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GROWTH

Westlake residents didn't think their leaders would stand up to developers. They were wrong

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WESTLAKE — A town known for its wealthy and famous residents has tapped the brakes on a housing development some longtime home owners worried would ruin one of the area's few designated public green spaces.

The Westlake town council last week rejected a plan to build 56 houses in the Solana office development, a plan opposed by more than 100 neighbors.

Although the property in question is privately-owned by the New York-based Blackstone hedge fund, it is listed as public green space on the town's master plan.

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The master plan is based on the historical use of the land since the Solana corporate campus project was created for IBM in the 1980s.

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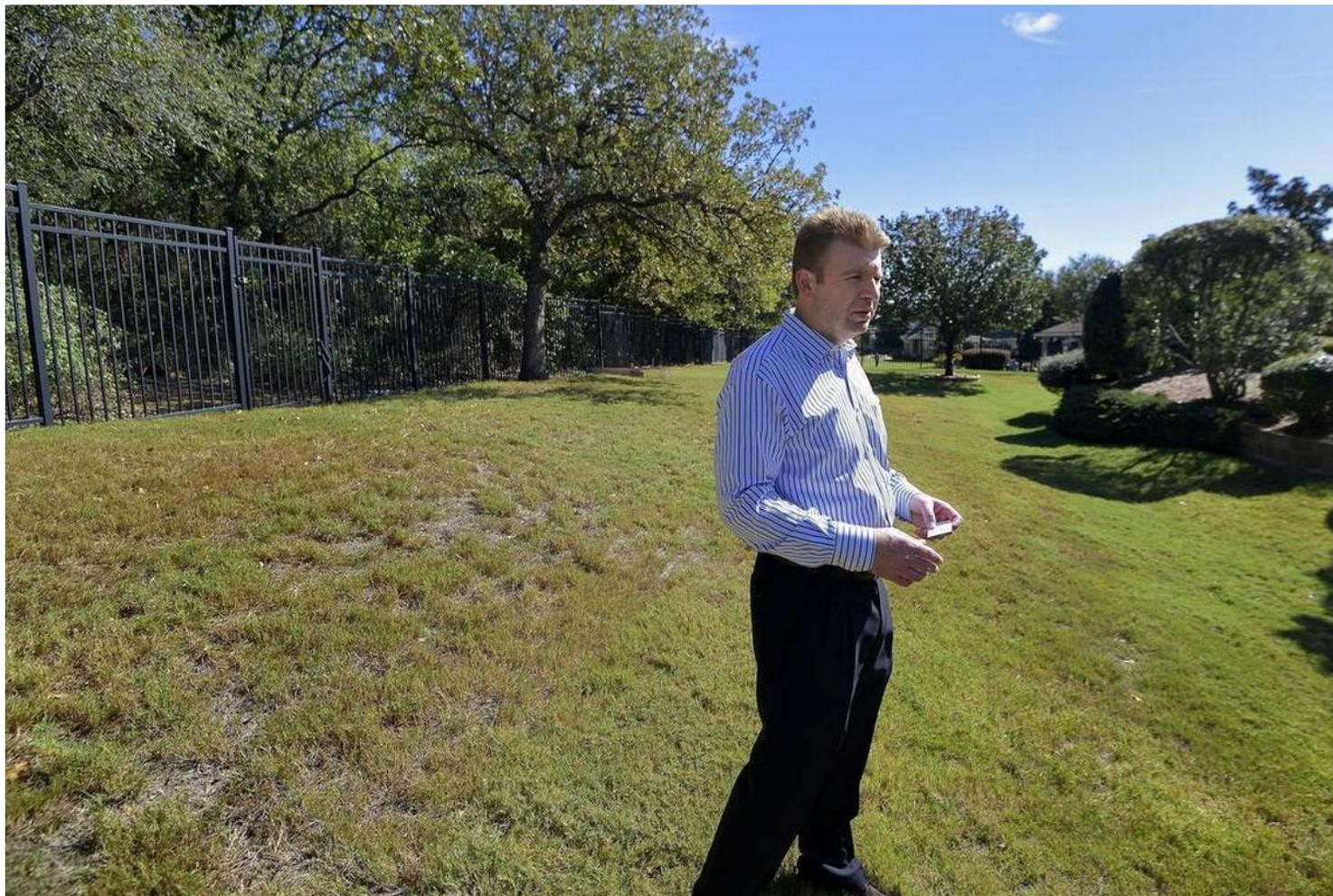
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Westlake is home to only about 1,230 people, but more than a few of them are household names, including Dallas Cowboys tight end Jason Witten, radio personality Glenn Beck and BNSF Railway executive chairman Matthew Rose.

