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Orland Park Library won't place filters on adult-section computers

By Susan DeMar lafferty slafferty@southtownstar.com February 12, 2014 4:36PM

The Orland Park Public Library. | File photo

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Orland Park Public Library trustees on Wednesday night voted to continue to allow adults open access on the library's public computers and also toughened the policy on inappropriate behavior by patrons.

At a special meeting, Trustee Elizabeth Gierach, who joined the board Wednesday night, sided with the majority in a 5-2 vote in support of unfiltered computer access in the library's adult section. Trustee Catherine Lebert, who participated in the meeting via phone, and Trustee Julie Ann Craig were opposed, with Lebert saying she wanted to delay the vote until Monday night's regular board meeting.

A controversy arose last fall over the library allowing computer users to view pornographic websites in the adult section when a patron from Mokena and a Chicago man publicly questioned the policy and demanded that the board rescind it. The Mokena woman said permitting patrons to view porn sites was irresponsible and made the library a "dangerous place" for children.

Library officials defended the policy as complying with First Amendment rights and said placing filters on computers used by adults would limit patrons' full access to information.

"It is a constitutional matter," Trustee Diane Jennings said Wednesday night. "Patrons have the right to access anything that is legal."

Board president Nancy Healy cited the Illinois Library Association's guidelines, which state that government may not prohibit the expression of an idea or someone from reading or seeing library materials simply because society finds the material offensive or disagreeable.

Library staff reported that placing filters on the adult-section computers could cost between \$2,400 and \$5,384 for the first year and between \$1,500 and \$2,154 in subsequent years and noted that people can circumvent the filters.

Previously, the Orland Park Library allowed parents to permit their children to have unfiltered computer access, but that will be stopped, the board decided. Computers in the children's and teen sections have filters. Only those 18 and older will be allowed in the adult section, and that will be strictly enforced, library spokeswoman Bridget Bittman said.

Also Wednesday, the board unanimously amended the library's policy on patron behavior to be more specific — prohibiting patrons from verbally or physically threatening others, including staring, lurking, offensive touching or engaging in or soliciting an obscene act.

Library director Mary Weimar said misconduct is now subject to graduated discipline — suspension of library privileges for the remainder of the day for a first offense, a one-month suspension for a second offense and a one-year suspension for a subsequent offense.

Last month, the library board imposed new computer restrictions on non-residents — limiting them to one, one-hour computer session a day for a \$3 fee. The board also designated a few computers for nonresidents to use at no cost but only for 15 minutes. Healy said there has been a 50 percent reduction in computer use since the one-hour limit took effect.

In November, the library also started requiring patrons 18 and older to show an ID to use the computers in the second-floor adult section.