

Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee

Report on Soccer Prohibition Signs in Culver City Parks EHRAC Meeting 8/19/25

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The ad hoc subcommittee reviewed archived Council minutes and documents dating back from 1994 regarding the Soccer Prohibition signs located in all parks in Culver City. The findings of this review are explained in past ad hoc subcommittee reports.

In consideration that the adult soccer prohibition signs have now been removed by PRCS, the ad hoc subcommittee submits the following narrative as our final report for this committee. The narrative describes the history of the signs as well as background information that prompted the work of this committee.

An End to Three Decades of Perceived Bias at Culver City Parks



Very few people have noticed the Adult Soccer prohibition signs have been removed from all Culver City Parks, ending a controversial legacy that had troubled many residents for almost 30 years.

The legacy of the signs date back to 1994, a tumultuous year where the primary immigration controversy in California was Proposition 187, a ballot initiative titled "Save Our State," which sparked intense debate surrounding immigrants within the state. The signs went up in the fall of 1994, coinciding with the fierce political debate being played out on airwaves and television commercials depicting images suggesting an 'invasion' of criminals coming from our southern border.

As a UCLA student at the time, Carlos Valverde remembers far too well the heightened arguments to deny immigrants healthcare and social services. “The signs went up in Culver City in the midst of the political debate surrounding immigrants. It was like a slap in the face to target soccer and the Spanish speaking community. What better way to say ‘you’re not welcome here’ than to deny adult Latinos from playing Latin America’s (and the world’s) most popular sport,” explained Valverde.

The adult soccer prohibition signs became the focus of renewed interest last April when Valverde, now member of the Culver City Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee (EHRAC), introduced an ad hoc subcommittee to research the processes and placement of these signs - a personal interest that gnawed at him since the signs went up.

Valverde began teaching at Culver City High School in 1997 and the controversial signs had become a subject of discussion among his students and parents for over 20 years. As an AYSO volunteer when his daughters played as children, the signs had also been the subject of irritation and sometimes anger by other residents, expressed through informal encounters and commentary.

EHRAC’s research, conducted by City staff, produced documentation about the controversial signs tracing back to 1994. During that year, residents near Culver Park West approached the former Human Services and Park Commission (now known as the Parks, Recreation and Community Services), with concerns that the park was too small for adult soccer activities. In the Commission’s fact finding process, testimony from residents indicated that soccer activities were “incompatible with other recreational uses for which the park is suitable;” had a “detrimental effect on surrounding properties” caused by balls landing on properties, people trespassing into properties to retrieve balls, and that unregulated soccer had a “detrimental effect on the program of turf and field maintenance at Culver West Park.” The Commission agreed that “adult soccer playing at Culver West Park is inconsistent with the best and appropriate uses of the park area and should be prohibited.”

Within weeks of the Commission’s vote to prohibit adult soccer at Culver Park West, signs prohibiting adult soccer went up at all Culver City parks. In EHRAC’s inquiry, no documentation was found by City staff that indicated a formal decision by the Commission or the City Council to have these signs placed at parks other than Culver Park West. According to City staff, they were “unsure whether this ‘Proposed Policy’ was ever formally adopted....”

EHRAC’s document review located a letter written in 1995 that had been written by Syd Kronenthal, Director Human Services, to CCUSD Superintendent Curtis Ruthmeyer, explaining that adult soccer had been prohibited at other parks with similar conditions, specifically only naming Tellefson Park, Coombs Park, Maxella Park, and El Marino Park. The timeline suggests that between September of 1994 and September 1995, the City had installed the adult soccer prohibition signs throughout all Culver City Parks but there is no record of this formal decision.

In 2018, the Parks Recreation Community Services Commission (PRCS) held a meeting to discuss field space for adult sports and make recommendations for future consideration. The meeting presented the 2009 Master Plan Parks and Facilities Inventory which lists soccer fields at Culver City and Veterans Memorial Parks and “open space” soccer fields at Vets, Fox Hills, Blanco, El Mario, and Tellefson Parks. According to City staff, “This does not include any notations on who is allowed to play on these fields, but rather just an inventory of soccer fields.”

Apparently at the 2018 PRCS meeting, the Commission cited a “nine month study” that apparently was conducted in 1994 that gave reasons for adult soccer being prohibited at Culver Park West and eventually throughout parks in Culver City. However, City staff was unable to locate the study for EHRAC’s investigation. The apparent study claimed behavioral issues from players, damage to the turf and conflicts with other activities in the parks, yet unable to find evidence as to who conducted the study and why only adult soccer specifically was prohibited and no other sports.

In a 2024 phone conversation with former Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director, Daniel Hernandez, staff learned that adult soccer had been prohibited at parks in Culver City for years, but not other sports. During his tenure, Director Hernandez did not change the policies, but rather continued to enforce them as had been done in the past.

