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were.

"The cities have a joint and mutual interest in the continued vitality of the airport," Jung said. "I don't think it would change the complexion of the lawsuit."

Robert Power, an Irving attorney representing the three suburbs, said he expects a court hearing by the end of June, if Fort Worth and Dallas choose not to join the lawsuit voluntarily.

"The cities of Dallas and Fort Worth should not be allowed to hide behind a shield," Power said.

The lawsuit filed by the airport April 12 in Dallas County Circuit Court challenges the authority of Grapevine, Euless and Irving to rezone airport property and to require each suburb's approval of a $3.5 billion expansion of the 15-year-old airport.

The elected leaders of all three communities oppose airport expansion out of fear that it would harm their cities' quality of life, reduce property values and hurt their local economies.

More than 17,000 acres of airport property within the three suburbs was rezoned several months ago as the communities sought to persuade airport officials to redesign their expansion plans.

D/FW officials contend that the Texas Municipal Airports Act — a 1968 state law that empowered Fort Worth and Dallas to build the airport — exempts the airport from such local government controls.

The lawsuit says state law empowers D/FW's 11-member policy-making board to "plan, acquire, establish, develop, construct, enlarge, improve, maintain, equip, operate, regulate, protect and police" the airport.

Jung, an attorney with the Dallas law firm of Strasburger & Price, yesterday said the language in the Municipal Airports Act does not explicitly exempt the airport from such local controls as zoning restrictions.

But, he said, "We believe that's the implication of the powers granted."

In separate but nearly identical responses filed in court yesterday, Grapevine, Euless and Irving contend that Fort Worth and Dallas — as well as "their agent," the airport — have no authority to circumvent such restrictions.

"Limitations on the constitutional powers of a home-rule municipality may be found, if at all, only where the Legislature has spoken with unmistakable clarity," the responses state.

The suburbs seek dismissal of the suit, largely on the grounds that D/FW officials have not been denied local approval of their expansion plan and, therefore, have no reason to seek a court remedy.

Tate, who was joined at the news conference by representatives of Euless and Irving, said the cities are willing to continue the court fight and are confident of victory.

"We will walk every mile, we will turn every stone, we will bear any cross," Tate said. "The D/FW Airport board is looking up a mountain that will be too high to climb."

Said Euless Mayor Harold Samuels: "If anything, our commitment has grown even greater."

Rick Douglas, president of the North Texas Commission, a regional business group strongly supportive of the airport, yesterday said that he hopes the involvement of Fort Worth and Dallas in the lawsuit would not worsen the dispute.

Douglas, who last week urged the airport and the suburbs to accept arbitration, said he does not believe officials in either Fort Worth or Dallas could serve that role or help identify solutions.

"I'm not sure lawsuits do that," he said. "I would hope nothing would impede the capability of the three cities and the airport to discuss possible alternatives."