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LOCAL & STATE

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Westlake wants new sign, tenant

Shopping center's owner seeks city's OK for larger sign to lure new business

BY JOHN SHARP
 OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA — Circuit City's old building could have a new tenant if the shopping center it's located in gets a new, larger and digitalized entrance sign.

Westlake Limited Partnership seeks changes to its zoning regulations to allow for a 42.5-foot-tall, 640-square-foot sign where the current sign is. The shopping center's current sign is 3½ feet shorter in height and 171 feet smaller in square footage than the proposed one.

City officials believe both the current and proposed signs are too big.

The Department of Planning & Growth Management is asking the zoning commission to

approve Westlake's new sign only if it's 25 feet tall and 285 square feet in overall size.

The zoning commission will consider Westlake's request during a meeting at 3 p.m. Thursday. The commission's recommendation will then go to the full City Council for final consideration.

"Compared to what is there now, I think Les Cohen believes it is a tremendous enhancement to the aesthetics," said Bob Hall, a Peoria attorney representing Cohen, who owns Westlake Shopping Center. "It's driven by a tenant who wants to go there and will not go there if the sign is not renovated."

Hall declined to name the proposed tenant.

He said the primary reason for the increase in the proposed sign's square footage is because of the "decorative elements" the new sign will have. He said the sizes of business names

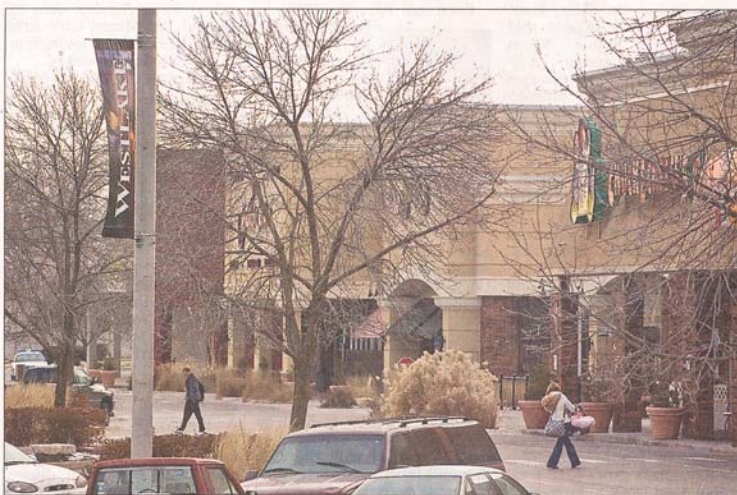
Westlake's new sign

Westlake Limited Partnership seeks a zoning amendment on Thursday to allow for a larger sign greeting visitors into the shopping center. The sign would be digital and it would be larger than the current sign. A new sign is considered a necessity in landing an undisclosed tenant into the old Circuit City building. City staff members, however, say the sign should be smaller than the existing one. The zoning commission is in charge of making a recommendation to the City Council.



listed on the proposed sign are no different than what currently exists.

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Shoppers walk to and from stores Monday afternoon in the Westlake Shopping Center in Peoria. The new sign would be bigger than the current one and would be digitalized. A potential tenant wants the sign. City officials are against the change. They believe both the current and proposed signs are too big.

WESTLAKE

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Leah Allison, senior urban planner with the Department of Planning and Growth Management, said the city isn't supportive of a new sign that is larger than the existing sign.

She said the current sign doesn't meet zoning regulations, which call for 25-foot-tall signs. She said the proposed sign only moves further away from the city's zoning regulations, and should not be allowed.

"It should come closer to conformance," Allison said.

The zoning request also asks for the sign to be digital, and perhaps with moving images.

But the city's sign ordinance doesn't allow for frequent, moving images on a digital sign unless it's located within the Downtown business district. The Peoria Civic Center, for instance, has a digital sign with movable images.

Instead, the city's ordinances allow for digital signs with static imaging, such as the images found on multiple electronic billboards throughout the city. Electronic multiple message signs cannot change messages more than once every 10 seconds, the city's code states.

Fifth District City Councilman Dan Irving recently requested an ordinance changing the city's zoning laws be tabled until later this year, while the zoning commission analyzed the city's sign ordinance. His proposals asked for the static images to be replaced with images that fade or dissolve.

Irving said the Westlake sign proposal wasn't the reason he proposed the ordinance change. He said there is increasing interest among businesses for digital signs.

"We need to review our sign ordinance," Irving said. "Is our current ordinance moving us in a



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direction we want to go? Do we want to further limit the signs or are there ways to add flexibility on what we can or cannot allow in certain areas?"

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