

Watertown Park Commission

March 15, 2023

Agenda Item:	Little Free Library Request
Request for Action:	Consider Little Free Library Request
Employee/Dept.:	Jake Foster, City Administrator

Background:

At the January 18, 2023 Parks Commission meeting, Commissioners discussed a request the City received to place a "Little Free Library" on an outlot adjacent to a trailhead for the Wetlands of Watertown Trails.

The request was received by Mr. Darren Schuler and his family. Mr. and Ms. Schuler have a disabled son who loves books, and it is their intention to involve him in the care for and restocking of the library. In addition to the upkeep/maintenance of the library, the Schulers will be responsible for its construction. Public Services staff could help with the placement and anchoring of the library if the requestors would prefer.

At the meeting, Commissioners asked staff to perform additional research including what other cities allow in terms of Little Free Libraries on public/city-owned property, what types of ordinances they have in place, and what applications might look like. During this research, staff found varying approaches cities took to address Little Free Library placement and operation within city limits.

Many cities seem to have very little information regarding Little Free Libraries, in terms of city code, policies, or otherwise.

Cities such as Pine Island and Bloomington have city or county staff operate the Little Free Libraries that are placed on public property (Pine Island's is located outside of their library, and Bloomington's outside of their community center).

Fridley allowed residents to submit design ideas for Little Free Libraries to be placed in city parks. The winning designs also received \$150 stipends to construct at place the little free libraries (online information and application link can be found here: <https://www.fridleymn.gov/1570/Little-Free-Library>). Staff does not feel they have the capacity to maintain multiple Little Free Library locations.

Furthermore, included in the packet is ordinance language provided by the Little Free Library organization cities can use as a template to tailor ordinance language to coincide with policies. Note that the placement language states that the library must be placed within 8 feet of a public street. One would then assume that this placement would be within the public right of way (generally speaking the right of way extends 10 feet past the curb). This isn't too dissimilar from placing one in an outlot/trail easement.

Staff has also drafted a draft maintenance agreement should the Commission/Council approve the placement of the Little Free Library as proposed. It is attached for review.

Staff recommends that the Commission recommend the Little Free Library placement and maintenance agreement for approval. Staff also does not believe an ordinance or policy adoption is necessary. As this is the first time we've received this type of request, and the maintenance agreement would be put in place, staff believes these requests could be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Attachments:

Little Free Library Draft Ordinance (framework provided by New Castle County, DE)
Draft maintenance agreement

Introduced by: Ms. Durham
Date of introduction: March 24, 2020

ORDINANCE NO. 20-

TO AMEND *NEW CASTLE COUNTY CODE* CHAPTER 7 (“PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE”), SECTION 7.01.002. (“AMENDMENTS TO THE INTERNATIONAL PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE”), CHAPTER 3 (“GENERAL REQUIREMENTS”), SECTION PM 302.10. (“OUTSIDE STORAGE OF HOUSEHOLD ITEMS.”) TO PROVIDE FOR LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES AND NEIGHBORHOOD BOOK EXCHANGE BOXS

WHEREAS, New Castle County recognizes the importance of reading and strong communities in creating a high quality of life, and for building and maintaining great neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, when children grow up in book-rich environments, literacy rates are typically high; and

WHEREAS, access to books has been cited as the number one predictor of a child’s ability to thrive in school; and

WHEREAS, access to books remains a problem in many parts of our County, especially for children living in low income areas – nearly 2/3 of children living in poverty have no books at home; and

WHEREAS, in an attempt to promote such access, New Castle County hereby recognizes the mission of non-profit organizations such as Little Free Library Ltd., which help to inspire a love of reading, to build a sense of community, and to spark a spirit of creativity by fostering neighborhood book exchanges around the world through programs such as “Little Free Libraries®”; and

WHEREAS, programs such as Little Free Libraries® and similar book sharing box exchanges allow millions of books to be circulated each year, which profoundly increases access to books for readers of all ages and backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, in New Castle County, we believe everyone deserves a book to read, and book sharing boxes such as Little Free Libraries® would provide access to books in areas where they otherwise are scarce or nearly non-existent, and thereby will motivate children and others to read, and, consequently, will help to deepen community connections; and

