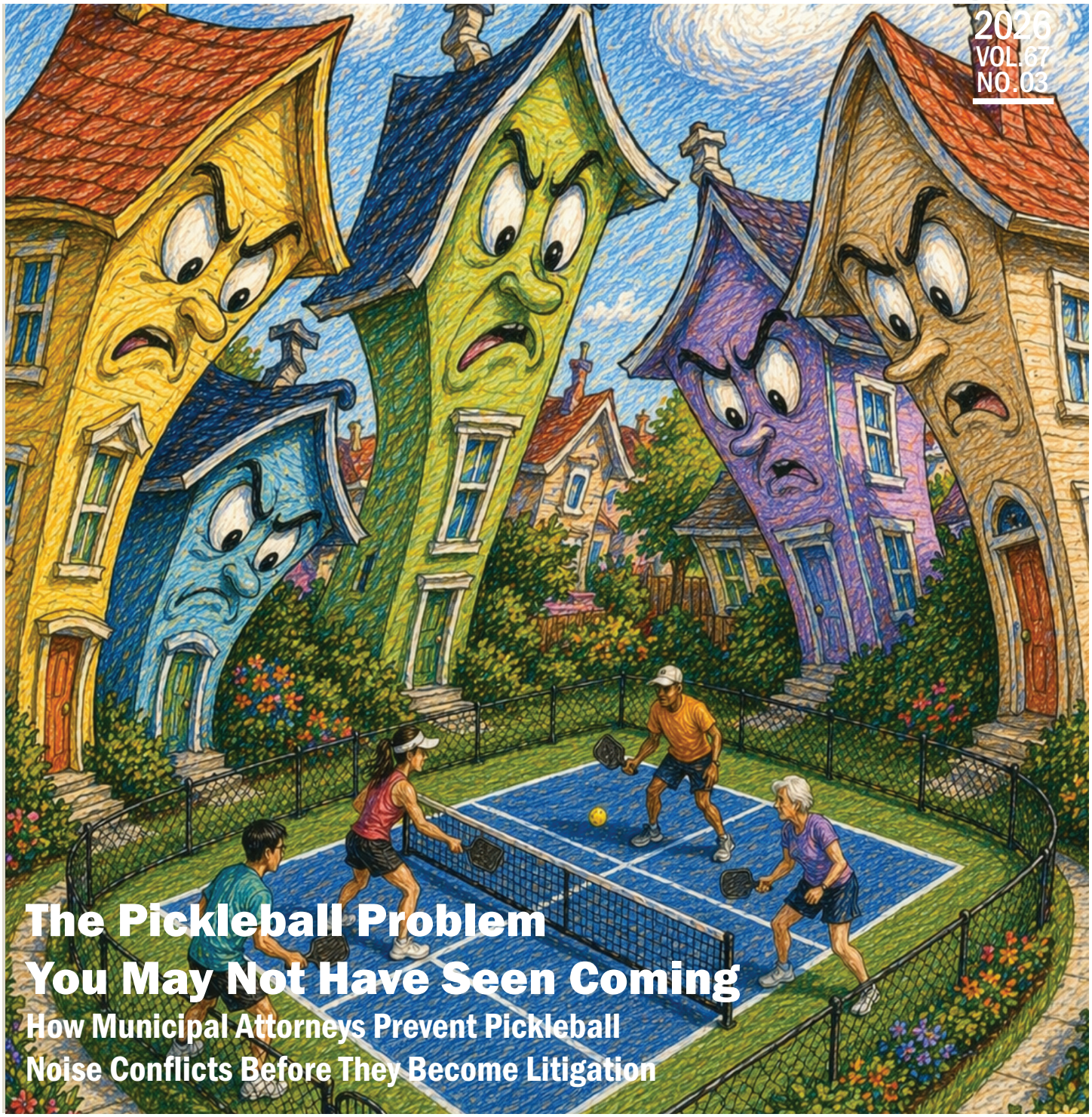
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The Pickleball Problem You May Not Have Seen Coming

How Municipal Attorneys Prevent Pickleball Noise Conflicts Before They Become Litigation

CASE STUDY

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Bringing the Court to the Community

The City of Mobile's Innovative Traffic Warrant Clinic Partnership

Across the country, municipal legal departments are increasingly called upon to think beyond traditional enforcement models and toward solutions that promote access to justice, reduce barriers to compliance, and strengthen community trust. In Mobile, Alabama, a groundbreaking partnership between the City of Mobile Legal Department, the Mobile Municipal Court, and Growing Real Alternatives Everywhere (GRAE), founded by Anza Bencal, is demonstrating how local governments can do exactly that.

Since May 2024, the City of Mobile has hosted biannual Traffic Warrant Clinics designed to resolve outstanding traffic warrants in a community-centered environment. Launched in recognition of Law Day 2024, the initiative marked a historic first: Mobile became the first city in Alabama to partner with GRAE to host this innovative model. In less than two years, the program has cleared more than 3,500 warrants — transforming lives while also reducing court backlog and improving administrative efficiency.

A New Model for Municipal Courts

Outstanding traffic warrants often stem from missed court dates, unpaid fines, or minor infractions that escalate over time. For many residents, these warrants can create cascading consequences: suspended driver's licenses, barriers to employment, difficulty securing housing, and fear of arrest during routine traffic stops. The City of Mobile recognized that traditional court processes — while legally sound — were not always accessible or welcoming for individuals who felt overwhelmed or intimidated by the system. In response, city leadership sought a solution that would uphold the integrity of the law while removing unnecessary barriers to resolution. The result was the Traffic Warrant Clinic model. Rather than requiring residents to navigate formal courthouse settings, the City made a deliberate decision to "bring the court to the community." Clinics are held at neighborhood venues, such as community recreation centers, where residents can voluntarily appear to address eligible warrants in a structured yet welcoming environment. The setting is intentional. There is no formal dress code. Judges and court staff wear plain clothes. A local DJ provides music. Families are welcome. Free food is available. Community organizations host informational tables offering resources on workforce development, continuing education, legal services, and social support programs. The atmosphere is one of resolution — not reprimand.

The Role of GRAE and Its Founder, Anza Bencal

GRAE, founded by Anza Bencal, brings extensive experience facilitating warrant resolution clinics nationwide. The organization emphasizes accessibility, dignity, and proactive engagement, helping municipalities create welcoming and effective events. In Mobile, GRAE's collaboration ensures that residents are aware of the clinics and understand that they provide a safe opportunity to resolve qualifying non-violent traffic warrants without fear of arrest at the event. The nonprofit's outreach — which includes canvassing, neighborhood engagement, and partnerships with community groups — ensures that residents who might otherwise remain disconnected from the court system have the information and support they need to participate. By combining municipal authority with GRAE's community expertise and leadership under Anza Bencal, Mobile has developed a model that is both effective and replicable in other jurisdictions.

Municipal Legal Leadership at the Forefront

This initiative has been spearheaded by Deputy City Attorney Suntrease Williams-Maynard and Deborah McGowin, Director of Courts for the City of Mobile. Their leadership reflects a broader evolution in municipal law practice — one that balances enforcement responsibilities with community-centered problem-solving. From a municipal law perspective, the clinics require careful coordination among the Legal Department, Municipal Court, clerks, judges, law enforcement, and community partners. Policies and procedures must be clearly defined to determine eligibility criteria, warrant resolution mechanisms, documentation requirements, and compliance safeguards. The success of the program demonstrates that innovation in municipal law does not require abandoning structure; rather, it requires thoughtful adaptation of existing authority to meet residents where they are.

Measurable Impact

Since the program's launch in May 2024:

- More than 3,500 traffic warrants have been cleared.
- Hundreds of residents have appeared voluntarily to resolve outstanding matters.
- Court backlog related to qualifying traffic warrants has been meaningfully reduced.
- Residents have regained stability in areas such as employment and transportation.

Equally important, the program has strengthened public confidence in local government. By offering a dignified path toward resolution, the City reinforces the message that municipal courts exist not only to enforce laws but also to serve communities.

High attendance at subsequent clinics — including events where doors opened early to accommodate demand — signals that residents view the clinics as credible and beneficial opportunities.

Operational Considerations for Other Municipalities

For municipalities interested in replicating this model, several operational insights from Mobile's experience may prove valuable:

1. **Cross-Department Coordination Is Essential.** Legal, court administration, communications, and law enforcement must collaborate closely to ensure clarity and consistency.
2. **Clearly Defined Eligibility Criteria.** The clinics focus on qualifying non-violent traffic-related warrants. Clear guidelines protect legal integrity and public confidence.
3. **Community-Based Venue Selection.** Hosting events in accessible, familiar locations reduces psychological barriers and encourages participation.
4. **Resource Integration.** Including workforce development agencies, educational institutions, and legal aid organizations broadens the impact beyond warrant resolution.
5. **Messaging Matters.** Public communications should emphasize safety, accessibility, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Broader Implications for Municipal Practice

Municipal attorneys are uniquely positioned to shape policies that intersect law, public administration, and community trust. The City of Mobile's Traffic Warrant Clinics illustrate how legal departments can lead innovative efforts that simultaneously:

- Improve compliance rates,
- Reduce administrative burdens,
- Advance equitable access to justice, and
- Strengthen relationships between residents and local government.

Importantly, this initiative does not compromise public safety or legal standards. Instead, it enhances accountability by creating structured opportunities for voluntary resolution. For many participants, the clinic represents the first positive interaction they have had with the court system in years. That shift in perception carries long-term benefits for civic engagement and institutional legitimacy.

A Model Worth Sharing

As cities nationwide explore alternatives to traditional enforcement-heavy models for low-level offenses, Mobile's experience offers a compelling case study. By partnering with GRAE under Anza Bencal's leadership and leveraging strong municipal legal leadership, the City has created a sustainable, twice-yearly program that delivers measurable results. The clinics are not one-time amnesty events. They are structured, recurring opportunities embedded into the City's annual calendar, beginning each year in May in recognition of Law Day.

In doing so, the City of Mobile has reframed what access to municipal justice can look like: accessible but orderly, welcoming but accountable, efficient yet compassionate. For members of the International Municipal Lawyers Association, this model underscores an important reality: municipal innovation often begins not with sweeping legislative reform, but with thoughtful adaptation of existing authority and collaborative partnerships.

Municipal Court Presiding Judge Carvine Adams has presided over each of the City of Mobile's Traffic Warrant Clinics. She embraced the idea of a "community court" when it was initially presented and has been a consistent component contributing to it's success.

Mobile's Traffic Warrant Clinics demonstrate that when municipal legal departments take proactive leadership roles, they can design programs that advance both justice and community wellbeing. M.