

MARCH 2021 PROJECT BRIEF:

Playfair Tennis Courts

What is the status of Playfair tennis courts?

Missoula Parks and Recreation regrets to announce it has closed three of the 12 tennis courts at Playfair Park for the foreseeable future. Due to this winter's extreme freeze/thaw cycles, major cracks have developed in the court surface, creating unsafe footing for players. The cracks are deep and wide enough to render traditional crack repair methods ineffective. The department will continue to research feasible temporary solutions, but we are not expecting a solution that will meet tennis players' needs and comply with current safety standards. Nets have been removed at courts 3, 7, and 8.

How will this affect the high school tennis season?

Parks has worked closely with high school tennis coaches to schedule practices and extend hours of play on other City courts. Thanks to the cooperation and flexibility of the high school coaches and players, we've been able to accommodate this year's high school tennis season practice and match play.

Why have these three courts failed?

Despite regular annual maintenance, crack repair and periodic resurfacing, the tennis courts at Playfair have reached the end of their natural lifespan.

The 20 tennis courts at Playfair and FMRP were constructed and opened in 2002. Construction was funded by the City's Capital Improvement Program and contributions from MCPS, Garden City Tennis Association, Loyola Sacred Heart High School and Valley Christian School.

Per industry experts, an asphalt court's lifespan is less than 20 years in climates that experience significant freeze/thaw cycles. Playfair courts are deteriorating as cracks form in the asphalt and widen due to weather, asphalt shrinkage, and use. Parks has repaired the courts' cracked surface annually for the last seven years to keep them as safe and playable as possible. All forms of crack repair are temporary fixes lasting from a single season to a couple of years. The larger the crack, the less likely it can be successfully repaired for any length of time.

What is the solution?

Our attention has turned to securing funding to replace all 12 courts at Playfair, and additional courts at other parks if possible. In future seasons, each court will continue to deteriorate, and we will be in the position of an annual triage and loss of courts.



Seeking funding since 2018

In 2014, the City Council adopted the Park Asset Management Plan, which identified tennis courts at Playfair, FMRP and Marilyn parks for replacement beginning in 2019 or as necessary. Parks has submitted Playfair tennis court replacement for consideration under the City's Capital Improvement Program for at least the past three fiscal years, but the project has remained unfunded.

The City Council and Budget Team evaluates Parks projects against all other essential capital projects throughout the City, like streets, sidewalks, the water utility, stormwater management and emergency services, and selects projects for funding on a priority basis. With the increasing demands on the City budget and taxpayers' desire to keep their taxes reasonable, we do not receive funding to replace sports courts preemptively.

Parks hosts annual user group meetings with high school tennis coaches, athletic directors, and the Garden City Tennis Association to discuss scheduling, maintenance, and the courts' condition. Court replacement has been an agenda item for the last several years. There has been some discussion of Parks and user groups collaborating to fund court replacement, but no agreement has been reached.

How can residents help?

High school tennis is the single heaviest user of community tennis courts, making these facilities extremely important to many of Missoula kids and families. Everyone who loves tennis can assist by working with your school, tennis or pickleball club and Parks and Recreation to support funding for improvements. Our success is much more likely when we work together collaboratively. For more information, or to help with the project, please contact Parks and Recreation Director Donna Gaukler at gauklerd@ci.missoula.mt.us.

What is the condition of the other City tennis courts?

FMRP courts are in a bit better shape and had a full crack repair and resurfacing in the fall of 2017. We hope to get another 2-4 years of play from the majority of courts at FMRP and Playfair, as long as significant cracks don't develop. Tennis courts at Marilyn Park were closed in 2018 due to irreparable weather damage and need replacement; a CIP budget request has been submitted. Courts at Kiwanis, Bonner, Pineview and Sgt. Don Gregory parks remain operable, but some are reaching the end of their natural lifespan.

How much does court replacement cost?

The most recent estimate to replace all 12 Playfair courts is approximately \$3.1 million, based on previous budget estimates. Like the 2002 court replacement project, funding sources could include the City CIP and user group contributions.

Enterprise fund balance and program:

Parks operates enterprise funds, which help cover the cost of operating and maintaining sports facilities. Up to 80 percent of tennis court user fees are placed in the Parks enterprise fund, which is then used for cyclical resurfacing and crack sealing to ensure the courts remain operational for their expected lifespan. Playfair's current tennis court enterprise fund balance is approximately \$77,000.