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# Orland Park library trustee steps down

12:13 p.m. CST, March 4, 2014

The Orland Park Public Library board is looking for another new member after Mary Ann Ahl, who served as trustee for 36 years, stepped down citing health reasons and the advice of her doctor, family and friends.

Ahl resigned Feb. 17, less than a week after library trustees voted to keep a controversial policy that permits adults unfiltered Internet access, including the ability to view pornography on library computers, while adding new rules letting library staff intervene if a patron is viewing materials that disturb passers-by.

It "didn't hurt" that staying on the board until the Internet policy vote gave her a say in an important decision for the library, Ahl said. She sided with the 5-2 majority in supporting unrestricted Internet for adults, citing the First Amendment and a commitment to open access to information.

"When you are sworn in, you take an oath that you will uphold the Constitution. I took that very seriously, and that's why I acted the way I did," Ahl said.

Linda Zec, a former library employee who has criticized the library's Internet policy and called for a ban on pornography on library computers, questioned Ahl's decision to participate in a vote so close to her resignation.

"She's not going to be there to deal with the aftermath," said Zec.

But Ahl said she also wanted to avoid leaving an already shorthanded board down another member during a "difficult period." Former board president Carole Hillman stepped down, citing health reasons, in October. The board of trustees appointed Elizabeth Gierach to fill Hillman's seat at the same meeting they voted on the Internet policy.

Board president Nancy Healy said in an email that Ahl was a dedicated member of the library leadership who never missed a meeting and "considers the library a second home."

"I know she is quite a cheerleader for the library within the Orland Park community," Healy said.

Ahl, an Illinois Library Association Trustee of the Year Award winner in 2009, said she was proud of how the library had grown during her tenure, particularly the construction of the library's current facility, which opened in 2004.

"I know every nook and cranny in that building, and to see it come to life and serve the community so well is wonderful," she said. Ahl said she and her husband, who have lived in Orland Park for 48 years, will continue to be involved in the library as patrons and volunteers.

The board plans to select a trustee to fill Ahl's seat from the 11 remaining candidates who applied for the opening left when Hillman resigned, Healy said. The new trustee will serve the remainder of Ahl's six-year term, ending in 2015. Healy said the board hopes to vote on a new member, who will be the fifth of seven trustees appointed mid-term, by the April 21 board meeting.