



Annise D. Parker, Mayor



HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Presentation to Houston City Council Quality of Life Committee

Council Member Ellen Cohen, Chair

Rhea Brown Lawson, Ph.D.
Director of Libraries
February 26, 2014

Background

NOTICE TO ALL USERS OF HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Library is for reading, studying, writing, participating in scheduled programs or meetings, and using library materials. We ask your cooperation in maintaining an environment in which all library customers can use and enjoy library resources, services, and facilities. These rules are posted for the comfort and protection of all who use the Library. They will be firmly but courteously enforced by library staff/security. Customers must comply with these rules and regulations.

The following behaviors and activities are prohibited on library property (inside or outside library buildings):

- Acts that are subject to prosecution under criminal or civil codes of law.
- Physical abuse, assault, public lewdness, indecent exposure or disorderly conduct.
- Use of obscene, abusive, insulting or threatening language.
- Possessing or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Damaging or destroying library property.
- Unlawfully carrying a weapon.
- Staring, stalking, harassment, or other behavior that reasonably can be expected to disturb others.
- Tampering with security or safety devices.
- Smoking within 25 feet of a public entrance.
- Selling/Soliciting (approaching citizens with items for sale or pleas for donations).
- Spreading out the contents of bags on library property. Unattended bags represent a safety and security risk and may not be left on library property.

The following behaviors and activities are prohibited in library buildings:

- Abuse or vandalism of library facilities, materials, or equipment.
- Smoking or other tobacco use.
- Eating or drinking (except water in covered containers), except in designated areas.
- Bringing in packaged or unpackaged food, except into designated areas.
- Bringing in any animals, except animals assisting persons with disabilities.
- Not wearing shoes or a shirt.
- Sleeping or putting your head on a table (except for infants), and putting your feet or legs on furniture.
- Producing or allowing any loud, unreasonable, or disturbing noises, including those from electronic and communication devices.
- Taking library materials into rest rooms.
- Using library rest rooms for changing clothes, shaving, bathing or any purpose other than for which rest rooms are intended.
- Offensive bodily hygiene that constitutes a nuisance to others.
- Bringing in bedrolls, blankets, frame backpacks, suitcases, or bags measuring more than two feet in length or height. A maximum of two bags of any type will be allowed.
- Bringing in any items that could potentially be used as weapons, including but not limited to sporting equipment such as baseball bats, skateboards, etc.
- Distributing or posting printed materials/literature not in accordance with library regulations.
- Viewing material deemed to be obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors, as those terms are defined in the Children's Internet Protection Act and the Texas Penal Code.

Parents/guardians/caregivers are responsible for monitoring the activities and for regulating the behavior of their children while in the library. Children under the age of seven may not be left unattended at any time. Children between the ages of seven and fourteen should not be left unattended for extended periods of time or at closing time.

All library materials must be properly checked out. If library staff/security has reasonable individualized suspicion that a library patron is attempting to exit the library with library materials that have not been checked out, the patron may be questioned and may be asked to open any item of sufficient size to contain library materials for inspection. Theft of library materials is a serious offense and will result in permanent exclusion from the library and arrest.

Anyone known to have violated any of the above rules may be asked to leave from the library as a matter of administrative policy or arrested, as permitted by law. Severe offenses may result in exclusion from the library.

If confronted with the violation of any of the above rules, please immediately inform library staff/security.

Violation of criminal trespass laws or of these rules and regulations may result in prosecution. These rules and regulations have been promulgated under the authority of Section 24-5 and Article IX, Chapter 21 of the Code of Ordinances, City of Houston, Texas. See also Texas Penal Code §30.05 (relating to criminal trespass) and §31.03 (regarding theft).

These rules were approved by City Council on April 27, 2005.
Reference: Motion #2005-0368

Chapter 24, Section 24-5 of the Code of Ordinances provides authority to establish rules and regulations for the Library.

Rules were last updated in 2005.

City Council approved changes to Section 24-5 in December 2013.

Two major changes:

Expanded definition of **where** rules apply.

Provides greater flexibility to Director to deal with issues quickly.

