

Westlake left in fragments

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Westlake is now a town divided.
Board, Perot work together to disannex

Westlake -- As a crowd of stunned residents looked on, four Westlake aldermen last night methodically carved up the town, doling out the biggest chunks -- including Ross Perot Jr.'s Circle T Ranch and their own properties -- to Fort Worth's jurisdiction.

When the meeting ended and confused onlookers scrambled to the front of the room to see what was left of their town, Mayor Dale White -- sworn in an hour earlier -- shrugged his shoulders at the onlookers.

"This is Perot Town now," he remarked and winked.

The revised town map -- approved by Aldermen Carroll Huntress, Al Oien, Jerry Moore and Howard Dudley -- sported a gaping hole where Perot's Circle T Ranch had been removed. Some portions of the town appeared contiguous, but many sections were tied by threadlike strips of land, resembling a gerrymandered political district. Stagecoach Hills, where alderman candidate Don Redding lives, was not included in Westlake.

"It just looks like a sinkhole," Redding said.

The aldermen, assisted by Town Attorney Bill Wood and Perot attorney Ike Shupe, systematically shuffled ordinance drafts and other documents among one another for signatures during each agenda item. A court reporter and notary were also there, rubber-stamping each item as it was approved. Ten properties, in addition to Perot's Circle T Ranch, were disannexed.

Each alderman refrained from voting to remove his own land from the town, leaving the others to carry the motions to release the group's properties into Fort Worth's extraterritorial jurisdiction. A small portion was released to Roanoke.

Only Westlake resident Sam Lee's property was withdrawn from the agenda after Lee's attorney objected to its disannexation in a written letter to the aldermen.

Alderman Fred Held opposed every agenda item, saying, "I won't be in accordance with any injustices against this town."

After the Circle T was eliminated, Held told the other aldermen, "You've just destroyed the town."

Former Mayor Scott Bradley -- ousted by the four aldermen on Tuesday -- sat two rows from the front, holding the hands of his wife and his daughter.

In three hours, the aldermen also:

- Approved a settlement with Roanoke that releases about 100 acres of Perot land to that city. Roanoke's lawsuit contested about 60 acres of the developer's land that Roanoke contended Westlake illegally

annexed. The aldermen could not say how much land was released or why the released property went beyond Roanoke's original demand.

- Dumped a franchise agreement with the Lake Turner Municipal Utility Districts hashed out in the 1980's with Nelson Bunker Hunt.
- Appointed and swore in White as mayor, whose land they voted to eliminate from the town a short time later.
- Authorized payment of the town attorney, although they did know what he would be paid.

Several times, angry outbursts from the crowd interrupted the session.

"Did you take a bribe?" one man demanded.

Another challenged White, "Who elected you?"

Stagecoach Hills resident Jack Walton demanded to know how the aldermen could move to dismantle the town when most residents oppose such a move.

"How does this fulfill your oath to Westlake?" Walton said.

The crowd cheered when the board voted to disannex Oien's land. At times, some snickered at the aldermen.

Throughout the meeting, Bradley interjected remarks and called for the resignations of White and the aldermen, saying they had no right to stay in office after removing their properties.

"You've taken yourselves out of the city," Bradley said. "Resign."

As the meeting was nearing an end, Jim Truitt, a Keller resident, had words for the aldermen.

"I hope you guys can sleep tonight," he shouted. "You've just made a mockery of the democratic process."

The final action of the board was to redraw the map of the remaining town.

The new town map appeared to show the bulk of the Circle T in Fort Worth's extraterritorial jurisdiction.

As Alderman Moore started walking out of the room at the meeting's end, Westlake resident Betty Redding demanded, "How can you face the people of Westlake?"

"Very easily," Moore replied.

Minutes later, Moore said the aldermen acted because Perot's rights had not been respected.

"Even though Perot is unpopular for some of the people here, he has rights just like they do," Moore said. "The four aldermen felt he had been denied some of those rights over the years and should receive more consideration from the town. And we didn't feel he would get it in the current climate.

"But we never intended for it to go this far."

Stephen Thornton, 41, of Westlake, whose family developed Stagecoach Hills, said residents felt helpless.

"They have been on the defensive for two solid months, and it seems like the aldermen have been on the offensive," he said.

"I thought citizens vote, but I guess not," said Wanda Haskins, a Stagecoach Hills resident. "We keep waiting

for a guy on a white horse to come in."

The first Westlake resident arrived at Town Hall at 2 P.M. Perot officials had set up two large speakers to broadcast the meeting to the overflow crowd expected.

At 3:40 p.m. Oien admitted into Town Hall some of the property owners whose land was up for disannexation, then locked the door and refused to allow others in.

Outside, residents sat on the floor of the hallway, waiting to be let in.

"It's a sad shame, what these guys are doing. They are voting what do with their own property and they don't care about us," said Mike Ferrer, who is building a house in Stagecoach Hills. "They'll sell their property and move and leave the town in a mess."

Ferrer said he didn't object to Perot's plans for the Circle T. "It might have been better if he'd gone a little slower," he said.

Phyllis McConnell, who has lived three years in Westlake, said she came to the meeting "to find out if the disappears, what happens to us."

"I'm very saddened and feeling betrayed to see the demise of a very nice town I've grown to care about," she said, adding that she would hate to see "a new town build on the grave of Westlake."

Some of the residents whose property was listed for disannexation said some aldermen asked to include their property on the agenda.

Owen Carpenter said Moore contacted him after Bradley's trial this week to see whether they would want to leave the town of 250.

Moore acknowledged he approached them, but declined to elaborate, saying it was "talk between neighbors."

Huntress acknowledged that he placed Lee's property on the agenda without Lee's permission this week.

"I put it on the agenda to give him a chance to disannex if he wanted to," Huntress said.

Robert Gunnels, whose 20 acres was separated from the town last night, said he was glad to get out.

"My view is when Westlake was established in the 1950's, it was only for a tax break. They said everyone would leave us alone," he said.

He added that Perot representatives had approached him recently and said they would consider buying his land, but he said he has not decided whether he will sell. "They said they'd like to have," Gunnels said.

Rick Patterson, president of Perot's Alliance Development Co., said after the meeting, "This shouldn't ever have happened. It's sad, sad."
