



Los Angeles County

Commission on Human Relations

Community and Senior Services
3175 West Sixth Street
Los Angeles, California 90020

May 2, 2016

TO: COMMISSIONERS

FROM: ROBIN S. TOMA

APPROVED MOTION ON HINDENBURG SIGN AS AMENDED

At today's meeting of the Commission, after receiving public comment from members of the public and engaging in discussion among Commissioners and members of the public, the following motion as amended was made by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Dove, and passed by all commissioners voting in favor, except for Commissioner Oh who participated via phone and abstained due to having difficulty hearing all of the discussion:

Motion as amended and approved: *That based upon the information presented at the public hearing on the "Hindenburg Park" sign recently placed by the County Parks and Recreation Department (Parks and Rec) at the County's Crescenta Valley Park and subsequent public comment received by our Commission, our Commission recommends to Parks and Rec (1) immediate removal of the recently placed Hindenburg Park sign; (2) consideration of a new sign which honors the German American heritage of that section of the park without reference to the name "Hindenburg"; (3) convening of an ad hoc community task force comprised of representatives of the community and Parks and Rec and facilitated by an accepted neutral mediator (which the Commission offers to assist in identifying) that would be given 30 days to develop the design of a new sign (including new language) and include a history of the park that provides a learning opportunity; and (4) Parks and Rec would have final approval of the sign and would pay for the creation and installation of the new sign which commemorates the German American heritage of the park without re-establishing the name "Hindenburg Park."*

To understand the reasons for this motion and its specific proposals, set forth below are the events and process which led to the public hearing and the submission of information by members of the public and Parks and Rec at that hearing.

Following that, this memo presents the findings and analysis which are the basis for this motion.

Events and Process Leading to the Public Hearing and this Motion

On March 1, 2016, the L.A. County Parks and Recreation (Parks and Rec) at the suggestion of the 5th Supervisorial District staff contacted the Executive Director of our Commission to request assistance in addressing complaints received by the Department about the “Hindenburg Park” sign recently placed at the entrance to one part of the County’s Crescenta Valley Park (CV Park). The complaints, which will be set forth in the findings below, alleged the Hindenburg Park sign (see image below) to be extremely offensive because of Hindenburg’s role as the President of Germany’s Weimar Republic who appointed Adolf Hitler to the position of Chancellor of Germany and other actions which lead to the takeover of the German national government by the Nazi Party. Complaints also alleged that Hindenburg was a famed leader of Germany’s military during World War One, in which Germany waged war against a group of nations that included the U.S., and thus was disrespectful of U.S. soldiers who were killed or injured by Hindenburg’s military leadership. Responses by the organization that advocated and fundraised for the sign stated that their intent was not that, but to recognize the history of that portion of the park, which was previously named Hindenburg Park prior to it being sold to the County to become part of Crescenta Valley Park.

On March 7, 2016, at a regularly scheduled Commission meeting, our Commission received information regarding this request for assistance, and voted to agree to assist Parks and Rec in handling this controversy, as it fell within our jurisdiction and capacity to address.

Between March 7 and March 22, Parks and Rec informed us that the main parties to the controversy were not willing to participate in a mediation at this time, and that both sides wanted an opportunity to be heard publicly on this issue.

On April 7, 2016, our Commission held a duly noticed public hearing at the Sparr Heights Community Center (Glendale City facility), near CV Park, to receive the views, opinions and information from any member of the public. Commissioner Sandra Thomas served as chair, accompanied by Commissioners Susanne Cumming and Isabelle Gunning. An estimated 120 people were in attendance, and 47 persons spoke on the question of whether the Hindenburg Park sign should or should not be removed and why. The hearing lasted approximately two hours and 20 minutes, so that all persons requesting to speak could be given the opportunity to be heard. Staff commends Commissioners Thomas, Cumming and Gunning, noting that they had to commit a substantial amount of time for the hearing, and they conducted themselves in a manner consistent with our efforts to ensure it was a fair and impartial hearing.

Findings and Analysis

Having heard and reviewed the multitude of public comments provided at the public hearing, which includes all correspondence sent to Parks and Rec on this matter (which Parks and Rec has stated includes any correspondence sent to Supervisor Antonovich’s office, who represents the district in which CV Park and the Hindenburg Park sign are located), we find as follows:

1. Paul Von Hindenburg was a famed general in Germany’s military forces during World War I (1914-1917). During the democratic era of the Weimar Republic (1917-1933), Hindenburg was elected President of Germany in 1925 and appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in 1933. Hindenburg was never a member of the Nazi Party.

He granted special powers to Chancellor Hitler shortly before passing away in 1934. Soon thereafter, Hitler and the Nazi Party engaged in actions to take total control of Germany's government, leading to brutal repression against all of its political opponents, the exaltation of a racially pure "Aryan" nation, and a campaign of military aggression against other countries that led to World War II in 1940, and the Holocaust, which was the official scapegoating, accompanying dehumanization, and attempted genocide of the Jewish people throughout Europe.

