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hired to transcribe the proceedings. After the 90-minute meeting, the trustee would say only, "I'm extremely disappointed."

The rezoning was approved first by the Planning and Zoning Commission and then by the City Council.

The only official to vote against it was Alderman Carroll Huntress, a longtime Hunt business associate who questioned the amount of study his fellow officials had put into the issue.

"Maybe they know more about it than I do," Huntress said. "I thought it was a little hasty."

City officials said rezoning the ranch from its current hodgepodge to a "planned office park" was intended to prevent a housing development that could create congestion in Westlake and rob the community's 300 residents of its rural atmosphere.

Scott Bradley, a lawyer who heads the Planning and Zoning Commission, said he was not swayed by the threats of a lawsuit by Hunt's representatives in retaliation for the rezoning.

Bradley pointed out that the biggest beneficiary of the Circle T sale would be the Internal Revenue Service, which was designated in bankruptcy court to receive most of the proceeds of about $220 million in Hunt assets.

Referring to the IRS, Bradley said, "It seems sort of foolish for them to be spending the taxpayers' money to fight the little people of Westlake."

Although the Circle T was valued in bankruptcy court at $27 million, the property twice has attracted offers of considerably more, including a bid from a Canadian real estate firm that currently has the ranch under contract for about $35 million.

The Bills Group of Vancouver, British Columbia, has outlined plans for 1,200 acres of housing development and 800 acres of commercial development. The company, which has about a week left to commit to the purchase, has said it would reconsider if the ranch were rezoned.

"Once this is done, there's no turning back," Pate warned city officials. "What I'm going to be left with is basically an unmarketable piece of property."

Stretching across half of Westlake, the ranch could accommodate a development nearly one-fourth the size of Dallas/Fort Worth Airport. Adjacent to the 1,000-acre IBM office development, it is considered one of the last major development sites in northeast Tarrant County.

Hunt purchased the ranch 15 years ago then left it undeveloped, using it as both a personal refuge and a favorite spot to entertain guests, who often were powerful politicians and celebrities.

Huntress, who has known Hunt for several years, said that the former tycoon would question the business sense of the rezoning but that he probably would not be angry.

"They love Mr. Hunt out here, and he's always loved Westlake," Huntress said. "I'm sure there's still a mutual admiration. He won't take it personally at all."