

## Fort Worth Star-Telegram

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# Fort Worth ropes Circle T before others

*Roanoke, Southlake and Trophy Club officials say they are interested in the ranch and any other disannexed Westlake land.*

**By Jack Z. Smith**  
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Ross Perot Jr.'s 2,600-acre Circle T Ranch was swiftly lassoed into Fort Worth jurisdiction yesterday, setting the stage for what could become a \$3 billion commercial and residential development.

In an emergency morning meeting less than 15 hours after the property was disannexed from Westlake, the Fort Worth City Council voted, 9-0, to place the property, just east of Perot's Alliance Airport project, in Fort Worth's extraterritorial jurisdiction - a first step toward likely future annexation. Westlake's aldermen [disannexed the property and some of their own land](#) after a bitter dispute that pitted Perot against Mayor Scott Bradley and tore apart the town.

Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr said the Circle T project, which would include homes, a regional shopping mall, golf courses and offices, could become "the largest nonindustrial development ever in Tarrant County."

Officials in greater Northeast Tarrant County, saying they have long recognized the value of the Circle T, did not back off the chance that the land could still be part of their own towns including Westlake officials.

After a [record turnout in yesterday's elections](#), Westlake residents began to discuss their options. "They wanted us to straighten this mess out," said Abe Bush, a Board of Aldermen candidate. "Now, we're ready to work with everybody and go about our business."

And, with Fort Worth officials contending that they moved quickly to establish their lead, officials from Roanoke, Southlake and Trophy Club reiterated that they remain interested in the Circle T and other disannexed Westlake property.

Rick Patterson, president of Perot's Alliance Development Co., said the Circle T development will likely take place over about 20 years. Some retail development could begin this year, he said.

One of the major projects in the Circle T's master plan, a regional shopping mall of an estimated 1.5 million square feet, "could break ground next year and open in the year 2000," he said.

"Four of the five anchor tenants are committed. We really can't disclose who yet," he said. The new mall might resemble Dallas' Galleria more than any other North Texas mall, he said.

Patterson said the development could eventually include 11 million square feet of office space, high lighted by a large corporate campus; various retail businesses outside the mall; an upscale residential development of an estimated 2,000 homes priced at \$250,000 and up; golf courses; an apartment development of 600 to 1,000 units; some hightech industrial developments and Texas Town, a community gathering place with a historical focus.

Fort Worth's move on the ranch site, became possible after the Westlake Board of Aldermen voted Friday night to disannex the ranch and some adjoining properties from the town. Perot and 10 other property owners,

disgruntled by a bitter civic feud over the Circle T plans that led to the ouster of Bradley, had asked to be disannexed.

The aldermen and the Fort Worth council approved joint resolutions calling for the ranch and 10 other properties to be put into Fort Worth's extraterritorial jurisdiction, as requested by Perot and other property owners.

Friday's Board of Aldermen meeting capped months of struggle over the fate of the town of 250. On Tuesday, four aldermen found Bradley, who had fought Perot's Circle T development plans, guilty of official misconduct and incompetence and removed him from office. During the Friday meeting which the aldermen scheduled on the day before the municipal elections, angry Westlake residents accused the four of taking bribes and acquiescing to Perot's demands.

Many said the aldermen were acting contrary to residents' wishes in disannexing 70 percent of the 23-year-old town.

Perot had been working with Westlake officials to reach an agreement to develop his ranch exempt from future property taxes - should the town choose to levy them to retain control of his powerful municipal utility districts and to use Westlake sales tax revenue for public amenities and infrastructure. They had met in closed-door mediation sessions since February, but those were called off last week when it appeared that the aldermen and Perot had reached an impasse with Bradley and his attorneys.

Fort Worth's action yesterday gives the city the future right to annex the ranch, Assistant City Attorney Mike Groomer said.

Cities have significant control over land use and development within their extraterritorial jurisdiction, which is essentially a buffer around an incorporated city. The city does not provide services and cannot collect property taxes unless the land is annexed.

Fort Worth City Attorney Wade Adkins said the joint resolutions represent "a contract between the two cities" and should pre-empt four other cities adjoining Westlake --Keller, Roanoke, Southlake and Trophy Club -- from laying claim to the prized ranch property.

City official, who sometimes plod at a turtle's pace as the deliberate thorny issues, moved as fast as a West Texas jack rabbit in a hailstorm after setting eyes on Perot's ranch.

Barr said he spent Friday evening on the telephone, trying to unify council members on a meeting time and ensuring that he had their support for putting the ranch into city's jurisdiction.

Barr said yesterday that he believed that the emergency session -- requiring only two hours' advance public notice rather than the 72 hours mandated by state law -- was necessary to ensure that Fort Worth gained jurisdiction over the ranch.

"It was important to make it clear to all the other cities that Fort Worth wanted this property once it became available and was willing to move aggressively to get it," he said.

Southlake Mayor Rick Stacy said a special meeting called for Monday is still on. He said Southlake is interested in other former Westlake property as well as Circle T.

"If Fort Worth is looking at Circle T, there's a lot more of Westlake left," Stacy said. "We're not looking to fight with Fort Worth. We're just looking at what might be appropriate to extend our own boundaries."

The Trophy Club Town Council plans to discuss the annexation at its meeting Tuesday.

In a related matter, the Roanoke council held a special meeting yesterday to discuss a lawsuit in which the city challenged Westlake's annexation of some Perot Property town years ago. On Friday night, the Westlake aldermen had approved a settlement with Roanoke that releases about 100 acres of Perot land back to Roanoke.

Perot, in an interview Wednesday said that in developing the ranch property he prefers dealing with Fort Worth official -- with whom he has worked for 10 years in developing the booming Alliance corridor.

Patterson said yesterday that Perot is aiming to "develop a really quality community" at the Circle T.

"That's one reason we're excited about being in Fort Worth," he said. "I just think our relationship is very deep and there's a lot of political stability in Fort Worth that will allow an area like the Circle T to be developed in a quality, consistent manner over a period of time."

Barr said no secret promises have been made to Perot in exchange for luring the ranch into the city's grasp.

"There have been no agreements struck with regard to how this property might or might not be annexed, or might or might not be developed," he said.

Councilman Chuck Silcox, while voting to include the Circle T into Fort Worth's jurisdiction, expressed concern that Perot will seek "special breaks" from the city as he develops the ranch. Silcox has been the council's most frequent critic of city backed property tax abatements for large corporations.

Barr, when asked if Perot will seek tax abatements or other financial incentives for the development said, "There have been no discussions about any of that. I have no idea what they might ask for or what the council might think was in the city's interest to agree to."

Groomer and Barr said they believe that the ranch likely will be annexed piecemeal as various segments are developed. Patterson said he believes the ranch will "eventually ... over a long period of time, be fully annexed into Fort Worth.

The ranch, purchased by Perot in 1993 from the bankruptcy trust of Dallas oilman Nelson Bunker Hunt, could be developed without being annexed.

Three municipal utility districts with ranch boundaries have the legal power to finance such services, Patterson said.

The ranch, straddling the Tarrant and Denton county lines, borders Texas 114 and U.S. 377 and is bisected by Farm Road 170 -- increasingly busy thoroughfare in and affluent, fast-growing area that is rapidly shedding its rural ambience.

"This is a prime location with highway access, and what do you put on places like that?" Barr said. "You put major retail activity. And that generates sales tax revenue."

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