

Officials: Perot firm seeks return of Circle T to Westlake

Ability to land major development may hinge on release of claims by FW, Roanoke

By Dave Michaels and A. Lee Graham
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Ross Perot Jr.'s land development company has asked Fort Worth and Roanoke to release claims to the Circle T Ranch and cede the property to Westlake, Roanoke city officials said.

The move comes a year after the developer persuaded Fort Worth to begin proceedings to bring 2,200 acres of the ranch into the city's extraterritorial jurisdiction.

The new request by Mr. Perot's Hillwood Development Co. stems from efforts to land a potentially major economic development at Circle T, Roanoke City Administrator Jimmy Stathatos said.

Circle T property cannot be developed without Westlake's approval, and Westlake will not grant that unless lawsuits over the town's geographic boundaries are resolved in its favor, Westlake Mayor Scott Bradley said.

"Westlake isn't going to settle for less than 100 percent of its own land," Mr. Bradley said.

Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr and top Fort Worth city administrators could not be reached Thursday and Friday regarding the reported Hillwood request. Mr. Perot and others from his company also could not be reached.

Hillwood representatives met with Roanoke city leaders last week and this week, asking that the Denton County city resolve a legal dispute with Westlake regarding a portion of the land north of State Highway 170, Mr. Stathatos said.

Whether Roanoke will comply with that request remains unknown.

"Everything's up in the air. Nothing is firm," Mr. Stathatos said Friday. "All we've been asked to do is talk to Westlake and Hillwood and get everything resolved."

Mr. Bradley said he does not know whether Hillwood officials have met with the other cities, but "it'd make sense they'd be talking to Fort Worth and Roanoke."

Mr. Stathatos described the talks as "cordial and friendly."

"That doesn't mean we're going to do it [comply with Hillwood's request]," he said. "It'll be something the mayor and council will need to sit down and see what's in the best interests of Roanoke. We want to be a good neighbor to everyone."

Mr. Stathatos said Hillwood officials are eager to secure the potential Circle T deal quickly.

"They are looking at a tight deadline as to when they have to close on the land," he said.

Roanoke Mayor Toby Alsip said Hillwood mentioned the potential development.

"They said they have a company looking to come to Westlake, but the details were sketchy," Mr. Alsip said. "We'll be more than happy to settle with Westlake."

Westlake has been embroiled in lawsuits since shortly after its Board of Aldermen disannexed 70 percent of the town in May 1997.

Earlier this year, attorneys for Mr. Perot filed a notice appealing state District Judge Fred Davis' Feb. 13 decision to reverse the disannexations.

The decision returned to Westlake 2,800 acres of disannexed land. Judge Davis said the May 2, 1997, disannexations were not legal because they occurred the day before a municipal election, in violation of state law.

His five-page opinion also deemed the disannexations invalid because Westlake was left as "islands of incorporated land."

The ruling meant that Hillwood must obtain Westlake's approval before developing the Circle T. As outlined previously, plans for the 2,500-acre property include golf courses, offices, a regional shopping mall and upscale homes.

Disagreement over how to develop Circle T property and surrounding land last year triggered what has become a battle for Westlake's territorial integrity.

Fort Worth later claimed most of the land that was disannexed, including the Circle T Ranch. Southlake and Roanoke received other portions of disannexed property, with both towns still battling Westlake in court over those properties.
