



Practical Tips

Where to Locate Your Neighborhood's Little Library

You want lots of people to feel as though this Library 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. 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, Municipal Regulations and Homeowner/Condo/Coop Rules and Covenants

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
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- 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.

Little Free Library already has examples of park systems and municipalities that have either purchased Libraries themselves or supported Library installation 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; which jurisdiction—Parks?

Streets? Zoning? The school district? A bike path, for instance, could be governed by many different jurisdictions, each with slightly different rules.

See if what you want to do is okay within those regulations. If not, consider how you can

make it as easy as possible to do what you want anyway. Here's how:

- a. **The best choice: Avoid the entire problem altogether** 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. Install the Library inside of the sidewalk and your home, *not on the apron between the sidewalk and the street.*
- b. **Talk 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 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.
- c. **Fill out and submit the required applications or permit forms.**
- d. **If absolutely necessary, seek a variance in the zoning rules.** Provide evidence that your project (a Little Library for the neighborhood, not just for one family) deserves it.
- e. **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.
- f. 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 (gov't official) think might be a good place?"

- Put the Library on a wall or fence, or next to a garden
- Attach it to a tree

And when the Library is installed:

- Feel free to plant flowers or create some landscaping around it.
- Consider putting a bench beside it so Library users can sit and read
- Keep it clean, inside and out.

Other Ideas: