



Customer Comments

Fourth Quarter, 2019

The following comments were received by the Library during the months of October, November, and December, 2019. Where the customer requested a personal reply by phone or email, it was provided. Customer comments and responses are posted on the Library's website.

Received by e-mail

Comment: The staff here needs to be a lot more respectful about expressing the rules to the customers. So twice now I've been practically yelled at in a library for (looking tired). I find it very rude and uncalled for her to raise her voice and embarrass me when I would have had no problem sitting up straight and looking more lively. Very RUDE!!

Response: I'm sorry you had a bad experience in the library. For a number of operational reasons, NOLS' policy prohibits sleeping in the library. Staff try to be courteous and non-obtrusive in encouraging customers to remain awake, but it can sometimes be difficult to get the attention of sleepers, which means staff may have to raise their voices. If you missed the initial soft-spoken attempts to encourage wakefulness, you may have been startled by the louder attempts. I apologize if that was the case.

Comment: The Library needs to put up security cameras inside and outside.

Response: With regard to your question about installing surveillance cameras at the library. NOLS has explored that possibility on various occasions previously, and it is actually a far more complicated issue than many people realize. Here are some of the factors that must be considered:

Protection of privacy and confidentiality is integral to the mission and role of public libraries in America. That philosophical commitment underlies all library service objectives and has impact on many operational decisions. In this case, it informs the belief that everyone should be able to utilize the public library without fear of surveillance. Rapid changes in society, technology, service expectations, and the value individuals place on privacy, require NOLS to continually re-assess many library policies, including this one. Thus far however, NOLS continues to feel that placing surveillance cameras on library premises, and particularly inside library buildings, is antithetical to our philosophical obligation to protect the privacy and confidentiality of library visitors. Any administrative decision to install surveillance cameras must be weighed against the fact that most of the activity that would be recorded is innocent, and a legitimate use of these public premises. While we are deeply saddened by the recent theft that occurred in the parking lot at the PA library, reports of theft at or in the library are actually a rarity. On the other hand, there are over 200,000 visits per year to the PA library, and numerous additional harmless and appropriate uses of the exterior spaces. So installation of surveillance cameras in the hope of deterring possible criminal activity, or helping identify a suspect following criminal activity, would in fact comprise a very substantial invasion of public privacy.

To pull back from the philosophical considerations, there are also pragmatic factors that would make implementation of parking lot surveillance by remote camera very challenging. These include factors such as the sheer size of the space to be monitored, the presence of many visual obstructions (trees), costs of purchasing, installing, and monitoring numerous cameras, and the extensive time demands and complexity of managing video footage of this type in a public records context.

NOLS has implemented a number of measures and activities to insure that buildings and parking lots are as safe and secure as it is reasonably possible for any public venue to be. Library staff also routinely monitor the premises to identify issues and address criminal or other problematic behavior that may present hazards to customers or disrupt use of the library. NOLS' partnership with the REdisCOVERY program, and the cooperation and assistance of the PAPD, is supportive of these efforts.

As noted, society is obviously undergoing extremely rapid change, in ways that affect public perspectives on safety, privacy, and numerous other community values. In keeping with the core values statement of [NOLS' Strategic Roadmap](#) the Library endeavors to remain flexible in adapting to social and technological change. One way we do that is by periodically reviewing policies and practices to make sure they remain appropriate to current community needs.