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SECTION B

Zoning approves Westlake sign

Height of new digital display must be reduced by one foot

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PEORIA — Westlake Shopping Center in Northwest Peoria can build a decorative sign with a digitalized feature to replace its existing sign, the city's zoning commission decided Thursday. There is one hitch, though

— the new sign has to be one-foot shorter than what was originally proposed.

By unanimous vote, the commission decided that Westlake Limited Partnership's proposal for a new sign was good enough to be forwarded to the full City Council for a final vote. That could happen later this month.

The commission's recommendation is for the sign to be constructed at 41.5 feet instead of the originally proposed 42.5 feet.

Please see **WESTLAKE**, Page B3



RENDERING COURTESY OF COHEN DEVELOPMENT CO.

A rendering of the new proposed sign at Westlake Shopping Center. The sign will be 41.5 feet tall and will have a digitalized feature.

WESTLAKE

Continued from Page B1

Dropping it down one foot will eliminate some of the "Westlake" base portion of the sign, according to Les Cohen, the president of Cohen Development Co., managers of Westlake Shopping Center for Westlake Limited Partnership.

"If they want a one-foot reduction, we'll be happy to give it to them," Cohen said.

Little explanation was given as to why a one-foot reduction matters, although commissioners were faced with opposing views on the matter — the Department of Planning & Growth Management opposed the sign's proposed height, wanting it to be much smaller; Westlake officials pushed for it.

At least one commissioner addressed the issue.

"If we cause them to reduce the sign by a foot, so be it," Com-

missioner Greg Hunzicker said. "All it does is, frankly, add to the burden (for Westlake officials) to go back and redesign it."

The proposed sign's height was the biggest issue during a lengthy debate on the zoning change.

Westlake officials requested the zoning regulation change to allow for a 42.5-foot-tall sign to replace the current 39-foot-high structure.

The Department of Planning & Growth Management requested the commission to approve the new sign only if it was 25 feet tall and 285 square feet in overall size, much smaller than the height and more than 600-square-foot size of the proposed sign.

City officials also argued that the change in the Westlake sign moved its size further from what is allowed under the current zoning ordinances and should not be allowed.

Bob Hall, a Peoria attorney representing Westlake, said the

current sign features advertisements that are larger than the ones that will be on the new sign. He said the reason the proposed sign is larger is because of "decorative elements" that cannot be tweaked to allow for additional advertisements.

"The intent is to enhance this shopping center with the signage," Hall said. "It goes a long way compared to what is there."

He also argued that the new sign should be allowed in the same location as the current one, which was originally approved by the council in 1997.

Commissioners agreed.

An updated sign also is considered important in attracting a new, undisclosed tenant to the shopping center at the site that was once Circuit City. Cohen said an announcement on who that new tenant will be could be 30 days away.

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