



Rowlett Leaders Hope New Deal Will Get Crystal Lagoon Built

Rowlett sued the site's original developer in January for refusing to build the entire lagoon

By Ken Kalthoff

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The city of Rowlett has a new deal that city leaders hope will get the long-planned Crystal Lagoon built along Lake Ray Hubbard and end a lawsuit after years of debate.



"We want the entertainment venues that we've been promised all along and this is a very critical," Rowlett City Manager Brian Funderburk said. "The Crystal Lagoon is a very critical piece of that puzzle."

The Bayside project where the lagoon was planned straddles both sides of Interstate 30 on lakefront property.

The city of Rowlett purchased the former city of Dallas park land for \$31 million after Dallas voters agreed to sell it in 2013.

Rowlett sold the land to the current developer, which has been building apartments and single family homes on the north side of I-30. Except for a marina that was already there, the south side of I-30 has remained undeveloped.

"It's highly coveted. It's a very nice property and we want to see the highest and best use for that property," Rowlett resident Jeff Winget said.

He started a group called "Build Our Bayside," that pushed for construction of the original vision for an eight-acre lagoon with a convention center, hotel, stores and restaurants around it.

"For me personally, the lagoon is the hill that I would die on. I would really like to see the lagoon because I think that's what encapsulates the entire Bayside development," Winget said.

His group was in response to another group called "Build a Better Bayside" that supported the original developer's scaled down plan for the south side of the lakefront property.

Billboards and "Build a Better Bayside" yard signs went up in Rowlett supporting the original developer and opposing the city of Rowlett after the city sued the developer in January for refusing to build the lagoon.

The firm said the lagoon plan was not feasible. Some residents opposed the dense entertainment district lagoon design. City officials still strongly supported it.

The new deal between the city and the current developer would allow work to continue on the north side of I-30 as the city paid the developer \$37 million to buy back the south side property. The city would then sell that south side land to a second developer to complete the lagoon and new buildings around it.

Funderburk said the city of Rowlett would be reimbursed for the full cost of the south side land by the second developer. The deal was approved by the Rowlett City Council on Friday.

During a 120-day negotiation period, the city's lawsuit against the first developer would remain in place pending the outcome of this deal. Meanwhile, Rowlett officials declined to name the second developer.

"It's going to take a lot of work in this 120 days, but at the end of that, we'll be able to tell the world the whole story," Funderburk said.

Winget said he considered the deal a step in the right direction to end fighting in court.

"We really need the ability to progress forward, make something happen with that property as opposed to it just sitting there," Winget said.

The city of Rowlett will hold a town hall meeting on the new deal on Monday, March 18 at 6:30 p.m. at the Rowlett Community Center.

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