

Lauderhill seeks to resolve 2005 annexation dispute

By Larry Barszewski, Sun Sentinel

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Seven years after annexing the St. George and West Ken Lark neighborhoods, the city is still fighting with Broward County over a fire station there and about who should be providing water and sewer service to the area.

The city anticipated taking over the county fire station — and the water and sewer responsibilities — but has not been able to overcome county objections

The two sides met Wednesday in a conflict resolution meeting requested by the city, the first step in a process that could eventually lead to a city lawsuit against the county if no agreement is reached.

County officials repeated the position they have taken since the 2005 annexation: They are willing to turn over Fire Station No. 14 on Northwest 31st Avenue if the city agrees to provide service to unincorporated residents of the Washington Park, Roosevelt Park, Boulevard Gardens and Franklin Park communities east of the annexed area.

Without such an agreement, County Administrator Bertha Henry said the county needs the station to provide those services. Henry said the county is willing to pay for the cost of providing the fire service.

But city officials don't want to service the unincorporated area because they fear it might be seen as a step toward annexing the area, which it has no interest in doing.

"We don't want to start creating an expectation in people ... that they are going to be annexed," City Manager Charles Faranda said. The communities have been seen as less desirable for annexation because they do not offer a strong tax base.

The city has been providing fire service to its annexed area using a manufactured home it set up on a vacant lot on 31st Avenue just north of the Swap Shop, which was also included in the annexation.

Faranda suggested the sides look into the possibility of Fort Lauderdale providing fire service to the unincorporated pocket, which would then erase the county's need to hang onto its fire station.

Regarding the water and sewer services, Henry said the county views those services as regional.

"We know that water and sewer boundaries don't follow boundaries of municipalities, they just don't," Henry said.

But Jamie Cole, a special counsel for Lauderhill, said the city has the right to provide water and sewer services to the annexed area. The issue is whether the city would have to lay its own lines or if it could purchase the county's lines in the area, he said.

"We wanted to do it in the most cost-effective way and not have to lay new lines all over the city," Faranda said.

Andrew Meyers, the county's chief appellate counsel, said he's not sure the city has that right to unilaterally provide water and sewer service and needed more time to research the issue.

"We'll research it objectively," Meyers said. "Then we'll see if it makes sense to do a deal with you."

The two sides will meet again Oct. 3.

lbarszewski@tribune.com or 954-356-4556