

March 4, 2022

River Forest Park District:

As you know, many of the current pass holders have had the great pleasure of being long-time RF residents and Paddle supporters in our community. This past paddle season, we heard rumblings of feedback about ways to improve the leagues for both newcomers and seasoned players. We decided to pursue formally capturing feedback via an in-person meeting and emails.

We hope that you are open to receiving this input in order to improve the women's leagues, recognizing that no one league structure meets the needs of every player.

Here are common themes that came through:

#1 The women's leagues should be a fun, social, and low stress way for women in our community to gather and play. For many, the recent changes to the house league are stressful and are impacting women's desire to play in the house leagues.

#2 Improve the RF leagues by leveraging tactics that have worked in the past and/or tactics that are used by other paddle programs. RFPD has had women's leagues for more than 10 years, and many variations have been tried. The veteran players know what worked, what didn't work, and why. We also have access to how other clubs run their leagues. In addition, there are dozens of women who have chosen to set up their own league play outside the Park District structure due to the challenges associated with playing within the confines of the RFPD league structure. We ask that RFPD consider changing its approach as we look to shape the Fall 2022 women's leagues.

#3 Use multiple league structures to meet the various needs of the women's paddle community. With two nights and four courts allocated to the women's leagues, several structures can be implemented simultaneously to meet the needs of the community. Some ideas that were explored include:

>>> A Team league: Play on Monday night

>>> A Competitive league: Play on Wednesday (or non-Men's travel) night with courts allocated based on sign up preferences

>>> A Social league: Play on Wednesday (or non-Men's travel) night with courts allocated based on sign up preferences

Providing details about each structure would allow women to select their desired environment. Many women have offered their time to assist with the league set up, so manpower should not be an issue. There are nuances associated with the different league structures, but clear communication should address that matter.

#4 No matter the league structure, addressing the needs of beginner players is required.

A person would not join a swim team or bridge league if she doesn't know how to swim or play bridge. However, women are joining the platform tennis leagues every season having never picked up a paddle. It is great that new women pass holders are getting into the sport, but it is a disservice to those players who have taken the time to learn the game.

A way to address that issue is to require beginner players to take lessons or obtain a pro "sign off" before joining the league. As an alternative, in the past we put all of the beginners together for the first

few weeks of the league, and had volunteers assist with teaching them the basics. We then incorporated the beginners into the rotation, based on their skill level, for the remaining weeks.

This process allowed beginner players to find a group of similarly skilled players with whom to learn the sport, while experienced players were not being forced to “give lessons” to the new players during league matches. This is a WIN -WIN for all women in the league.

#5 Use a cross section of players to make league decisions and implement change.

The women's house league would benefit from a committee, with committee representatives selected by their peers. The representatives' input should have weight. Decisions impacting dozens of league players should not be made outside a committee structure. Given that our paddle program is self-funded and community driven, we ask that the Administrator's role be to work in partnership with the league representatives for an outcome which all parties involved can feel good about. If a committee structure in partnership with the RFPD is not feasible, then the women would request that we shift to the structure the men use, and allow a league commissioner and the player representatives to manage the process.

#6 Be transparent and open with processes and procedures in connection with the leagues.

There is a lot of confusion right now about processes and procedures, causing existing pass holders and prospective women pass holders to shy away from the house leagues. We suggest posting the process online and be consistent with how leagues are arranged.

For a team structure, the path to success is to ensure captains are willing to assess, rank, and position players for team play in a consistent manner, removing personal bias. Similarly, for competitive and social leagues, the flight selection and movement process needs to be transparent and consistent.

#7 Invest time or money to ensure fair league schedules.

In the recent past, there were many instances of league players being assigned to courts with the same players over and over again, having back to back byes, and having more byes than others in the flights. These errors can be avoided with software, attention to detail, or both.

#8 Evolve the Park District's culture to support the pass holders.

The women in the community feel that they are not being heard by the current administration at the RF Park District. We would like to have more dialogue versus being overlooked.

We know this was a big download but as you can see, the women in our paddle community are passionate about the short term and long term success of the program. We fear that we will continue to lose enrollment due to the issues mentioned above. In addition, we are concerned that there is nothing mentioned in the spring brochure about upcoming lessons or drills.

Please let us know when we may have a forum to discuss the above in more detail.

Sincerely,

Women Platform Tennis Pass Holders.