



Little Free Library How-Tos

Where to Locate Your Library

Created by the Little Free Library nonprofit organization

You want lots of 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 it's easy to find, easy to see from the street or sidewalk, and easy to reach. Consider handicap accessibility, as well. It helps if you can also see the Library from a nearby window.

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 have the Library with reach of streetlights or its own lighting.

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

Many people wonder why government has so many policies, rules and regulations; why it seems to make it so hard to do something nice.

Stewards and supporters of Little Free Libraries want to know: is it okay to put a Library on public property? If so, who do you talk to? Who has authority? Some think they can do whatever they wish on their own property. Managers of apartment or office buildings are likely to have their own concerns.

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 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 a good deal more 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.

Little Free Library already has worked with many parks departments, city governments and other institutions to install Little Library book-sharing boxes on public land. We have also found

that some communities are much more worried that they might be about 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 Library on public land, we recommend:

- Talking to the person in charge of enforcing or managing compliance with the regulations. Ask for his or her 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.
- 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 Library in this area or nearby? Where do you (government official) think might be a good place?"

An Example of Parks Department Regulations

In Madison, Wisconsin, if you wanted to put a Little Free Library in a park, the process would go like this:

- Submit a park modification request to the Parks Superintendent
- Include in your proposal:
 - A detailed description of the project
 - The exact location in the park where you want to put a Library (include a map!)
 - Your maintenance plan
 - Any impact the Library would have on the park (if applicable)
 - Your timeline for implementation
- After the Superintendent receives your proposal, if it's acceptable, it will be passed on to the Parks Commission for further review. You will then be notified if they grant approval.

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.