



October 8, 2020

To All The Beautiful Boulders People:

We want to thank you for contributing to our [three online comment boxes](#), our two physical comment boxes (one in each location), and for reaching out via email and social media. We plan to respond to your feedback regularly, and this is our next installment in that series.

We can't thank you enough for contributing to the improvement of our Boulders community. We really appreciate the comments. We're happy and privileged to serve each and every one of you.

Sincerely,

Boulders Climbing Gym

Safe Space Feedback:

Comment: *I want to shout out the work that you all did with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County. However, it seems inappropriate to use words like "our new walls." Don't you think these are the boys and girls walls? You all made a misstep in calling these your walls. Aren't the lower income, mostly black and brown kids the real owners that reap the benefits of these? Or are you the white saviors that own these walls that you allow minorities to climb on?*

Response: Thanks for bringing this up and holding us accountable for our language, and for questioning our intention. We see your perspective and understand why you would bring this to our attention. We appreciate the opportunity to have a discussion about this.

We've worked extensively with the Boys & Girls Club on language and messaging regarding this initiative, and the use of "our" is deliberate. The clubs where these walls are installed are both located in parts of Madison that were historically - and until relatively recently - highly red-lined. This historical physical segregation is one of the reasons why Madison remains one of the most racially divided cities in the country, and one of the aims of this new program is to break down some of these barriers.

When we explored language that talked of "their walls" and "our programs" it seemed to reinforce the idea of "separate but equal" segregation common to the Jim Crow era, and we wanted to avoid repeating language that fostered that kind of

division. Our intention is that there is no barrier to participation between the community at the Boys & Girls Clubs, and the rest of our programs. The goal is to make the kids from the clubs feel that because they climb in our programs at their walls, they naturally are welcome to climb in our gyms as well. Our Climb For Community initiative will close the funding loop to make this a reality, and one step to this is our new Mutual Aid membership program, which is a “pay what you can” membership model. Further, as we hire members of the Boys & Girls Club community to staff these walls, they will also work at our gyms. The use of the word “our” is to reinforce the idea that there’s a direct pathway to participation and employment in climbing for those who are so inspired, and that they’re part of us, and we’re part of them.

The models that we examined for comparison include the commercial food vendors who set up locations in area high schools, as well as the Boys & Girls Club employees who work in the school districts. While the food service and the BGDC staff are the assets of the communities they serve, the food vendors refer to them as “our locations,” and the Boys & Girls Clubs are very clear that “their” employees work in the schools, though these staff members primarily answer to the school administration. It’s these and other similar partnerships that informed our decisions about how to present what we’re doing with the [1Climb](#) walls at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County.

Language is often inadequate in the short bursts that are necessary in social media. This is particularly true when we try to describe all that goes into decisions about how to present something new, and disruptive. We’re one of the first gyms in the country to take on this project, and - literally - there is no manual. We’re working closely with the team at 1Climb and at the Boys & Girls Clubs to solve the complex problems and explore the immense opportunities that are presenting themselves here. We’re going to make some mistakes, and not all of what we’re doing will be readily understandable from an outside perspective. We appreciate the feedback and questions, though. It’s good for all concerned to examine what we’re doing at every step.

Comment: *Thank you for making Boulders an inclusive, kind environment. My daughter feels a sense of belonging here.....*

Response: That’s so great to hear! Thank you. We’re glad she feels at home at Boulders.

General Feedback:

Comment: *Can you add Bluetooth speakers in the training room?*

Response: Thanks for the suggestion! Yes, we're looking into this. We're also exploring a general sound-system and AV upgrade to the Eastside location. The Bluetooth can happen quickly, and the general upgrade will take a bit of time. But we hear you, and we're on it.

Comment: *Love the autobelays! Thank you!!!!*

Response: We do too! You'll be happy to know that we're installing six more this week, make a reservation and come give them a try!

Comment: *Add a weight area w/squat rack, dumbbells, etc.*

Response: We assume that you mean that you would like to see this at our Downtown location, because our Eastside has all of this, of course. The hard part is that we're out of space Downtown, so there's not room to add this equipment. The other issue is that there's a lot of general fitness (and yoga) on and around the Square, so we built that location to focus on what we do best: Climbing! This said, we've thought about taking on additional space in the building, or working out a partnership with local fitness gyms and yoga studios. Most of this probably won't come together during COVID, but it's something we'll continue to explore. All of this said, our next gym(s) will have full health club amenities, so stand by for big things coming!

Route-Setting Feedback:

Comment: *Man I don't care too much about what grading system is used, but Boulders really needs to pick a system and stick with it. The changes make keeping track of progression really difficult.*

Response: We hear you, and relate. The challenge is that grading is subjective, and any community that sets a standard within itself ends up becoming something of an echo-chamber where it gets a lot harder to gauge grades. Changing up the systems every so often makes us all think about the grades, so we each have to re-examine our own bias. We've found that if we don't make changes, things get stale, or grades get soft or stout the longer our team goes without mixing it up.

Our current thought on this is to focus on movement and not so much on grades. Progress in the real world is the true benchmark, but even that can be deceiving if you compare it to what we're doing indoors. A good example is when one of our Boulders community members was in Hueco Tanks, and after a few tries did Lobster Claw. When she came off, she said: "That's really good, but no way is that V5, it's too easy." Someone else pointed out: "Actually, that's not only V5, it's *THE* V5!" Reshuffling the deck helps us all to keep it real, we've found, and as you said most of us are still more or less the same climber either way.

Comment: *Can we have some lower-graded overhanging routes? There was a great 5.8 blue route last month, would like to see more!*

Response: Noted! We'll work on this!

Comment: *I have been super impressed with the route-setting. I've been happy to see such thoughtful routes with incredibly varying styles and interesting movement. I noticed that even the "easy" routes often have interesting moves and beta. I appreciate the effort put into these easier routes and appreciate that the more difficult routes don't all just use strong moves and/or small holds, but require a bit of problem-solving and technique. Hope we continue to see such a fun and thoughtful variety of routes!*

Response: THANK YOU! You made our day/week/month/year! ;)