

Perot, Westlake resurrect proposal for 'Texas Town'

By Miles Moffeit
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Westlake residents have further proof that the town's struggle with Ross Perot Jr. over Circle T Ranch development may be nearing an end. For the first time since Perot purchased the ranch in 1993, he has filed formal rezoning proposals for the 2,500-acre property.

The voluminous documents, submitted to Town Hall during the past few days, show that Perot has scaled back his plans for multifamily housing -- a tinderbox issue with Westlake officials for years -- but is sticking to his vision of a massive shopping center, an old-fashioned Texas town square, golf courses and a sprawling corporate office sector.

Another testament to the dramatically improved relations: The two camps have called a joint news conference -- also a first since the Circle T's purchase -- for this morning to discuss Perot's plans and Boston-based Fidelity Investments' proposed 311-acre corporate campus.

Yesterday, Westlake officials hailed the filing of the Circle T proposal, saying it signals a sea change in the often bitter relationship.

"This just follows the notion that everybody's working together over the Westlake development issue," said Alderman David Loeser, a member of the town panel negotiating with Perot. "It's another sign that a lot of folks want to resolve many differences."

Loeser declined to comment on the documents' proposals, which still include some of the same conflicts with the town's master plan that rankled Westlake officials and residents two years ago.

But he emphasized that the town staff has had input into some of those proposals. According to the plan, the ranch is divided into nine planning areas including "residential," "resort" and "regional" retail.

"I would say the town has good internal people who've worked hard on this, too. In fact, we've hired some of the best to help with the process," Loeser said.

Perot's ordinance proposals came a few days after Fidelity Investments filed a proposal to develop a massive corporate campus on part of the Circle T Ranch and on Westlake Mayor Scott Bradley's Paigebrooke Farm.

The mutual fund giant has been indirectly brokering a legal settlement between Perot and the town because it does not want litigation hampering its project, which could grow to 3.5 million square feet by 2003, according to estimates filed with the town.

Last week, town and Perot officials said they were close to resolving many of their differences, including the battle over Perot's utility districts. The Fidelity project and Perot's plans for the Circle T still face significant hurdles, because Fort Worth and Roanoke claimed part of the Circle T Ranch after its contested disannexation from Westlake last year.

According to Perot documents filed with Westlake, the developer devotes more acreage to single-family housing development -- about 700 acres in the southernmost portions of the Circle T -- than to any other ranch project.

Golf courses fall next in line, covering 413 acres, and would sidle up to the western edge of Fidelity's proposed campus. Also planned are a 22-acre resort hotel, 110 acres of retail stores and 240 acres of corporate development. Open space, excluding the golf courses, covers about 300 acres.

The documents, which primarily spell out proposed building setbacks, landscaping requirements and other engineering details, also show that the developer still wants special discretion to create retail centers, apartments, industrial offices and a 46-acre "Texas Town" -- all of which are not specifically allowed by the Westlake master plan.

Although they never saw a formal plan for the "Texas Town," Westlake officials have said that they believe the concept -- a takeoff on a pedestrian-friendly historical-like square with accents on sidewalk canopies, trees and stair-stepped building heights -- is creative and workable.

The major conflicts over Perot's plans centered on his desire for multiple mixed-use areas that town officials believed could allow thousands of apartments. Although his initial plans targeted at least a half- dozen sites for multifamily unit options, Perot's new documents sport only one area specifically showcased for apartments -- a 12-acre site north of Texas 170 that Roanoke claims is within its boundaries.

In recent weeks, Fidelity and Perot officials have been lobbying Fort Worth and Roanoke to drop their legal claims and cede the ranch back to Westlake.

The Board of Aldermen have scheduled a work session for 7 tonight to study Perot's plans and the Fidelity project in depth. The next step in both is a July 27 public hearing.
