

Information for

Noise in Public Areas and Street Performers



Street performances have been a popular attraction in Old Town Alexandria for hundreds of years, and continue to delight residents and visitors from all over the world. In order to ensure an enjoyable and peaceful experience for residents, businesses, and visitors, the Alexandria City Code includes specific regulations on the generation of sound (referred to in the Code as “noise” regardless of the type). These regulations apply in **All Public Areas** in the City, including the Central Business District.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Street performance is generally protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.** No permit is required for the basic act of performing.
- Performers may receive donations (this is known as “busking”), but no specific charge may be suggested or required and no goods or services may be sold.

SOUND LEVEL LIMITS IN ALL PUBLIC AREAS

- **The volume of a street performance, measured at a distance of 10 feet or more from the location where the sound is being produced, may not exceed 75 decibels between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m., or 65 decibels between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. [Sec. 11-5-4.1(c,d)]**
- If a person with normal hearing can plainly hear a performance above the background noise level at a distance of more than 50 feet from the source, the performance is presumed to exceed the decibel limits and thus violates the noise ordinances. [Sec. 11-5-4.1(c,d)]
- Performances may use amplified sound as long as they adhere to the above volume limits, except where amplified sound is prohibited by posted signage. When amplified sound is permitted, devices may not be connected to City power sources, including receptacles on City buildings or street lights.

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- Permits to vary these volume limits are for the very limited circumstances outlined in Section 11-5-7 of the Alexandria City Code and do not typically apply to street performances.

LOITERING AND TRESPASSING

- **Performers should strictly observe the property rights of others.** When in doubt, a performer should ask permission from the person in charge of the property where the performance will take place, and the person in charge of any immediately adjacent business or residence.
- No person may stand in a public place in a way that obstructs a sidewalk or impedes the free movement of pedestrians, including blocking access to a business. [Secs. 5-2-16 and 13-1-24(a)]
- No person may remain in a building open to the public or the immediately adjacent property after being asked to leave by a person in charge or a police officer. [Sec. 13-1-24(e)]
- No person may enter or remain on someone else's property after being told by a person in charge not to, or in violation of a posted sign. Violation is a Class 1 misdemeanor. [Sec. 13-1-33(a)]

ENFORCEMENT

- **The Alexandria Police Department and the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services are responsible for enforcing the above described rules and regulations and will make every effort to work with performers to obtain voluntary compliance.** If voluntary compliance cannot be achieved, the City will act accordingly depending on the violation.
- If violation of the City's noise ordinances continues after verbal instructions by a City representative, the violator may be issued a written notice of violation with a civil penalty of \$100 for the first violation with escalating penalties for repeat violators. [Sec. 11-5-12(a)]

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- This summary is intended to provide an overview of the major regulations applicable to street performances, and does not include every pertinent detail or type of noise. The references in brackets are to applicable sections of City Code.
- For detailed information about the City's noise ordinances, including links to the City Code, please visit www.alexandriava.gov/Noise.
- For questions about the City's noise ordinances, please contact the Department of Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES), Office of Environmental Quality, at 703.746.4065, on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- For all other questions, please call 703.746.HELP (4357) or visit www.alexandriava.gov/CallClickConnect.

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