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Seattle homeless RV site now eyed for pickleball complex, not housing

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A 1.25-acre site in Interbay, along 15th Avenue Northwest, is slated to temporarily host RVs and tiny houses for the next couple of



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The site of Seattle's only parking lot for homeless people living in RVs could eventually become a 20-court pickleball complex.

Not long ago, the property was slated for housing. Developer Maria Barrientos submitted applications to the city in April to erect about 300 apartments on the narrow, 1.25-acre site in Interbay, which is owned by Seattle Storm co-owner Ginny Gilder. Because such projects can take years to break ground, Gilder agreed in May to host an RV safe lot and tiny houses in the meantime.

The Low Income Housing Institute hopes to open the safe lot soon, having initially aimed to do so last month. But the long-term plan for the site has changed, with Barrientos and Gilder now pivoting to pickleball. They want to build 20 to 22 courts, plus bathrooms, community spaces and parking stalls, with some courts inside and some on a roof deck, according to [city permitting records](#) the Puget Sound Business Journal [reported first](#).

A city blog [identified](#) the applicant as Pickle at the Palms LLC, which is governed by Gilder. Neither she nor Barrientos returned interview requests.

Many people without homes in the Seattle area live in vehicles, including RVs, cars and trucks. LIHI searched [far and wide](#) for an appropriate location to open an RV safe lot before negotiating to use the property on 15th Avenue West, north of West Bertona Street, Executive Director Sharon Lee said. The site was previously used by a car wash and a coffee stand, she said. It's now expected to host 26 RVs and other oversize vehicles, plus nine tiny houses, whenever the city approves LIHI's construction permit.



Lee said the development pivot shouldn't pose a problem for LIHI. The pickleball complex won't be built right away, and the safe lot and tiny houses can move elsewhere if the project breaks ground before LIHI's five-year lease ends, she said, expecting to use the property for at least two years.

"They're going to have to do the architectural work and get permits and financing," Lee said. "It will take a while. We like working with developers who have land where we can be there on an interim basis."

The start date for the safe lot has been delayed while the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections works with LIHI on details related to permitting the lot, said Wendy Shark, a spokesperson for the department.

“There are significant challenges at this site with maintaining stability of the steep slope relative to the added weight and proximity of the RVs,” Shark said in an email Friday. “We are also asking that stormwater runoff be controlled to reduce risk of erosion to the slope.”

The department will expedite the process once LIHI responds with modified plans, Shark said.

Invented on Bainbridge Island in 1965 and played casually for decades by a small number of Puget Sound locals, pickleball has exploded in popularity in recent years. Nationwide participation almost doubled to 4.8 million in 2022. Gov. Jay Inslee has named the tennis-like racket game Washington’s official state sport. And a professional league has launched, with big-name investors like ex-NFL star Tom Brady, rapper Drake and actor Michael B. Jordan. Seattle’s Woodland Park hosted a pro tournament this past July.

You can play pickleball at some Seattle community centers and there are 90 outdoor courts at city parks, but you have to bring your own net in many cases. Mayor Bruce Harrell announced Thursday the city has created a new court in Belltown and will host a tournament there next weekend.

A pickleball complex in Interbay could absorb some of the growing demand among players for high-quality courts and would be in line with another sports project across the street; Barrientos’ company is developing a new practice center for the Storm on a Gilder-owned site there.

At the same time, advocates for more housing in Seattle may be disappointed. In an interview with the Business Journal, Barrientos attributed the change to increased financing expenses and costly city requirements. The project, described as “workforce” (moderately priced) housing, was expected to take 36 months to permit and two years to build.

“I know the owners tried really hard to do multifamily housing,” Lee said.

Barrientos told the Business Journal the pickleball project emerged in July and could break ground in summer 2025, with matches starting in 2026.

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