



### **Siting your Little Free Library**

You want people to feel as though your Little Free Library book-sharing box belongs to them, not just you. After all, it's your gift to the neighborhood! So make sure your library is easy to find, easy to see from the street or sidewalk, and easy to reach. You'll also want to consider handicap accessibility.

The library itself is its own best advertising, especially if people driving by can see it and stop without blocking traffic. If possible, try to place the library within reach of streetlights or provide it with its own lighting. (Watch this [video](#) for more information about picking a site and installing your Little Free Library.)

### **Common Concerns with Choosing a Little Free Library Location**

Stewards and supporters of Little Free Libraries want to know: is it okay to put a library on public property? If so, who should I talk to? Who has authority? Are there any restrictions to installing a library on my private property? Even though the library will be on your property, you'll still want to ensure you're abiding by local zoning laws and your HOA, neighborhood association, or building manager's rules (if applicable).

For parks, school districts, municipalities, and other governing bodies, the key issues that come up most often are:

- Liability and safety
- Right of way—both legal and actual—for snow plows, bike riders, walkers, mowers, cars, and other vehicles. Will library users be blocking traffic as they look inside? If so, consider moving the library back two or three feet from the sidewalk or path.
- Physical maintenance in case of damage as well as normal wear and tear
- Appropriateness. How will you ensure materials are suitable for the general public (children and adults)?

A parks administrator or streets engineer might ask: Who will be “responsible” for both the structure itself and its contents over the long term? If an organization or individual is the key contact, for example, what should the government agency do when that person is no longer willing or able to be the steward for the library?

In short, government officials want to minimize the administrative burden while trying to satisfy various publics' wishes. The bigger the city, the more rigorous the zoning laws might be. Small town governments probably have greater flexibility.

HOAs and neighborhood associations vary in the intensity of their regulations, but they're usually most concerned with the appearance of the library and who will be responsible for keeping it in good condition.

## How to Deal with Zoning Laws, Municipal Regulations, and HOA Rules

Little Free Library already has worked with many parks departments, city governments, and other institutions to install Little Free Library book-sharing boxes on public land. Through this process, we have found that some communities worry that they might be setting precedents that will cost them later on. So here is what we recommend:

First, find out whose regulations and rules might apply. Want to put a Library in a public park? Start by contacting your city's Parks and Recreation Department. If you want a library at your kid's school, contact the school administrative staff. If you're considering a bike path, a public transit stop, or other land that you think is publicly owned, call up your city government and ask to speak with the zoning department. Explain what you'd like to do, and be prepared to work within city regulations. Make it as easy as possible for city officials to say "yes!"

Still, you may have a lot of hoops to jump through. If possible, avoid the entire problem by putting your Library *near* public land but not on it—across the street or nearby, on property that belongs to someone who is willing, even eager, to have it there. Private residences or businesses like coffee shops are great choices!

But, if you're determined to get a Little Free Library on public land, we recommend:

- Talking to the person in charge of enforcing or managing compliance with the regulations. Ask for their advice rather than permission. Explain how the little library belongs to everyone and should cause no major problems. Take a picture of the spot where you'd like the library or invite the official to show you where might be a better place. Ask what you need to do to comply. It might be easier than you think.
- Fill out and submit the required applications or permit forms.
- If absolutely necessary, seek a variance in the zoning rules (this can be expensive!) Provide evidence that your project (a book-sharing box for the neighborhood, not just for one family) deserves it. It may also help to show them an example of amended zoning ordinances from another city that allows Little Free Library book-sharing boxes.
- Suggest that the government, association, or co-op board get the library, and you/your group will work with them to support and maintain it.
- Be nice. If things don't work out exactly as you would like, ask something like, "Is there any other way we might be able to locate a Little Free Library in this area or nearby? Where do you (the government official) think might be a good place?"

### An Example of City Regulations

With the rapid spread of Little Free Libraries in past years, many city governments have adopted regulations specifically for book-sharing boxes. Here's what the city of Derby, Kentucky put in place in 2014:

*Any individual or organization desiring to place a Little Free Library should be advised of the following: Little Free Libraries meeting the below listed conditions are not subject to permitting or licensing requirements of the City of Derby.*

*Little Free Libraries are considered as an accessory use, and are permitted in any zoning district; provided that, all such Libraries meet the following placement requirements:*

- *Shall not be located within or overhang the public street right-of-way or any public easement;*
- *Shall not obstruct vehicular, bicycle or pedestrian traffic, either physically, or by a person utilizing the Little Free Library;*
- *Shall not obstruct access aisles or paths utilized by persons in wheelchairs or for ADA accessibility;*
- *May be placed as a permitted obstruction in a required front yard (area between the front wall of a building and the public street right-of-way);*
- *Enclosures shall be sized and arranged such that no person or child is able to enter;*
- *Shall be anchored to the ground or otherwise securely attached to something having a permanent location on the ground.*
- *The City of Derby encourages prospective operators of Little Free Libraries to submit proposed locations for review by City of Derby staff to ensure the above listed requirements have been satisfied.*

Read about how 9-year old Spencer Collins fought his City Council in Leawood, Kansas over a local ordinance restricting certain “detached structures,” [here](#).

### **Working with HOAs, Neighborhood Associations, and Building Managers**

If you are part of an HOA, neighborhood association, or apartment building, you will likely need to get permission from the management body before you put up a Little Free Library book-sharing box. Here are some tips to help get your them on board:

- Be friendly and show that you are willing to comply with their regulations. If your HOA is concerned about your library’s appearance, show that you’re willing to design the library to address their concerns. If they’re worried about liability, show that you’re willing to purchase liability insurance.
- Demonstrate the value of Little Free Library book-boxes: they provide access to books 24/7, which is especially important for kids when they aren’t in school, but adults need access to books, too! Little libraries also strengthen community connections and encourage neighborliness.
- Show the HOA that you’re prepared to be an active steward that will keep your little library clean, attractive, and in good shape.

If you try these suggestions but still can’t get approval, then perhaps you could work around the issue by creating a “temporary” little library. Read about how Donna Bright started a [“pop-up” Little Free Library](#) to abide by her HOA’s rules.

**Tip:** Wherever you decide to install your library, **call your local 811 number or digger’s hotline first**. Google “digger’s hotline {insert your town name}” and you will find a phone number easily. You want a local utilities company to come and check out the spot where you want to install your library. Why? To be sure that there are not any gas, sewage or other pipes beneath the ground where you want to dig. This is usually a free service.

Visit our [FAQs page](#) for more information on starting, installing, and maintaining your Little Free Library!