potential of urban nature [19].

Many people visit the south end of Magnuson Park specifically for its natural setting. The park's restored landscapes provide opportunities to listen to wind through trees, birds singing, and frogs croaking. Introducing the repetitive, high-pitched "pop-pop-pop" of pickleball—which carries hundreds of feet and continues for hours—would fundamentally alter this soundscape. Visitors seeking peaceful walks, wildlife observation, or quiet contemplation would find their experience degraded.

Birding is particularly affected. Birds are often heard before they're seen, and some secretive species are rarely seen at all—their calls are the only sign of their presence. Many people listen closely for songs and calls to identify birds in the wetlands. The constant percussive noise from pickleball would mask these vocalizations, fundamentally interfering with this popular activity. Nationally, 96 million Americans engage in birdwatching [20] compared to just 19.8 million who play pickleball [21].

Parking conflicts. Twenty-four or more courts hosting games simultaneously throughout the day would generate hundreds of new vehicle trips to the area. At the same time, the project will reduce parking at E5 to just 100 stalls, all to be shared by pickleball players, baseball players, trail users, birders, dog walkers, and other park visitors. The increased traffic and competition for parking would create frustration and congestion, potentially forcing other park users to abandon the area or circle repeatedly searching for spaces. This parking pressure would also increase the likelihood of illegal parking on adjacent grass or natural areas, causing additional habitat degradation.

Residential Impacts

The noise and long hours of pickleball play create persistent quality of life issues for nearby residents [22]. Outdoor pickleball courts have generated noise complaints and lawsuits in communities across the country [23], [24]. Residents in Boise, for example, filed a \$1.6 million claim over pickleball noise. The city settled and removed the pickleball courts [25].

Outdoor courts at the E5 site would directly affect residential communities. Depending on how the facility at the E5 site is configured, we estimate that between 24 to 44 households would be within 600 feet of the courts if they were developed at E5. The impacted communities include Radford Court (housing for UW students, staff, and faculty) and the Low-Income Housing Institute Sand Point Cottages.

Educational and Research Impacts

The wetlands adjacent to the E5 site host several ongoing research and educational programs that would be disrupted by a noisy pickleball facility.

The Neighborhood Bird Project (Birds Connect Seattle since 1996) and the Secretive Wetland Bird Survey (Puget Sound Bird Observatory since 2016) conduct ongoing bird counts at the wetlands. A loud pickleball facility would impair observers' ability to detect birds, particularly secretive species identified primarily through sound.

The Christmas Bird Count, the longest running community science project in history (since 1900 in the US and 1908 in Seattle), conducts bird censuses every December, including at the Magnuson Park wetlands.

The Seattle Cooper's Hawk Project (Urban Raptor Conservancy) finds and monitors hawk nests at Magnuson Park every year, often discovering them by listening for vocalizations between adults and juveniles.

Organizations like Birds Connect Seattle, Feminist Bird Club, and Eastside Audubon lead regular, free guided walks through the wetland. Seattle Parks and Recreation's *Rec 'N the Streets* program offers guided walks for seniors in the wetlands.

Why the N2 Site is the Better Location

We prefer developing outdoor pickleball courts at the N2 site because it is substantially farther from sensitive habitat, from residential structures, and would be more consistent with the site's existing character and uses.

Developing courts at the N2 site would:

- **Reduce environmental impact.** The N2 site is much farther from sensitive environmental areas. While N2 is closer to Lake Washington's open water, this habitat is far more expansive than the upland wetlands adjacent to the E5 site, giving wildlife more options and opportunities to move to avoid disturbance. Further, developing at the N2 site would not require tree removal and would not conflict with habitat enhancement and wildlife management objectives.
- **Reduce recreational and nature access impacts.** Developing in the northern section of Magnuson Park would preserve the E5 site for youth baseball field development as approved in the Magnuson Park Master Plan. The N2 site is largely industrial in character and far from nature trails; pickleball play there would not interfere with nature access, wildlife observation, or passive recreation.
- **Reduce residential impact.** No residential units are within 600 feet of the N2 site. Adjacent uses are commercial and industrial: Arena Sports (a commercial sports facility that could benefit from pickleball amenities), Seattle Conservation Corps offices, and NOAA industrial facilities, The Mountaineers office, and the businesses within Building 11. These are mostly daytime work environments rather than homes where noise impacts sleep, family life, and relaxation.

- **Reduce impacts on research and education.** As far as we know, there are no ongoing research projects that could be impacted by pickleball courts at the N2 site.
- **Reduce costs.** Because of its location and history, development at the E5 site would require a supplemental environmental impact statement. This process includes preparing a draft EIS, conducting a public comment period, and producing a final EIS with mitigation measures, adding significant time and cost to the project. In contrast, developing at the N2 site would likely result in a Determination of Non-significance, streamlining both timeline and budget. Developing at N2 would also save the expense of costly tree removal and replacement, which could exceed \$500,000 at the E5 site.

