

Aldermen set to remove Solana from Westlake

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Town Hall has been closed, the town secretary locked out and public records left unavailable for inspection, by order of the town's lame-duck Board of Aldermen and new mayor.

A sign scrawled in ink on the Town Hall window reads, "Town Hall temporarily closed as of May 6, 1997 until further notice."

Town Secretary Ginger Crosswy said she has been trying since Monday to find out when she can get a key to the office.

"I still don't have one," she said last night.

For the fifth consecutive day, the aldermen declined to release a copy of the revised town map that they approved last week.

And tonight, the Board of Aldermen is expected to take a vote that will place the Town Hall building in the jurisdiction of neighboring Southlake.

At a special 9 p.m. meeting, the board is to consider disannexation of the \$105 million Solana office complex, which houses Town Hall. That vote will also remove most of Westlake's tax base. Southlake City Council also meets tonight, planning to take action on absorbing Solana after the Westlake vote.

Solana officials declined to comment yesterday.

Alderman Carroll Huntress said the move is being made before the aldermen elected last week take control of the board tomorrow because Solana just recently requested disannexation.

Last Friday, the board disannexed more than 70 percent of the town, including the homes of four aldermen and the man they appointed that night as mayor, Dale White. But the board left Solana in the fragments of Westlake that remained.

Huntress said that Solana officials on Monday requested that the complex be placed in Southlake. About 480 acres of the 900-acre complex are now in Westlake.

"That was why it was such a last-minute deal," he said. "We're getting blamed for it, but they requested it. They came to us. We thought we were through Friday night."

White could not be reached to comment. Aldermen Jerry Moore declined to comment.

The loss of the \$105 million complex from the town's tax roll will leave deep cuts in its financial future. Solana accounts for about 95 percent of Westlake's annual income. The rest comes from building permits and other small fees. Westlake does not levy a property tax.

Former Mayor Scott Bradley - ousted by the board last week - said the town has about \$2 million in its coffers,

which it can use in its fight for survival.

"We have a fairly substantial sum of money on reserve," Bradley said. "We can fight for a long time, and we will."

Still, he said the loss of Solana - which has such high-profile corporate clients as Levi Strauss, Citicorp, Nokia and Wells Fargo - will hurt the town in many ways.

"It is a blow because I think most people identify Westlake with Solana and vice versa," Bradley said. "It represents something that we had put a lot of input into. It hurts. It really does."

At tonight's meeting, after the vote on Solana's disannexation, the board is also expected to approve payment of its legal bills and attorney's fees, and indemnify themselves from litigation-related matters.

"It's just a clarification thing," Huntress said yesterday of the indemnity ordinance. "We're just covering all the bases."

The town can dip into its reserves to pay the legal bills, Huntress said.

"We existed as a city long before Solana," Huntress said. "We were a city and we didn't need a lot of money. They won't need a lot of money now because it's all residential. I think they are in pretty good shape."

Bradley has sued the aldermen, contending that they slandered him and violated his constitutional rights in a trial where they acted as judge, jury and witnesses. A decision is pending from the 2nd Court of Appeals about whether the Board of Aldermen acted properly in removing Bradley from office. The aldermen also face lawsuits - all involving disannexation issues - by three residents.

Many Westlake residents have argued that the various disannexations are not in their best interest and on Saturday, three board candidates who opposed disannexation won office.

But Texas courts would be more interested in whether the board followed proper procedures than if their action was good or bad for Westlake residents, said Bruce Kramer, a professor at Texas Tech University law school.

"It's power politics on the local level," he said. "Whether it's good or bad or indifferent, under the Texas scheme, local governments and their councils have the powers to engage in these kinds of activities without having substantive review.
