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Arlington residents open to Cowboys plan Homeowners would sell to clear way for stadium but wary of being used

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When it comes to the possibility of the Cowboys buying up the 30-acre Reynolds subdivision and other land and bulldozing homes to make way for a new stadium, Charlie Scott has perspective.

The white-haired and white-bearded Mr. Scott, 50 years old and a resident for nearly half that time, owns about 30 of the properties in the neighborhood in the southwestern shadow of Amerquest Field.

Like some others there, he'd be ecstatic if the franchise bought them out - for a fair price. On the other hand, he remembers the Mavericks and Stars talking a few years ago about doing the same thing.

"The first thing we think is, 'How many times have we heard this?'" he said, sitting in his remodeled kitchen on Crestwood Drive. "We're tired of being somebody's carrot. They used this neighborhood to get the American Airlines Center in Dallas. I'm not into being used by Jerry Jones to get a deal in Dallas."

But, Mr. Scott said, if the deal were right, "I would sell. We won't be the ones to hold this up."

Arlington officials, who announced Tuesday that they are negotiating exclusively with the Cowboys until Aug. 17 to strike a 50-50 cost-sharing deal to build a stadium, haven't disclosed a site. But Mayor Robert Cluck said a blighted area under consideration is near Amerquest Field and includes residential and commercial properties.

Although they haven't been approached, residents of the Reynolds subdivision think their homes are potential targets.

"Aside from the money, I'd love to have the Cowboys here," said Troy Villarreal, 35, sitting on the small wooden front porch of a home his family has owned on Vine Street since 1963. "Can you imagine?" he said, speculating about a future conversation: "My house was on the 20-yard line."

Walt Herrington, a 24-year resident, said he doesn't know anyone in the neighborhood who would be against a sale. "You got some older homeowners who just want to buy a home in a similar, quiet subdivision," he said.

Glen Heath, an 83-year-old who's owned a home on Crestwood for 56 years, agrees.

"As far as money," he said, "I think anybody in this neighborhood would move for the right price."

Mr. Scott, who acts as a patriarch for the neighborhood, said he won't sell if seniors don't get a fair price for their homes. That's going to mean a lot more than the \$60,000 or \$70,000 many of them are appraised at.

Glenn **Sodd**, a Corsicana attorney who represented two major landowners in eminent domain cases involving the Texas Rangers' ball field, agreed.

"The problem for those landowners in older homes around Johnson Creek is, even if you sell your home for every penny that it's worth, it won't be enough for a new home."

When asked whether he'd jump into the fray over a potential Cowboys deal, Mr. **Sodd** didn't hesitate.

"I'll do the same thing on this football stadium, if they do it," he said, "if ... [the neighbors] call me."

But phone calls are still far away. The city of Arlington has commissioned a cost-benefit study by a California firm to determine whether the prospective deal makes sense to the city - and the franchise. If it does, then the City Council must vote by Aug. 17 to put some combination of tax increases on the November ballot.

County still hopeful

On Tuesday, Dallas County Commissioner Mike Cantrell said the county still has a chance to remain the home of the Cowboys.

It is not a forgone conclusion, he said, that Arlington voters will approve the amount of public investment the Cowboys want.

"Just because it gets on the ballot in Arlington does not mean it's going to pass," Mr. Cantrell said.

Dallas County hired a raft of consultants to analyze its deal with the Cowboys. The group included a Houston law firm, financial advisers, construction consultants and a sports consulting firm whose job was to examine the deal's potential effect on the local economy.

Meetings between the consultants and the Cowboys did not produce information that county officials thought they needed. County commissioners said it would be difficult for Arlington to adequately study the Cowboys proposals in only one month.

Dr. Cluck "is going to have to get the Cowboys to provide some of the documentation for the city," County Judge Margaret Keliher said. "That is going to be tough to do in 30 days."

Ms. Keliher and the commissioners insisted they were not disappointed to learn the Cowboys might leave the county.

"All we wanted was a fair partnership," Commissioner Kenneth Mayfield said. "The Cowboys don't want that. What the Cowboys want is one-sided."

Dallas County officials said the Cowboys would choose the city that gives them the most money. But they also insisted that Dallas has benefits - the skyline, a historic location in Fair Park - that suburban Arlington does not have.

"There are intangible things that are worth more than just money," Mr. Cantrell said. "Those are very strong assets."

Some Dallas business leaders have expressed disappointment that the county government took the lead public role in the stadium negotiations. Dallas City Hall, they said, is better prepared to undertake such a project.

The city of Dallas has built several arenas, including Reunion Arena and American Airlines Center. Critics derided the amount of public investment the projects required. Supporters emphasized that the deals kept sports teams in Dallas.

Earlier hurdles

Dallas County viewed the Cowboys project as a business deal and said it would have to meet several criteria - including an economic return for taxpayers - that might not be realistic.

On several occasions, Dallas County commissioners expressed annoyance with the amount of public investment the Cowboys demanded.

"Dealing with the county on this project really was misunderstood by the Cowboys," said Darrell Jordan, a Dallas lawyer and former mayoral candidate who has championed a Fair Park home for the Cowboys. "It became much more difficult than they ever imagined. You couple that with the apparent negativism from the get-go."

Arlington would be more supportive of the project, he said.

"I would be very surprised if it did not succeed out there," he said. "It is very saddening to realize this once-in-50-year opportunity is likely beyond us."

The economic return for taxpayers through real estate development around local sports venues has been mixed.

When Dallas' Reunion Arena and Irving's Texas Stadium were built, no significant retail or restaurant construction followed.

Ameritrust Field was added to a district that was already developed with major entertainment attractions and extensive retail and restaurant space. Plans for a large mixed-use complex to accompany the new stadium have never gotten off the drawing board.

In Frisco, the minor league ballpark for the RoughRiders was built after construction of the adjoining Stonebriar Centre mall and millions of square feet of retail and restaurant space. Now that the park is open, developers are planning more office space, apartments and hotel rooms.

Downtown Dallas' Victory development has been slow to take off but is finally showing promise. Developers hope to have the first retail and residential units, plus a hotel, completed by 2006 - almost five years after American Airlines Center opened.

Staff writers Steve Brown and Dave Michaels contributed to this report.

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