Throughout the years, Valverde had made informal inquiries to City staff about the signs. In most cases, staff explained that the signs were due to heavy turf damage. Yet no one could say definitively as to why soccer was targeted, why no other sport was targeted and why it only targeted a Spanish speaking population.

It was not until 2018, 23 years after the signs went up, that PRCS began to address the issue of the signs. During this discussion, concern about the turf damage was considered, however, “Commission members expressed an interest in gaining a better understanding of the background and implications of this [soccer] prohibition.”

At a later meeting that year, the Commission considered a motion to present to the City Council “to consider removing the signage prohibiting soccer in Culver City parks subsequent to receiving the Turf Report.” The motion failed to pass (1 aye; 3 nays; 1 abstention).

At this same August 7, 2018 meeting, a Parks and Facilities Sections of the Culver City Municipal Code Review Ad Hoc Subcommittee was formed to review and provide potential recommended updates to the CC Municipal Code related to parks and facilities. City staff collected park prohibition information from adjacent cities. The Municipal Code Review Ad Hoc Subcommittee made recommendations regarding some of the other sections in the municipal code. After this meeting, the lower half of the Adult Soccer Activities prohibition sign, which contains text in Spanish, was redacted with tape at all City parks. Apparently, since 2018, staff would re-apply the tape each time it was noticed and or reported that it has been removed. EHRAC’s investigation did not find why this directive or decision had been given.

In 2020, once again, the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission held a meeting to discuss park prohibitions signage in Culver City parks and the “Removal and/or Replacement of Existing Signs.” The Commission listed, apparently for the first time in City record, the locations of the soccer prohibition signs. The Commission's report mentions, “The posting of signage is not legally required in order to enforce park rules and regulations, however, signs serve as a way of putting the public on notice of prohibited conduct.”

For EHRAC, this was an area of consternation as it raised the question, “Who exactly was being put “on notice” with signs targeting only one sport (and in Spanish)?” It was quite usual to drive or walk past city parks watching ultimate frisbee, flag football, AYSO practices, etc. being played yet the sign prohibiting adult soccer was prominently displayed.

For Valverde, EHRAC and some other residents, the signs were a constant reminder of past practices of exclusion through indirect policies. With the 2024 release of the Culver City Historical Context Study, the study cited the 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 cited 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).

At the 2020 PRCS meeting, public comment received by members of the community pointed toward a perceived bias with the signs. Disa Lindgren expressed concern of the Spanish targeting a specific group and “does not communicate respect and appreciation of diversity.” Noah Zatz asserted that the signage is “blatantly racist and should be removed...it is a sign of exclusion” which targeted a sport “associated with the Latinx community.” Valverde, attending as a private citizen, also added to public comment that many members of the community were offended by the signage as it misunderstood the cultural significance of soccer, the need for City officials to listen to the community, to be aware of the City's history of keeping certain people out, and that the signage carried greater meaning than the issue of preserving turf. The PRCS Commission moved to recommend that the City Council remove all signage that prohibits soccer. The motion failed with two ayes, three noes.

In August 2020, Valverde posted a picture of these signs on his personal Facebook account. The post was a simple picture of the adult soccer prohibition sign without words or explanation. The post prompted unsolicited responses from his Facebook followers who mostly lived, studied or currently live in Culver City. Comments 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 serving CCUSD school board member added to Valverde's post describing the signs as "anti-adults, anti-Latinx, and anti-access to public parks."

After the initial post, Valverde updated it with the PRCS vote that resulted in the refusal to remove the signs, prompting one community member to ask, "So what's it going to take to get the racists off the commission?"

It was not until April of 2024, as a member of EHRAC, that Valverde introduced an ad hoc subcommittee to study the issue. In its initial weeks of forming the ad hoc subcommittee, City staff informed the subcommittee that the signs were scheduled to be removed in the fall of 2025 as part of park maintenance. In February of 2025, the EHRAC ad hoc subcommittee introduced a report that called for a recommendation to the City Council to take up the matter and to discuss the long history of these signs.

As EHRAC was expected to deliver this recommendation to City Council in May 2025, the ad hoc subcommittee discovered that the adult soccer prohibition signs were removed the week prior. The subcommittee inquired with PRCS Director Dani Hernandez to ask as to why the signs were removed before their scheduled removal in the fall of 2025. According to staff, the removal was due to the "accelerated project completion timeline/date."

The removal of the signs now ends the long legacy of perceived bias by some residents. It is not clear whether EHRAC's work in addressing the issue prompted the expeditious removal of the signs nor is it clear why the signs specifically were removed the week prior to EHRAC's report to Council. However, EHRAC's subcommittee believes that the absence of these signs is good for Culver City as it ended what was perceived to be an exclusionary practice that did not match with Culver City's commitment to diversity. In addition, the removal of the signs finally ends, for some residents, the constant reminder of the politics of exclusion they correlated with.