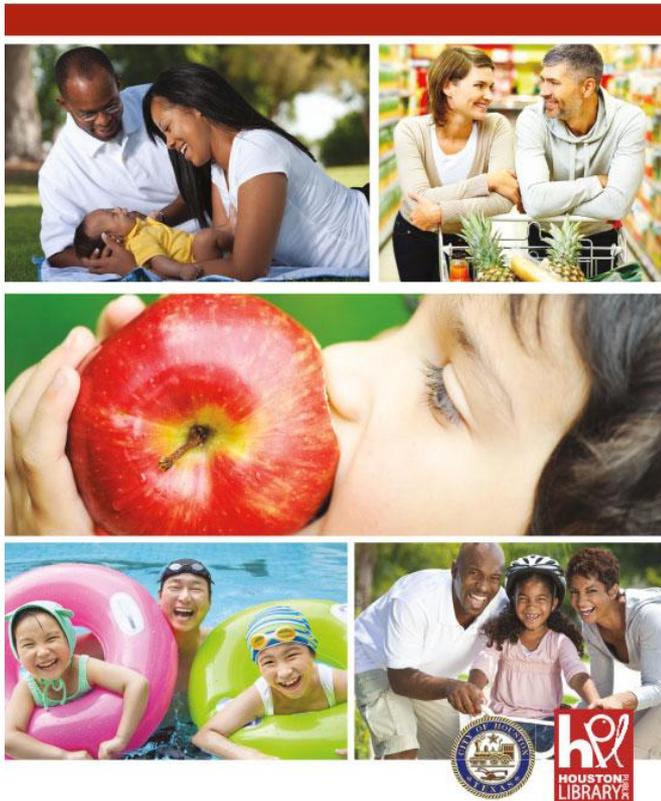


Expanded Definition

Section 24-5 (a): ...”Without limitation, the director is now authorized to include provisions that govern the use of library premises by the public, including the use of the property around the library, in order to promote an environment that is protective of the health and well-being of patrons and children while at the library facility”

Section 24-5 (b): For the purposes of this section, *library premises* means the building and any city-owned property, plaza, green space, or walkway around the building. The term does not include a parking lot.

Philosophy and History



We want all of our locations to be **safe, healthy, family-friendly and welcoming environments** for all communities and all customers.

Existing and updated rules are designed to focus on **behaviors**.

Existing rules are designed to help provide a safe, healthy and welcoming environment **inside** our facilities.

Policies and protocols are in place to guide security officers and staff as to how to deal with violations of the rules.



Recent Experience

We have seen changes in customer behavior since 2005 at many of our locations.

We have seen an increase in behavior that interferes with the use and enjoyment of library premises, services and programs.

- In FY 13, we saw a 36% increase in violations of existing rules, including a 21% increase in assaults and an 8% increase in theft.

Many of these same behaviors are now happening on library property outside of our buildings, creating an impediment to service.



Proposed Changes

The following behaviors and activities are prohibited on library **premises and mobile units** (inside or outside library buildings):

Existing:

Staring, stalking, harassment, or other behavior that reasonably can be expected to disturb others.

Change:

Intimidating, stalking, harassing, speaking loudly, or other behavior that interferes with or impedes the peaceful use and enjoyment of library premises, services or programs.



Proposed Changes

The following behaviors and activities are prohibited on library **premises and mobile units** (inside or outside library buildings):

Existing:

Spreading out the contents of bags on library property. Unattended bags represent a safety and security risk and may not be left on library property.

Change:

Spreading out personal belongings unrelated to the use of library services.

Leaving bags of any type unattended.



Proposed Changes

The following behaviors and activities are prohibited on library **premises and mobile units** (inside or outside library buildings):

Existing:

Selling/Soliciting (approaching citizens with items for sale or pleas for donations).

Change:

Soliciting or petitioning without prior approval.



Proposed Changes

The following behaviors and activities are prohibited on library **premises and mobile units** (inside or outside library buildings):

Existing:

Smoking within 25 feet of a public entrance.

Change:

Smoking of any type.

New:

Use of tobacco products of any type.



Existing Rules with No Changes

The following behaviors and activities are prohibited on library **premises and mobile units** (inside or outside library buildings):

Acts that are subject to prosecution under criminal or civil codes of law.

Physical abuse, assault, public lewdness, indecent exposure, or disorderly conduct.

Use of obscene, abusive, insulting or threatening language.

Possessing or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.

Damaging or destroying library property.

Unlawful possession of a weapon.

Tampering with security or safety devices.



THANK YOU