

Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee

Report on Soccer Prohibition Signs in Culver City Parks EHRAC Meeting 4/16/24

By EHRAC Chairperson: Carlos Valverde

As a member of the Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee, I write this report as a concern for an issue that has long been a point of discussion among some community members. For over 20 years, all Culver City Parks display a sign post prohibiting adult soccer activities but the signs are often perceived as exclusionary and culturally insensitive.

The signs (picture provided)

I was born and raised in Culver City and have taught at Culver City High School for 27 years. For 24 of these years I taught Intercultural Literature, a course that explores diversity in the US. In class discussions, the topic of these signs was often brought up by students who felt disturbed about these signs not necessarily about the prohibition of adult soccer activities but about how it targeted a Spanish speaking population. Throughout these years, I have also had numerous conversations with members of the community, fellow AYSO parents, and neighbors. Within these conversations the signs seem to carry a meaning that people perceive beyond an issue with the sport or the fields.

In August 2020, I posted a picture of these signs on my personal Facebook account. I did not ask a question nor did I write anything, but did so with the intent to elicit unprompted responses/opinions from my Facebook followers, who mostly lived, studied or currently live in Culver City.

Some comments suggested that perhaps it was due to the condition of the field, however, other comments from people who grew up in Culver City included, "You know why it's in Spanish... and who plays soccer at the parks?" Another comment explained, "... agreed the verbiage allows any CCPD officer to stop anyone with a soccer ball on the field. We all know *Raza* is its biggest enthusiast and will play in almost any park. As they should!"

At the time, a community member and now a current CCUSD school board member added to my post an announcement for a PRCS meeting which would discuss the removal of these signs as she described them as "anti-adults, anti-Latinx, and anti-access to public parks."

I spoke at the PRCS meeting on Tuesday, September 1, 2020, also urging for the removal of the signs. Eventually the PRCS voted down (3-2) the removal of the signs. After the results of the PRCS vote was posted on my Facebook string of comments, one community member asked, "So what's it going to take to get the racists off the commission?"

I am not aware of any history with these signs after this vote. This would be an inquiry on the part of EHRAC.

Why is this important?

The conversations about these signs suggest that many of our community members see these as problematic as the signs not only prohibit the world's most popular sport for adults, but its translation in only one other language (Spanish) targets a specific ethnic group.

With the recent release of the Culver City Historical Context Study, it reminds us of our City's history of discriminatory attitudes that persisted through unfair housing practices, racial covenants, schooling, etc. The study explains that in communities such as Culver City, "suburban communities increasingly used the power to control public spaces as a way to manage racial dynamics and protect the interests of White homeowners, often cloaked, somewhat putatively, with "colorblind" language" (p. 52).

The study goes on to cite the example from 1982 where the "Fox Hills Property Owners Association, a politically powerful consortium of property owners and real estate interests in the southernmost section of Culver City, petitioned city officials to remove basketball courts at Fox Hills Park." (p. 52). According to the study, more recent examples of discrimination are "not as explicit as the exclusionary attitudes of years past, but nonetheless continued to work against people of color and often made them feel like outsiders in their own community" (52).

I understand that Culver City today is not the same city of the past, but for many residents these signs still carry the memory of that time. The signs produce a reaction that, for some, is unwelcoming and targeted. The city of Culver City can do better.

Potential Inquiry by EHRAC:

I would like to propose that EHRAC create an ad hoc subcommittee to

- conduct an inquiry about the history of the soccer prohibition signs in Culver City Parks.
- Elicit information/remarks/comments from community members regarding the signs
- Examine the information and determine if any recommendations should be made to the Council.