

Digital signs at District 99 high schools put on hold

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Downers Grove Community High School District 99 is putting off its pursuit of digital signs at its two high schools.

Jill Browning, a district spokeswoman, said the district does not have current plans to seek the signs, even though the village agreed to zoning changes requested by the district to ease the way for posting such signs at Downers Grove North and Downers Grove South high schools.

Although the village council unanimously backed the zoning changes at the Oct. 13 meeting, council members had previously expressed concerns about digital signs. A June Supreme Court ruling raises the worry that Downers Grove could be viewed as limiting public expression if it allowed digital signs at the schools but not elsewhere.

Council member William White said he supports allowing the signs at the schools, but is worried it would open the village to other unwanted requests.

"The bottom line for me is that if we create this exception for our high schools on electronic signs, we'd risk giving a federal judge the opportunity to require that similar signs be permitted elsewhere in the village," he said.

In February, a previous council rejected a request from the school district for a text amendment to the sign code that would have allowed it to install digital signs at the schools. The district then decided to pursue changing the schools' zoning from residential to institutional, in part because it would have allowed the village to consider the sign proposal in

the context of an institution. It was hoped the zoning change would streamline the process, Browning said.

Under institutional zoning, which is for public and civic uses that are least 4 acres in size, the school district would be able to put a non-electronic, 60-square-foot monument sign outside Downers Grove South at Dunham Road and 63rd Street. There has not been a sign at that spot since 2011 when a tornado struck near the school, said Stan Popovich, the village's Community Development Director.

Downers Grove North, at 4436 Main Street, would keep its current 50-square-foot monument sign on Main Street, but could ask to replace it with a 60-square-foot non-electronic sign in the future.

With the zoning changes, "there are no plans at either school to expand the campuses or build any new buildings that would increase enrollment," Popovich said.

Browning has said previously that the district wants electronic signs similar to one at Hinsdale Central High School because such signs can display messages that can be quickly changed and are necessary to provide updates to the community at large.

"It brings people who are not part of the schools into the schools," she said.

Council member Gina Vattimo said she'd like the schools to have digital signs, but the time isn't right for them.

"I wish we had a magic wand and we could go back in time and say we're giving you your electronic signs. I was completely for it. I wish we could have electronic signs (at the two schools)."