

Southtown
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Board wants library Web curbs

By Phil Rockrohr

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At the urging of two residents, Lansing trustees agreed last week to prepare a resolution asking the Lansing Public Library board to vote against providing unrestricted Internet access.

The residents — John Klomp-maker and Henry Dokter — implored trustees to pass a resolution to push the library board to defeat a proposal to offer unrestricted, or “unfiltered,” access to the Internet.

“The leadership of the community needs to take a stand on what is good and best for our community — for children and families,” Dokter said. “If we want to continue to maintain those values, we need to say it.”

Trustee Donald Sciackitano, chairman of the village board’s ordinance committee, offered to prepare the resolution and said he may present it as early as Tuesday’s regular meeting of the board.

Library officials said that if they elect to provide Internet access to the public, they are required by law to provide at least one computer with unfiltered access.

“A federal court has ruled that it is unconstitutional for a library to offer only filtered Internet access to adults,” library director William Babcock said in a prepared statement. “While the decision was not made in Illinois, it is a legal prece-

dent which will influence other courts throughout the country.”

The library does not currently provide Internet access to the public, but is considering the possibility, Babcock said.

Klomp-maker urged the board to appeal to library officials because they appear to be unwilling to listen to him.

“I believe an ordinance is needed to allow no Internet access in public facilities unless it is filtered,” he said. “If you’re not concerned about this, I can show you things on the Internet that will burn your eyes out.”

Village officials appeared to sympathize with Dokter and Klomp-maker’s complaints.

Mayor Robert West said he has received much literature on the issue of Internet access in public facilities, and the matter “appears to be a very serious problem.”

“It doesn’t seem like the right thing to have unfiltered Internet access,” West said. “It’s not going to serve anything if you’re going to come and see pornography at the library.”

Trustee Patti Leach said she “would have no problem” voting in favor of the proposed resolution.

Sciackitano asked if the village ordinance regulating adult entertainment and successfully driving

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Thee Body Shoppe strip club from Lansing would prevent the library from providing such access.

Village attorney Dale Anderson said the controversy is a “very, very delicate constitutional area,” and suggested the issue be resolved by the library board.

“You could certainly make recommendations and send it to them, but ultimately the authority lies with the library board,” Anderson said. “This is a very, very difficult thing to legislate.”

Trustees asked Anderson to offer a legal opinion on the issue, but he declined.

“This is a subject that is very, very difficult to make intelligent commentary on unless you’ve done exhaustive research, and I have not,” he said. “I suspect the library board has followed the recommendations of its counsel.

“I think they’d have the same interest as you.”

Babcock said the library board of trustees and staff are “well aware of and respect the values on which the village was founded.”

“A great deal of time and effort have been expended in planning Internet access for the library, which will protect the children of Lansing and more sensitive patrons while also protecting the constitutional rights of those adults who feel it is important to make their own informed decisions about the information they view,” he said.