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Westlake resident Neil McNabnay talks about his opposition to a proposed zoning change in his neighborhood in Westlake. The Westlake town council last week rejected a plan to build 56 houses, a plan opposed by more than 100 neighbors.

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But Westlake is surrounded by neighboring communities — including far north Fort Worth, Keller, Roanoke, Haslet and Northlake — that are growing so quickly the region is scrambling to build roads, schools and other infrastructure fast enough to accommodate the masses.

In particular, Westlake residents worried that a 60-foot-tall hill would be mostly leveled to make room for the new houses. The hill provides a “noise barrier and a viewshed” from traffic on nearby Texas 114, said area resident Neal McNabnay, who led the fight against Blackstone’s plan.

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A horizontal banner advertisement for Capital One. On the left, it says "Member FDIC" in small text. The main text reads "WELCOME TO BANKING REIMAGINED" in large, bold, blue letters, with "SM" in smaller letters to the right. Below that, it says "GET A GREAT SAVINGS RATE IN 5 MINUTES" in white text on a blue background. On the right side of the banner, there is a photo of a man with a beard wearing a blue suit jacket. To the right of the photo is the Capital One logo. At the bottom right, there is a blue button with the text "START NOW" and two right-pointing arrows. A "Close Ad" button is visible in the top right corner of the banner area.



Map data ©2017 Google

The vote to reject the housing proposal was 3-1, with one Westlake Town Council member absent.

It's unknown what Blackstone and its housing builder, Wilbow, will do with the 62 acres of hilly, tree-speckled land.

The green area runs along Solana Boulevard, just east of Davis Boulevard, and is adjacent to dozens of homes valued in the \$1.5 million-plus range in the Glenwyk Farms and Granada neighborhoods.

In 2014, Blackstone bought Solana out of bankruptcy and embarked upon a multimillion-dollar makeover of the office buildings on the property, including painting over the postmodern bright colors of the buildings with earthier tones.

While this particular project is on hold, Westlake is growing aggressively.

A \$100 million Charles Schwab complex is scheduled to open in 2019 at the corner of Texas 114 and Texas 170 on Westlake's western edge. It will bring up to 2,600 jobs and the surrounding development will include a 200-room hotel and about 275 residences, including some multifamily housing.

Fidelity Investments also operates a massive regional campus, with 4,500 employees in Westlake, and Deloitte, which performs accounting and other professional services, has a large corporate training center.



Neil McNabney talks about his opposition to a proposed zoning change in his neighborhood in Westlake. The Westlake town council last week rejected the plan, which was opposed by more than 100 neighbors.

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Neil McNabney's back yard in Westlake. His neighborhood would have been affected by the proposed zoning change, which has been rejected by the Westlake town council.

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Other than corporate offices, Westlake is mostly known for some of the region's most upscale housing, including the luxurious Vaquero gated community and golf club. It's home to pro golfers and celebrities, having attracted names like the Jonas Brothers pop singing family and former pro baseball slugger Josh Hamilton over the years.

Ron Ruthven, Westlake's planning director, said the projected rejected by the council was one of the first projects to encounter significant neighborhood opposition.

This report includes information from the Star-Telegram archives.

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