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Trustees say no — again — to filtering library computers

Tribune Orland Park reporter Lauren Zumbach talks with Gregory Pratt about the latest developments in the Orland Park Public Library's computer policy.

By Dennis Sullivan, Special to the Tribune

5:54 p.m. CDT, March 18, 2014

Orland Park Public Library's second-newest trustee voted with the majority this week to ratify and confirm an earlier vote to leave computers in the adult section unfiltered.

Beth Gierach, re-appointed at the beginning of Monday's meeting, joined board President Nancy Healy and Treasurer Diane Jennings in the 3-2 vote, ensuring passage of the measure to allow pornography for adult viewing. The re-vote was done on the recommendation of board attorney Dennis Walsh in the wake of questions about the legality of the special meeting held Feb. 12, when Vice President Denis Ryan and then-Trustee Mary Ann Ahl joined Gierach, Healy and Jennings for a 5-2 vote in favor of the measure. Ryan was absent Monday, and Ahl resigned from the board.

Trustees Catherine Morrissey-Lebert and Julie Craig cast the negative votes at both meetings.

Prior to Monday's vote, Morrissey-Lebert suggested "voiding" the Feb. 12 meeting, but Walsh said, "You can't void the meeting; the meeting occurred."

Dan Drew, who replaces Ahl, was sworn in after the board ratified and confirmed all actions taken at the Feb. 12 meeting. During the process, Kevin DuJan warned trustees, "What you're doing here is illegal."

DuJan and Megan Fox have championed restricting access to Internet pornography at the library, arguing the existing policy makes the facility unfriendly to families.

The American Library Association supports leaving filters off Internet access, reasoning that a public library preventing an adult visitor from viewing pornographic photographic stills or videos on a public computer could be sued.

Barbara Jones, ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, previously told the Tribune, "It's up to the library to provide as much as possible so people can learn to think critically about what is out there. ... If they don't agree with it, they can go on to another (Internet) page."

The Illinois Attorney General's Office is looking into the Feb. 12 special meeting in response to complaints by DuJan and Fox.

Walsh, responding in a letter dated Monday, contends the meeting was legal. He had written to Assistant Attorney General Tola Sobitan, arguing these points

- There was no problem with the day because Feb. 12 is not a legal holiday,
- The board gave legal notice prior to the meeting and
- The board did deny public comment, but there is no requirement that public comment be allowed during a special meeting.

This week, trustees spent approximately 55 minutes of a two-hour meeting in closed session to discuss litigation issues. When they returned to open session and invited public comment, only DuJan and Fox spoke.

DuJan complained that Monday's meeting, like the Feb. 12 meeting, had no discussion by trustees prior to the vote.

"The fact is that this board needed to deliberate and provide proper recital to the public on everything that it voted on tonight, but it did not." Referring to Morrissey-Lebert and Craig, he said, "They should have walked out in protest."

Fox took a different tack, telling trustees the decision to charge non-residents for an hour on the adult computers effectively makes the facility the only pay-for-porn place in Orland Park.

"Currently, the library is acting as a sexually oriented business with no government oversight by charging a \$3 fee for the child porn you can see. This is illegal," she said. "No other business in Orland Park exists that profits off of pornography and, if there were any, they would be highly regulated by the village."