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Getting used to success: Progress on the Chalk Line site

by The Anniston Star Editorial Board

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It rarely snows in Anniston, but the snowball effect could soon be felt at the former Chalk Like site on the western edge of downtown.

In other words, don't be surprised if one success breeds another — quickly, let's hope.

Last week, city officials discussed the likelihood that the local office of the Department of Human Resources would become the first tenant in the revitalized Chalk Line property. Don't chuckle at the lack of sexiness of that storyline. This is a big deal.

Today, the 1880s-era home of the historic Anniston Manufacturing Co. is a vacant brownfield whose environmental remediation is under way but remains incomplete. However, that location's future is shrouded in a visionary dream that includes office space, retail accommodations and several other possibilities, many of which hold immense cultural and civic value.

Such a project just west of Noble Street and within a stone's throw of vital city offices could become the tinder needed to light a revitalization fire in Anniston's historic core. This page continues to hope that that fire burns in a positive manner for the city.

For now, DHR's move from Noble Street to the Chalk Like site isn't written in stone, but it seems that few insurmountable roadblocks can crop up that will prevent it. The property still needs environmental cleaning from its decades of hosting a manufacturing plant. Plans for the new office space aren't in the design stage, either.

Yet, city officials are wise to move ahead with plans that this project will not only happen, but will be the genesis for larger things to come.

"This probably will be the first. That's very good," Toby Bennington, Anniston's city planner, told The Star. "When you can move this quickly, particularly when you are getting a brownfield cleaned up, this is what the EPA and ADEM and of course the city, this is what we like to see."

In all fairness to the DHR, the bigger picture for Anniston development dwarfs its potential move.

The Chalk Line site has unique characteristics — its proximity to both west Anniston and downtown being at the top of the list — that make it different than other developable locations in town.

Nevertheless, that site can become a Petri dish of modern-day ideas for remaking the city's numerous developable areas. If city leaders — particularly those councilmen who often bathe in dysfunction — can work successfully with planners on projects such as Chalk Line, that opens the door for needed questions:

Today, it's Chalk Line. Tomorrow, it's what? What's possible with vacant Quintard Avenue storefronts? What's doable in Lenlock and west Anniston? What can City Hall and the Anniston Public Building Authority come up with next?

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What we'd like to see is for the Chalk Line site to become that figurative snowball in Anniston. Success in development is long overdue. We could get used to it.

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