



SWANSEA TENNIS CLUB

Club Status Update 2017-2019

Context

The Swansea/Rennie Park tennis courts are owned and ultimately controlled by the City of Toronto. Community clubs get preferential access to the courts in exchange for improving and managing the courts and running various programs that promote tennis. The Club must collect membership fees, manage those monies responsibly and be governed by a board of directors elected by the membership each year (during normal club operations).

The current board of directors worked before and through the Club closure period (2017 - 2018) to deal with all manner of issues, including the court reconstruction, restarting the Club and requirements to operate in 2019. A review of some important facts and events follows.

Pre-reconstruction

Poor physical court conditions led to the suspension of Club activities in 2017 and 2018. Despite the very good works of past Swansea Club directors who ensured the Club promoted programming for all ages and levels, more so than most clubs, the City of Toronto rewarded Swansea by leaving its courts to deteriorate long past the date suggested by engineering studies that examined options for a full reconstruction of the courts. The courts were well passed any simple resurfacing and required approximately \$400,000 to stabilize and restore. The courts sit over an underground water channel (that feeds Catfish Pond) and the soil is very unstable sand (former beachfront) combined with ash (from when the area was used as a dump). This combination causes the subsurface material under the courts to shift over time much more than usual. For example, a large depression in courts 3 and 4 caused water to pool deep enough to still be there a day or more after a rain (losing access to those courts). A drainage channel under court 4 also leaked and caused the surface to buckle within the doubles lines of that court, creating a tripping hazard.

Attempts to cajole and/or “guilt” the City in to doing the reconstruction work a year or two earlier than it had by then slid to on their schedule failed. Bureaucrats and politicians could not move the capital project, likely because the City is teetering on the edge of insolvency. A major effort launched years earlier might have had an impact, but possibly not. One of the key strategic issues for the Swansea Tennis Club is whether to take financial matters into our own hands (as our sister Club Old Mill has done) so that we are not put in that position again.

The engineering report done by the City years earlier had identified the serious challenge with reconstructing the courts in a traditional manner else the same problem of the subsurface shifting would just continue. Those who played at the courts will recall the interior net post on Court 1 tipping

over. When the repair crew came to fix the post, by cutting a square out of the court surface around the post to then pour a new concrete base, there was effectively nothing under the court surface (but air and some water, with sand below that). They had to abandon the plan to replace the post because of fear that if they dug the whole, they would create a sink hole under Court 1 and 2 and collapse them. Since the courts were going to be reconstructed, they welded the new post to the remains of the old post and hoped for the best.

Reconstruction

The City finally began its work late in the tennis season in 2018. They did try to minimize disruption to the prime playing season, and to ensure that everything would be ready for 2019. This was a godsend given the record-breaking horrid weather we had in the Spring. Had they waited to do the reconstruction until then, Club opening surely would have been delayed by at least a month.

As is predictable, the City planned and implemented the project with the bare minimum of communication to the Club and did not seek the Club's input into any critical aspect of what was done. We confirmed that shifting the courts slightly to the West was OK if it meant that the drainage channel at the edge of Court 4 could be avoided and a small incremental amount of extra space between the courts could be added. Otherwise, all of our suggestions and preferences were ignored in favour of the City's established approach.

The court reconstruction was completed in October of 2018.

- We ended-up with a relatively mediocre surface (i.e., worse than other City courts)
 - Rough channel drainage marks in Court 2
 - Premature cracking already in tram lines of Court 1
 - A small depression at the back of Court 4
- Instead of the courts draining outward from each court, as is standard, they are sloped downward all the way from Court 4 to the lowest point at Court 1 (into a pool of water that forms after each rain beneath the tree that is behind the bleachers)
 - This means drying the courts takes longer as the runoff is crossing the entire breadth of the courts
 - Squeegee process has to start at one end and finish at the other
- A standard tennis fence is 14' high; the City installed a 10' fence of the wrong grade
 - Competitive doubles play (or beginners miss-hits) sees balls flying over the fence regularly
 - Access to the favourite ball-catching area between the rink and the courts has been blocked-off from the main entrance side, just to make things more frustrating
 - A fence height extension contractor who has been doing sports-related fences for decades said he has only ever seen the gauge of fence used at our Club for a prison/correctional facility
 - The old fence was much better—it should be very soft and pliable (nylon) with spacing too small to hold a tennis ball
 - The stiff fence causes balls to splay in every direction, disturbing those who are playing on adjacent courts
 - The current fence and support beams represent a real head-injury risk
 - Signage will need to be erected to that effect

