

New Westlake board acts to take back town

By Miles Moffeit
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The town's three newly elected aldermen assumed office yesterday amid loud cheers from residents, then moved quickly to try to reverse the former Board of Aldermen's actions to sever 70 percent of Westlake and discharge Scott Bradley as mayor.

The installation of Charla Bradshaw, Abe Bush and incumbent Fred Held, all resounding winners in last Saturday's election, came hours after the lame-duck board again voted to disannex Ross Perot Jr.'s 2,600-acre Circle T Ranch and 10 other properties. That land includes the homes of Aldermen Howard Dudley and Carroll Huntress and former Aldermen Jerry Moore and Al Oien.

The former aldermen said they were "ratifying" the May 2 disannexations and wanted to ensure that Bradley had not overridden their actions with his veto. Bradley contends he was mayor for 10 days while he challenged his ouster.

But his challenge failed Thursday when the 2nd District Court of Appeals struck down a ruling by a lower court judge, Bob McGrath, that had allowed Bradley to stay in office.

Absent from yesterday's swearing-in were Dudley, Huntress and Dale White, who was appointed mayor by the lame-duck aldermen. Bradley read a statement denouncing his ouster as unconstitutional and a violation of state open meetings laws.

"If this were 1910, there would be four aldermen hanging from trees," Bradley said after the meeting. "The feeling is that strong that they are in the wrong."

The three new aldermen sought to repeal each disannexation, then issued an order vacating Bradley's ouster trial and granting him a new hearing. Paul Isham, reinstated yesterday as town attorney, and Bradley said that order allows Bradley to continue as mayor, despite the court of appeals ruling this week. They contend that the court decision is only applicable to McGrath's actions.

Bradley intends to veto the aldermen's disannexation of Maguire Thomas Partners' Solana office complex. "It's not in the town's best interest," he said.

Last night, the board again moved to terminate town attorney Bill Wood and reinstate Isham and land-use consultant Terry Morgan. After meeting for an hour in executive session, the aldermen reiterated that Isham would represent the town in six lawsuits related to disannexations.

Dozens of residents squeezed into a packed Town Hall meeting room for all the meetings yesterday, voicing their support of the new aldermen and questioning the outgoing aldermen about how much they were paying Wood and others.

On Thursday, the Texas Comptroller's Office froze about \$2.4 million in Westlake funds after Huntress transferred \$87,000 from an investment account to the town's coffers and wrote 67 checks for \$1,000 each, town officials said.

Some of the checks to Fielding, Barrett and Taylor "bounced" after Town Secretary Ginger Crosswy and Bradley ordered the town's checking account closed Thursday, Crosswy said yesterday afternoon.

"Show me in writing the exact names of lawyers being paid for," demanded Wanda Haskins, saying that residents have a right to know how much was spent and who was paid.

Wood responded that his Denton firm, in addition to Fielding, Barrett and Taylor of Fort Worth, which represented Dudley in his move to oust Bradley, received payments. Wood and the other aldermen declined to disclose the amount.

when the meeting was adjourned, Haskins said, "As a citizen, I guess I still don't have an answer, do I?" As Huntress was preparing to leave the room, he responded, "And you won't either, honey."

David Bryant and Ike Shupe, attorneys for Perot, stood in the hallway and congratulated Huntress, patting him on the back. Bryant and Shupe watched as the new Board of Aldermen moved to stamp out their predecessors' actions. But Shupe said, "There's no quorum. None of this means anything."

To the residents attending the meeting, it appeared to mean much more.

Westlake resident John Douglas condemned the outgoing aldermen for "childish and greedy" antics during the past few weeks. He compared Huntress' moves to pay the town attorney with 67 separate checks to children "stealing quarters out of a vending machine."

Resident Allen Heath said he has not been able to sleep during the past few weeks as the former board tore apart the town.

"The new board is a positive step in the right direction after weeks of confusion by the other board, who just ignored our rights," Heath said. "If Congress did this, we'd be giving the Louisiana Purchase back to France. I think with the new board, we can say we've got democracy again."

Bradshaw said she is relieved that true representatives for the town are now in place.

"It feels good because we have not had control - even though we won the election," she said. "Our focus is to act in the best interests of the town."

Resident Buddy Brown said he hated to see another power play by the board in paying the town attorney thousands of dollars and re-approving the disannexations.

"The hair is standing straight up on the back of my neck," Brown said. "We've got to put the town back together again. We now have an open government and not a bunch of council members with open pockets."

Other developments yesterday:

Wood and the outgoing aldermen released a town map depicting Westlake in broken pieces. In their morning meeting, they approved a "corrected" version of the map adopted during the sweeping disannexation moves May 2. Their revised town map, which was immediately repealed by the new board, shows Bradshaw's residence as being within the town. The version approved last week left out her home.

The board also removed an ordinance that would have disannexed the 5.5-acre Odd Fellows Cemetery from the town without the owners' permission. The *Star-Telegram* reported Thursday that cemetery officials did not ask to be a part of the disannexation move. The cemetery is not shown as a disannexed property on the new map.

Town officials and representatives for Denton-based Metroplex Engineering, the town's map maker, repeatedly

declined to release the map to the *Star-Telegram* since it was adopted May 2. Ernest Hedgcoth, the town's engineer, said yesterday that Perot representatives had input this week into the map's revisions, saying "many of these properties affect the Circle T." Most of the property owners leaving the town own land adjacent to the Circle T or are surrounded by the ranch. At least three of the property owners say Perot has offered them money for their land.

For the past week, the former aldermen have locked up Town Hall, leaving Crosswy and other town officials without a key. As they were leaving Town Hall yesterday, they handed Crosswy four new keys to the building.

Crosswy later discovered that the town's checkbook was missing. White told her that he believed the "attorneys probably took it."

"Why would they take the town's checkbook?" Crosswy asked him.

"I don't know, but Bill Wood probably has it," he answered. White retrieved the checkbook hours later and returned it to Town Hall.

On Monday, the town plans to open a new checking account.

The new Board of Aldermen plans to meet every Monday night indefinitely, Bradley said. Meeting notices will be delivered to all aldermen, including Huntress and Dudley.

On Monday's agenda are the appointment of a mayor pro tem, resident presentations, a procedure change on accessing the town's investment account and more disannexation repeals.

"This Monday, we will adopt a resolution setting 7:30 p.m. as the time to meet regularly until we save the town," Bradley said. We've got a lot of cleanup work to do."
