Annise D. Parker, Mayor

HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
Presentation to Houston City Council Quality of Life Committee

Council Member Ellen Cohen, Chair
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Director of Libraries
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Background

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.
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