The N2 site is closer to necessary amenities such as bathrooms and drinking water, which do not currently exist at the E5 site and would have to be constructed. It is also close to food and beverage at Magnuson Cafe and Brewery and Arena Sports. Pickleball courts nearby would likely benefit these small businesses.

Broader Concerns about the Outdoor Pickleball Project at Magnuson Park

Process Failures

Repeating past mistakes. In 2023, SPR announced it would construct eight outdoor pickleball courts at Lincoln Park in West Seattle [26]. The chosen site was within 200 feet of state-designated priority wildlife habitat. Despite no formal public comment process, widespread opposition over environmental and passive recreation impacts ultimately led SPR to cancel the project.

Less than a year later, SPR announced the outdoor pickleball project at Magnuson Park’s E5 lot—a site with arguably greater environmental sensitivity than the Lincoln Park site, and much closer to people’s homes. That SPR repeated the same mistake it made at Lincoln Park so quickly reveals a systemic failure to engage relevant stakeholders, creating conflict with community and potentially leading to poorer outcomes for the park system.

Stakeholder engagement failures create conflict with community. The advisory committee that recommended the E5 site for pickleball court development included only SPR staff, pickleball players, tennis players, and advocates for these sports. Notably absent from this process were other park users and broader community stakeholders, who remained unaware of these plans until public meetings held in fall 2024. By that time, site selection was presented as a *fait accompli*; questions only remained about the design and configuration of the courts (see Figure 3 below).

SPR failed to include baseball advocates in their planning process. This oversight is significant given that the E5 site is already approved for development into a youth baseball field. This omission raises questions about SPR's commitment to honoring existing community agreements and ensuring all affected parties have a voice in decisions about shared public space.

SPR also failed early on to include community and advisory groups, including Friends of Magnuson Park, the Magnuson Park Advisory Committee, and the Magnuson Environmental Stewardship Alliance, nor did they include residents of the nearby communities.

In response, thousands of Seattle residents and dozens of organizations—including ours—signed a petition opposing the development of pickleball courts at E5, reflecting widespread concern about the decision-making process and the proposed use of this space.

Stakeholder engagement failure creates conflict with past public investments. The restored wetlands adjacent to E5 represent more than \$5 million and 15 years of intentional public investment with clear objectives to enhance wildlife habitat and provide nature access for education and passive recreation [11].

Developing outdoor pickleball courts at the E5 site directly contradicts both goals. Had SPR invited more diverse stakeholders to review potential court locations for the courts, this conflict could have been identified immediately, saving time and resources for SPR and community members.

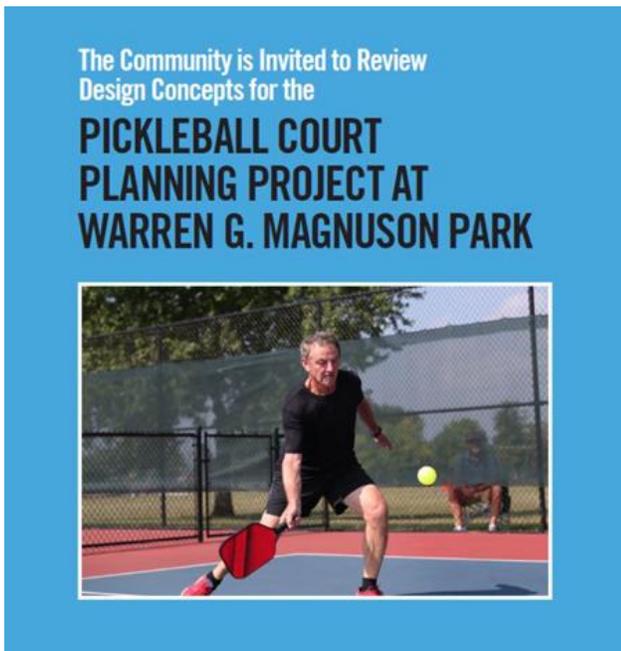


Figure 3: This graphic accompanied the first community invitation to review outdoor pickleball planning at Magnuson Park. Notice that the community was asked to weigh in on design concepts, not whether the location was appropriate in the first place.

Infrastructure and Traffic Concerns

SPR's proposed 24+ court facility would be the largest outdoor pickleball facility on public land within 800 miles. At peak demand, it could generate hundreds of additional vehicle trips daily, straining local roads and park infrastructure while increasing traffic-related risks regardless of its location within the park.

Traffic safety in the Sandpoint Elementary Walk Zone. The E5 site is within the Sandpoint Elementary School walk zone (Figure 4). NE 65th Street is a key route and crossing for students. Increased traffic from a large pickleball facility in either location, but especially at E5, could create pedestrian and student safety concerns that require evaluation, particularly during school commute hours.