- The court resurfacing was rushed—before actual warm and dry weather arrived (in the coldest, wettest Spring on record in Toronto)
 - Paint peeling off has already been fixed once, but is occurring again
 - It will be fixed again in the Spring
- We do have new bleachers and small benches besides Courts 1 and 4
- The court area was widened slightly, so there is also a small amount of extra room between the courts
- The lighting is the latest technology LED (energy efficient and more focused beams) on extremely high light standards
 - The lights are so high that they glare into our neighbours' properties
 - The lights are rarely in line of sight when serving, which is a big advantage over the old lights and those used at most City-owned courts
 - The lights are inadequate at the edges of Courts 1 and 4—people very obviously gravitate to the middle courts at nighttime despite not having a fence beside to help catch balls
 - Court 4 and 1 are not appropriate for serious tennis (e.g., inter-county) until the lighting problems get resolved
 - Court 4 lighting problem is exacerbated by the tree overgrowth into the court area
 - City has been asked to trim trees repeatedly, but they do it only on their own pre-determined schedule
 - The City will not pay to upgrade the lighting to a usable standard
 - That would acknowledge that their design standard was flawed from the outset
 - Club will have to contemplate costs and options to upgrade it

2019 Operations

As all members know, the Club implemented a new electronic/online registration system for 2019.

- The system has many configuration options and is complex to use
- There is the possibility to integrate the registration system with the Club Website
- It supports features like court booking that we are not using at the moment
- Payment by credit or debit card is a major convenience for members relative to past years
- Membership report will give more details of how well this worked and feedback from users

As all members also know, the Club implemented locked people gates for the first time in 2019.

- Vandalism prevention, especially with brand new courts was the primary concern
- A low-cost lock system was chosen, which will deteriorate when exposed to the off-season weather
- There has been a fair amount of concern from the broader community about the locked gates—of course, they can no longer access the courts when members are not playing as they always could in the past
- The City failed to post public access hours (5 to 11 pm Saturdays) and community club signage (until late September), so further confusion arose as to what type of Club was operating and when were there, or were there, public hours
- City policy requires public access in an unfettered manner (i.e., the same way the members access the courts) and failure to do so is one of the few issues that materially affect the ability to secure a permit from the City

A range of lessons and camps was offered in 2019, as has been the tradition in past years when the Club was operating.

- Details of the arrangements made by the Club with the programs contractor, what transpired and the financial and membership implications will be contained in the report from the Vice President

No provision for court maintenance was pursued.

- The programs contractor was left holding the bag (literally and figuratively) to clean the courts to prevent safety issues for their customers (thank you to them!)
- A select few members also cleaned the courts regularly on a volunteer basis (thank you especially to them)

Organized social tennis (aka round robins) resumed in 2019.

- Friday night round robins, always popular, resumed thanks to Oleh Iwanyshyn—former board member and Club volunteer for many, many years
- Treasurer Bharat Pardasani organized a later Monday evening social tennis aimed at higher-level players

Signage to indicate how to use the court sign-up board and to reinforce Club rules and etiquette was not implemented.

- This, combined with no Club-related signage from the City, resulted in confusion
- (The sign-up board is already warped from the heat and may need to be replaced next year with a better-quality version)
- The issue is queuing—who has priority when all the courts are occupied and people are waiting to sign-up? A simple first-come, first-served was not utilized in the past, though few, if any, actually know the written rules of the Club and even if someone knows, there is no authority present to ensure that they are followed.
 - Those who know the rules do not necessarily agree they are optimal, so this needs to be resolved before purchasing and mounting signage

The Club finances are in good shape from a year-over-year perspective.

- Treasurer's report will provide details
- There are strategic issues that need to be discussed

Marc Collins
President
Swansea Community Tennis Club

October 1, 2019