

## Westlake sweeps in pro-town candidates

By Miles Moffeit  
Star-Telegram

WESTLAKE -- In record turnout, voters repudiated an alderman who helped to dismantle the town and oust the mayor, electing by wide margins three candidates who supported the mayor's fight against Ross Perot Jr.'s Circle T Ranch development plans.

Alderman Al Oien, who on election eve voted to disannex the ranch and the property of three other aldermen, was overwhelmingly defeated. For weeks, Oien and Aldermen Carroll Huntress, Howard Dudley and Jerry Moore had said that they were acting on behalf of the town's best interests in ousting Mayor Scott Bradley and working with Perot.

Oien and candidate Don Redding, who had effectively withdrawn, drew the least number of votes in the five-way race for three seats.

About 75 percent of the town -- 143 voters -- cast ballots in the election, giving Charla Bradshaw, Abe Bush and incumbent Fred Held the vast majority of votes. Bradshaw took 106 votes; Held, 99; and Bush, 89. The vote count was monitored by an inspector for the secretary of state's office, which received more than 15 requests in recent days for additional election scrutiny.

"I've said all along, I felt the town's decisions were up to the voters," said Held, the only incumbent on the Board of Aldermen to support Bradley. "Well, the voters spoke today."

Oien and Redding had 34 votes each.

Oien, reached at his home about 10:15 last night, had not heard the vote outcome, but he said he believes that the election results would not stand up to scrutiny of the courts.

"Were there any Westlake votes in that election?" Oien said. "Well, they'll have to void this election anyway and have another election. Whoever runs then will win, and that's wonderful. Whether I obtain any votes is a moot point."

Bradley termed the vote a victory for the town. But, he said, the fight continues this week.

"The election results marks the first event under which we can begin reconstruction," Bradley said. "We'll be fighting this week."

Oien and the other aldermen had tried to block residents of Stagecoach Hills subdivision from voting in the election. The four aldermen claimed that Bradley had misled them into voting for annexation of the subdivision in 1995.

Ironically, two aldermen who voted for the massive disannexation -- Dudley and Huntress -- apparently will keep their seats on the Board of Aldermen for some time, even though they no longer live in Westlake. Although they effectively resigned when their property was disannexed, the secretary of state's office said they can remain in office until the U.S. Justice Department signs off on the disannexation.

And Dale White may remain as mayor, as appointed by the four aldermen on Friday shortly before they voted to

disannex his property as well.

The aldermen also voted to delay the official canvass of the election results until Friday, the last possible day allowed under state statutes.

But yesterday, Bradley posted a notice at town hall, bearing Town Secretary Ginger Crosswy's signature, setting a meeting for tomorrow to canvass election votes and swear in the candidates. Bradley contends he can still remain as mayor until he appeals the aldermen's ouster.

Last night, supporters for Held, Bush and Redding gathered at Bradley's house to await elections returns. Minutes after the final unofficial vote was tabulated at town hall, just before 9 p.m., the candidates got the news by telephone.

But many considered last night's watch party -- coming on the heels of Bradley's ouster on Tuesday and Friday night's secession by Perot and other landowners -- more in the spirit of a disaster-relief effort.

"I just felt terrible after" Friday night, Bush said. "It was as if they just cut the town's heart out and left a big hole. We have a lot of work to do" to put the town together.

Bradshaw was out of town and could not be reached to comment. Held said he was elated at the large voter turnout, because it was the strongest showing ever for the town.

"With everything that's transpired, you always have a little doubt that something could go wrong with the election," Held said.

Bush said, "This is the first time in this town's history that this many people have voted. They wanted us to straighten this mess this out. Now, we're ready to work with everybody and go about our business."

In early March, a week after Redding filed to run for office, the aldermen sought to disannex his residence and 80 of his neighbors in Stagecoach Hills, saying they were never properly annexed. Redding filed suit to stop them, and the aldermen obtained a court order allowing them to temporarily segregate the Stagecoach Hills ballots from other town residents. The order was eventually withdrawn, leaving one ballot box.

During early voting, Redding had implored Westlake residents not to vote for him and to instead give Bradshaw, Held and Bush their votes because they supported his philosophy to uphold the town's master plan in the face of Perot's aggressive efforts to implement his own Circle T plan and preserve his powerful utility districts.

"There were still seven people who voted for me today and I can't imagine why," Redding said. "I was unsuccessful because I did everything I could to keep them from voting for me. But this is clearly a step in the right direction. This is a pro-Westlake vote that simply says the people of the town want a say in development."

Tomorrow, a state appeals court is scheduled to hear arguments over whether Bradley's ouster was constitutional.

Elizabeth Hanshaw-Ross, an attorney for the election division of the secretary of state's office, said last night that Westlake's election saga has been an unusual one to monitor.

"It's unusual for such a change of events during an election, spearing the ballots out and then canceling the injunction and then putting ballots back in," she said.

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