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# OPPL Board loosens public comment policy language

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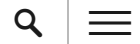
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Eric Skalac, Assistant Editor

3:48 pm CST December 23, 2014

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The Orland Park Public Library Board of Trustees made more changes to their public comment policy Monday, Dec. 15. And the most recent changes made the policy “less wordy and more welcoming,” according to library spokesperson Bridget Bittman.

Changes included loosening language around the content and delivery of public comments. The previous policy included a requirement restricting “abusive, profane, harassing and/or repetitive comments and language and/or personal attacks.” That and other rules governing the content of public comments were removed, Bittman said.

The new policy also omits the previous requirement that all public comments be submitted in person. The new policy allows members of the public to submit comments by mail, email, and “other means.” Public comments made by “remote means” — including telephone, videoconferencing and some other electronic means — are prohibited.

Bittman said the changes were prompted by library staff, who “recommended it be streamlined and [made] easier to read.”

She said the changes were not a response to the State’s Open Meetings Act, which ensures that the deliberations and actions of public bodies are openly conducted.

In May, representatives of the Illinois Attorney General’s Public Access Counselor determined that the library board had violated the Open Meetings Act when they scheduled a special meeting on Abraham Lincoln’s Birthday. The determination was non-binding. In another non-binding letter of determination this year, the bureau concluded that the library board had restricted the topics of conversation in public comments during a January meeting.

In a letter addressed to the library board's attorney, Dennis Walsh, the office cautioned the board "to avoid restricting public comment on substantive bases that are not addressed by its established and recorded rules."

There was no public comment on Monday's policy changes, but two members of the public criticized the board for alleged misuse of funds in 2011. Walsh said he did not know if the event in question constituted a misuse of funds or not.

The meeting also included a two-hour executive session, in which board members and staff discussed, "both litigation and a personnel review," according to Bittman.

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