

## Circle T Setback

### Star-Telegram Editorial

Hillwood Development Corp. shouldn't have let its pact with Westlake fall apart.

After years of down-and-dirty fighting about how to develop more than 2,000 acres on the Circle T Ranch, officials from the town of Westlake and Ross Perot Jr.'s Hillwood Development Corp. found a way to get along. At least it looked that way until Perot's folks let their most recent agreement with the town fall apart.

Dumb move. There is too much at stake for either side to let an amicable relationship slip away.

In 1997, bitter confrontations led Perot to separate the rolling hills of the Circle T from tiny Westlake and begin the process of joining the ranch to Fort Worth. Then in 1998, the chance to land a lucrative Fidelity Investments office development brought Westlake, Hillwood and the Circle T back together.

Ever since, Westlake and Hillwood officials have worked to resolve their differences. It's been a one-step-at-a-time process, and it has worked well. Hillwood's plans call for high-dollar homes, golf courses, a resort hotel, a retail area and a small-town-Texas business district on the ranch.

The biggest conflicts between Westlake and Hillwood have centered on the powers of the Perot-controlled utility districts that cover the ranch. The town has seen those districts as an unacceptable obstacle to municipal control within Westlake's boundaries. Hillwood has seen the districts as a way to finance development costs.

As part of doing away with the utility districts while satisfying the needs of Hillwood's financing process, the two sides ironed out an agreement to put Westlake in charge of water and sewer service on the ranch. Town aldermen approved the agreement on Dec. 13.

Now Hillwood officials have allowed the formal agreement to expire without signing it, saying that they found a paragraph in it that they didn't like.

That's a black mark on a slate that had been refreshingly cleaned of many black marks. Apologies are due, and the hard work toward mutually agreed goals should move forward.

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