WHEREAS, New Castle County, in seeking to foster a sense of community and a love of reading and, thereby, increase literacy rates, hereby seeks to clarify that book sharing box exchanges are encouraged and, moreover, are permissible under *New Castle County Code*.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE COUNTY OF NEW CASTLE HEREBY ORDAINS:

Section 1. *New Castle County Code* Chapter 7 (“Property Maintenance Code”), Section 7.01.002. (“Amendments to the International Property Maintenance Code”), Chapter 3 (“General Requirements”), Section PM 302.10. (“Outside Storage of Household Items.”) is hereby amended by adding the underlined language and deleting the language that is stricken, as set forth below.

Section PM 302.10. Outside storage of household items. The outside storage of items designed and manufactured to be used and stored in an enclosed building is prohibited in any residential zoning district. Such items include, but are not limited to, the following: appliances or interior furniture, housewares, exercise equipment, plumbing fixtures, irrespective of age or condition.

Section PM 302.10.1. Book sharing box exchanges. The establishment and maintenance of Little Free Libraries® and similar book sharing boxes intended for use as book exchanges, as suggested in the guidelines set forth by the non-profit organization “Little Free Library, Ltd.”, are expressly excluded from the prohibitions established by Section PM 302.10, and, as such, are allowed to be placed on private property, subject to the requirements set forth in subsections a. and b.

- a. Little Free Libraries® and similar book sharing boxes must securely protect their contents from rainfall and other weather hazards, be safely secured, e.g. to the ground or a wall, and be clearly marked in such a way to clearly indicate that the box is a book sharing box and part of a book exchange. Little Free Libraries and similar book exchange boxes may be placed on private property only by or with the permission of the property owner. Little Free Libraries® and book exchange boxes must be placed in well-lit and safe areas within eight (8) feet of a public street.
- b. By establishing a Little Free Library® or similar book exchange, the property owner is automatically establishing an easement for public access to the Little Free Library® or book exchange box. In addition, law enforcement officers shall be provided unfettered access to all Little Free Library® and similar book exchange boxes, when the circumstances so warrant.

Section 2. This Ordinance shall become effective immediately upon its adoption by County Council and approval by the County Executive, or as otherwise provided in 9 *Del. C.* § 1156.

Adopted by County Council
of New Castle County on:

President of County Council
of New Castle County

Approved on:

County Executive
New Castle County

SYNOPSIS: A primary goal of this Ordinance is to promote access to books for all ages, especially youth, to increase the love of reading and to combat illiteracy in New Castle County. This Ordinance aims to accomplish these goals by amending Chapter 7 of the *New Castle County Code* to allow for neighborhood book exchanges, which are commonly referred to as little free libraries.

FISCAL NOTE: There is no discernable fiscal impact.



LITTLE FREE LIBRARY MAINTENANCE AGREEMENT

This Maintenance Agreement (“Agreement”) is made and entered into as of this _____ day _____, 20____, by and between the City of Watertown, a municipal corporation under the laws of the State of Minnesota (“City”) and _____ (“Holder”).

RECITALS

- A. Holder has agreed to construct and install a “Little Free Library” within the City Outlot located at 800 County Road 10, Watertown, MN 55388 (PID: 854450540).
- B. With the placement of this structure, the Holder will effectively donate the “Little Free Library” to the City of Watertown.
- C. In exchange for allowing the Holder to place the structure within City property, the Holder agrees to keep the “Little Free Library” adequately stocked of books, none of which the City deems as *inappropriate*.
- D. The Holder also agrees to maintain the Little Free Library to the City’s standards. Including, but not limited to, performing activities such as, Mending broken components, ensuring the structure remains adequately anchored, painting/staining, and replacing missing components. If the City ever deems the Little Free Library to not meet any safety or appearance requirements, the City reserves the right to remove of the structure and dispose of it and its contents.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have executed this Agreement as of the date of signature by the required approval authorities below. It shall remain in effect until either party chooses to withdraw from the agreement.

City of Watertown

Holder

By: _____

By: _____

Its: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____