

Sponsored



Idaho Statesman

13.9K Followers

# We support pickleball in Boise. Just not next to homes | Opinion

*Opinion by Kathleen Romito*

• 1d •

3 min read



A sign at Boise's Elm Grove Park in October 2024.

My husband and I were the plaintiffs in [the case the city of Boise settled](#) by agreeing to close the pickleball courts near our home. Out of necessity, I have also become a physician-researcher studying the health effects of noise.

Once the city of Boise understood the issue with the pickleball noise at [Willow Lane](#), they also chose to close the pickleball courts on the other side of town. Our house is 57 feet from 6 public courts that were used from 7 am until 10 pm for several years. At Manitou, courts were only 30 feet away from homes. The courts were put in with no input from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Pickleball noise is not just about the decibel level. One court produces 900 pops per hour. So, on a busy day, 6 courts might produce 55,000 pops. The pop is a high frequency sound, about 1200 Hz. Humans are very sensitive to these frequencies, and back up alarms on vehicles are set at this level for a reason.

Even worse, the pickleball pop is impulsive, meaning it produces very short rat-a-tat sounds. Civilians have never been exposed to this type of noise for extended periods of time. Even the roofers and landscapers working in my neighborhood would tell us, "Wow, that noise is bad!".

Imagine your phone alarm going off in the other room. It's not super loud, but there it is. And imagine, you can't turn it off. It wakes you up in the morning. It might stop for an hour, but then, unpredictably, it starts up again. Did you know that more residents dealing with this noise [call it "torture"](#) than call it "stress?"

Interestingly, how we perceive sound is only about one-third loudness. One-third is social context, and one-third is unexplained or uncertain factors. So, being unable to control the noise in our own home, the gaslighting, the glib "you should move" - it all makes the situation worse for the people suffering from the noise.

This issue is playing out in hundreds of communities across the country, where courts are too close to homes. Veterans are reporting flare ups of PTSD. Parents are reporting children that can't sleep. Teens with neuro-cognitive issues (like autism) are having behavioral issues. People are having to take medicine to quiet down over-activated unconscious "fight or flight" responses. And people who have lived next to parks for 20 to 30 years are having to move away.

Sound barriers, limited hours and quiet equipment can all play a role in certain situations, but they don't seem to fix the problem when courts are less than 100

feet from homes. This is why leading sound professionals now say that courts within 100 feet of homes should be enclosed or moved.

Players need access to good courts. Pickleball is fun; it's social; it's active. Pickleballers, please know that in a strange way, I'm on your side. I tore my Achilles playing pickleball - we know how great the sport is.

After five years of trying to work with the city, we learned that when defending your health and home, sometimes the only path left to be heard is through a lawsuit against a neighbor. Now the city of Boise can focus on how to help thousands of pickleball players find community and stay active - with courts located in appropriate places.

*Retired physician Kathleen Romito and her husband have been Boise residents for more than 30 years.*