2. The portion of CV Park which is marked by the "Hindenburg Park" was originally named such to honor the popular President of Germany shortly after his death in 1934, by the private owners of the property who regularly gathered there for social and cultural events by members of the German American community.
3. During the time which this portion of CV Park was privately owned, a large bust of Hindenburg was placed there, as well as a bust of famous German composer Ludwig Van Beethoven. Both busts were removed when the park sold to the County in 1957 or 1958.
4. There are two other markers which reference Hindenburg inside that section of CV Park: (1) one plaque on a large rock that references the history of the German American community role in that part of the park (see photo below), and (2) another which is a larger display board that describes in words and pictures the history of that section of the park.
5. In February 2015, a group called the Tricentennial Foundation requested to create and place a new sign at the main vehicle entrance of that section of the park. The original proposal was that the sign would say "Willkommen, Welcome to the Historic German Section of Crescenta Valley Park, Hindenberg Park (County Seals Below, and Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation).
6. In response, Parks and Rec asked the Tricentennial Foundation representative Hans Eberhard to obtain community support for the park.
7. Mr. Eberhard obtained the support from the Crescenta Historical Society, the Crescenta Valley Chamber of Commerce, and other groups. The Tricentennial Foundation also raised and provided the funding for the sign's production costs.
8. In February 2016, Parks and Rec installed the Hindenburg Park sign at CV Park, having modified the design of the sign in consultation with the Tricentennial Foundation.
9. Since the sign was installed, Parks and Rec has heard from several community members who are not supportive of the sign and have asked about a process to have the sign removed, according to the testimony of the Parks and Rec historian.
10. The complaints about the sign are that it appears to rename the park "Hindenburg Park" and Paul von Hindenburg was a military leader of Germany during World War I, a prominent political figure in Germany from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, and appointed Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler to the leader of Germany's government in

1933. As is well known, Hitler and the Nazi Party gradually seized total control of the German government, calling itself The Third Reich. In Germany and those countries it had taken over, the Nazi government carried out the horrific attempt at genocide of the Jewish people, killing over 6 million Jews in what is known today as the Holocaust. Hitler proceeded to wage war on nearby countries, and allying itself with Japan and Italy, launch World War II which led to the death of millions of people around the world, including millions of Americans. Today, Nazism and its openly racist philosophy lives on in neo-Nazi and white supremacist organizations that have carried out hate violence in the U.S., including in L.A. County, as is documented in the Commission's annual reports on hate crime in our county.

11. Despite the complex nature of Hindenburg's role in history, it was noted by one speaker that it would be difficult to find any similar honor of Paul von Hindenburg today in Germany, given the recognition of his historical role in the rise of the Nazi regime.
12. It is documented that while the majority of activities in Hindenburg Park historically were of a social and cultural nature, as many public comments referenced, there was also documentation presented in the form of newspaper stories and photos of rallies there by the Bund, a German American political organization which openly supported the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s.
13. Today, Los Angeles County is home to the second largest community of Americans of Jewish ancestry and faith in the U.S. Among them are survivors of Nazi Germany's holocaust, and many are children and grandchildren of those survivors. Given Nazism's philosophy of racial superiority, it is not only Jews who are deeply offended by Nazism: African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and virtually anyone who considers themselves as non-white abhor Hitler and Nazism.
14. As acknowledged by some opponents of the sign, we find that the Hindenburg sign in question was posted without any ill-intent, and it is appropriate to recognize the history of the park, its German American roots, and its importance to the local community.
15. The erection of the Hindenburg Park sign in such a prominent place gives the erroneous impression that Crescenta Valley Park has been renamed "Hindenburg Park", and has understandably given public perception of a renewed attention and spotlight on the historical name of this portion of the park.
16. There is understandable concern that to place such a prominent sign today at the entrance of this section of the park is not merely a historical reference. It elevates the park's historical name Hindenburg Park, despite what Hindenburg represents for many today. To continue to do so is akin to newly placing the Confederate flag at government buildings in the south as a commemoration of the past, ignoring that it conveys the glorification of a slave society.
17. The historical name of Hindenburg Park is already commemorated in two significant places in the park, and therefore does not need to be the focus of another sign, and a prominent one at that, at the main vehicular entrance to this section of the park.

18. First, there is a sizable educational plaque (approximately 5 feet wide by 2 feet high) inside the park which is titled "Hindenburg Park." This display plaque includes text, photos and drawings to explain the history of the park, who Hindenburg was, German American cultural and community activities that occurred in the park, and an architectural drawing of the layout of the park as it was.
19. There is also a smaller bronze plaque that is titled "Hindenburg Park" that is on a large boulder placed to the left as you enter this part of CV park after crossing the concrete-encased wash.
20. The German American heritage of the park and its meaning for that community can be honored and commemorated with a reference to "Welcome to the Historic German Section of Crescenta Valley Park," which was part of the original proposal, or other similar language, but need not reference Hindenburg.
21. A new sign could also utilize the rear portion of the sign as an educational experience that conveys a balanced historical view of the park, including the cultural community gatherings as well as the pro-Nazi rallies and the present controversy, so that we are reminded of a part of our history which by remembering, we are warned against repeating today.
22. Therefore, based upon the information presented at the public hearing on the "Hindenburg Park" sign recently placed by the County Parks and Recreation Department (Parks and Rec) at the County's Crescenta Valley Park and subsequent public comment received by our Commission, our Commission recommends to Parks and Rec the following:
 - a. Immediate removal of the recently placed Hindenburg Park sign;
 - b. Consideration of a new sign which honors the German American heritage of that section of the park without reference to the name "Hindenburg";
 - c. Convening of an ad hoc community task force comprised of representatives of the community and Parks and Rec and facilitated by an accepted neutral mediator (which the Commission offers to assist in identifying) that would be given 30 days to develop the design of a new sign (including new language) and include a history of the park that provides a learning experience; and
 - d. Parks and Rec would have final approval of the sign and would pay for the creation and installation of the new sign which commemorates the German American heritage of the park without re-establishing the name "Hindenburg Park."