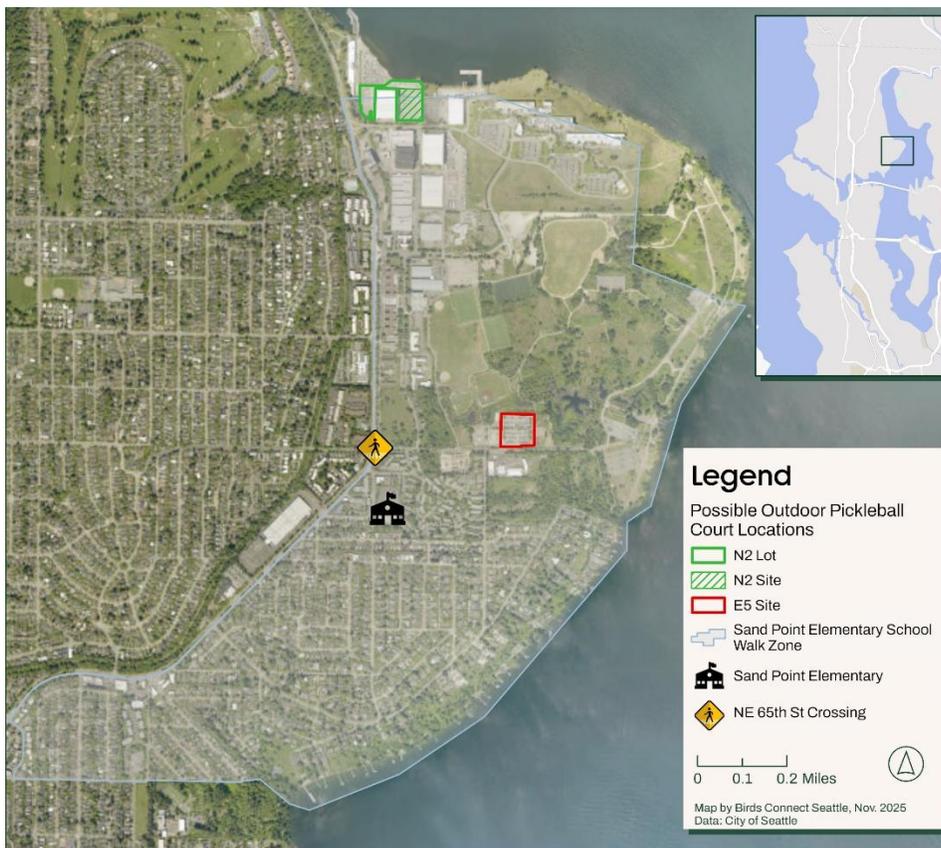


Figure 4: NE 65th Street is a key route and crossing for students in the Sand Point Elementary Walk Zone.

Main arterial to Magnuson Park is already a traffic bottleneck. Sand Point Way / NE 45th St / Montlake Blvd NE is notoriously congested. Hundreds of additional vehicle trips from pickleball players will worsen existing traffic problems.

A massive outdoor pickleball facility will strain parking. SPR planners have stated they anticipate demand for four parking spaces per court. For a 24-court facility, that is 96 spaces needed for pickleball alone. SPR is planning only 100 total spaces to be shared among pickleball players, baseball players, trail users, and other park visitors. On summer weekends, Magnuson parking lots are already filled to capacity.

Fiscal Concerns

Seattle faces significant budget uncertainty and looming deficits. Committing \$9 million (2024 estimate from [12]) to begin a massive outdoor pickleball facility project could be a precarious fiscal decision.

SPR has also lost revenue from the E5 site. The lot was previously leased to Children's Hospital as a park-and-ride facility, generating \$250,000 annually in lease income for Seattle Parks and Recreation [27]. That lease was not renewed in 2025, possibly in anticipation of developing the pickleball facility.

Conclusion

Our coalition supports providing outdoor pickleball facilities in Seattle and recognizes the sport's growing popularity. However, thoughtful site selection is essential to avoid conflicts with environmental stewardship, residential quality of life, and other recreational uses.

The E5 site is fundamentally incompatible with outdoor pickleball development. It sits adjacent to restored urban wetlands representing \$5 million in restoration investment, is close to residential communities, eliminates a promised youth baseball field, and would degrade the nature experience that draws the majority of Magnuson Park visitors. Developing here would undermine decades of environmental work and community planning while creating noise conflicts that have sparked lawsuits in communities nationwide.

The N2 site offers a viable alternative that serves pickleball players without these conflicts. Located in the park's industrial north section, N2 is far from sensitive habitats and homes, compatible with adjacent commercial uses, and would avoid costly environmental review and tree replacement. This location respects both the park's environmental assets and past community agreements.

SPR's planning process has excluded critical stakeholders and ignored lessons from the failed Lincoln Park proposal. Meaningful community engagement—including conservation groups, baseball advocates, residents, and existing park advisory bodies—should have occurred before site selection, not after.

Magnuson Park can accommodate both active recreation and nature preservation, but only with planning that respects the unique character of each section and the communities that depend on them.

Signatories

Birds Connect Seattle

Joshua Morris, Conservation Director

Heron Habitat Helpers

Marla Master

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Thornton Creek Alliance

Ruth Williams, President

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Sandy Shettler, Founder

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