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Menards coming to Dell Range and Windmill?

Some readers remember when the Cheyenne Herald was first, by almost a year, to announce the coming of Kohl's, Michael's and Bed, Bath & Beyond.

On April 17, 2006, we announced in a front page story "Kohl's to open by Lowes in north Cheyenne" with a sub-head of "and Best Buy is also likely." Many Cheyenne consumers wish the Best Buy prediction would have come true - and it still may when the economy improves.

A telephone conversation with the spokesman for Menard, Inc., in Eau Claire, Wisconsin on Friday morning (July 31, 2009) elicited the specific response that there are no plans to open a Menard's store in Cheyenne in 2010. The spokesman asked for an e-mail request seeking information about future plans, if any are specific and can be made public, for a Menard's store in the future. That request was made immediately and the quick response was: "Menard's has no plans at this time in Cheyenne, WY."

No official announcement has been made by Menard, Inc., the City (where plans would have to be filed), or any other property owner in Cheyenne as of this time.

So, why do I predict that a Menard's will not only open in Cheyenne but will open on the southeast corner of Dell Range and Windmill?

Let me count the ways.

1.) There is a Menard's store in Casper and Menard's is one of the growing major retail HI chains in the country.

2.) Menard's stores are also open in Rapid City, South Dakota and Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

3.) The corner parcel at Dell Range and Windmill that was carved out is suitable for such a retailer - 22.7 acres.

4.) Menard's has been inserting their advertising flyers into the Sunday Tribune-Eagle newspaper for several weeks. That is known as "priming the pump."

5.) With a reported asking price of \$7.0 million for the 22.7 acres, it will take a major retailer like Menard's to be able to afford the land. Rumor also has it that Casper money will buy the land, build the building and lease it to Menard's.

6.) The rumored price for the 22.7 acres of land - at \$7.0 million makes sense.

22.7 acres of land is 988,812 sq. ft. A \$7.0 million selling price calculates to \$7.08 / sq. ft., a believable price for square foot for commercial development land on Dell Range.

Note: An hour after my exchange of e-mails with the Menard, Inc. home office in Wisconsin, the spokesman called me to tell me he was digging further - that having no "plans" may not mean having no interest or even pursuing land, etc. That's the way I had taken the vague response. "Plans" often mean no architectural drawings or building plans are filed.

7.) The size, 22.7 acres, is consistent with other parcels of land Menards' stores have been built on - when they are a free-standing store without other retailers.

Note 2: Within two hours, an official message was conveyed by e-mail from Jeff Abbott, spokesman for Menard, Inc. of Eau Claire Wisconsin. It said:

"Although we currently do not own land in Cheyenne, we are always looking at opportunities to expand and meet the growing demand for home improvement products at Menards. Within the past year, we opened two new stores in the region in Scottsbluff, NE and Casper, WY, therefore it makes sense that we continue to study other communities in this region should we decide to expand."

These two new stores, as with all of our new stores, were built in our largest 240,000 square foot format and include several great departments, a full-service lumberyard, beautiful garden center, and even convenience grocery items for your one-stop shopping convenience. Although we do not have any specific plans to announce, we will continue to look at new markets throughout the region including Cheyenne."

8.) The rumored "money" from Casper is the same money that developed the industrial park in Casper where the Menards store is located up there.

Now, whether this market is adequately served in that product category or not will be left to others to debate. With Sutherland's, Lowes, Home Depot, Mead



Lumber, Bloedorn Lumber and Capital Lumber, Menards might have their hands full in Cheyenne. That is not a concern of mine. I just do not have the answer and Menards has not retained me to do any market research for them.

The specific location at the corner of Dell Range Blvd. and Windmill does seem problematic. If Menards is to build a 240,000 sq. ft. store at that intersection, the sales volume to support it will be huge. Especially with the land cost there.

Dell Range is already overcrowded - maybe not as bad that far east - and the additional traffic from a giant, high traffic retailer will only exacerbate the problem. The south end of Windmill sends traffic from East High School north (and Cahill Park is adjacent to this location on the north end of Windmill) - between Pershing and Dell Range - and trucks delivering to Menards and then out to customers of Menards will create more traffic in that area and its already heavy.

When the federal government made the donation of that land, it can be safely assumed that they seriously intended it to be used for recreation purposes as the restrictive deed said. They may not be concerned with what lifting that restriction means in a local community - preferring to allow local governments to make wise decisions. Unfortunately, this local government has not shown a proclivity for making wise decisions.

While a deal may be all but made for the 22.7 acres of land, it seems that state statute may require that first a municipality declare such land as surplus and then entertain all bids. It is unlikely that there would be much competition to a \$7.0 million offer that has reportedly already been made and accepted, hence the replat. And, again, the City has not shown much concern for adhering to laws they expect others to obey and the legal procedure for designating and selling "surplus" property or land may be ignored.

Their safe reliance is usually, "who is going to sue us?"

Maybe a consortium of the stores likely to be most adversely affected if a Menards opens there will bring the legal action to force the City to follow the law.

As readers can see for themselves on page 5, the mayor and city council president made certain back room representations and promises to the Botanic Gardens about proceeds from the sale of that land - IN WRITING! The board of directors of Friends of the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens has some heavy hitters. In fact, they have more than one attorney on the board. Will they get weak in the knees when facing off against the City?

Jack Spiker said in the forced cover letter about the promise(s) that "his word is his bond." We shall now see.

Menards is somewhat described in Jeff Abbott's e-mail but it should also be noted that they manufacture some of the products they sell. Founded in 1962 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the chain of home improvement stores is concentrated in the Midwest, extending west to the Dakotas and Wyoming. Menards will open its 250th store in 2009 and is estimated to have annual sales of \$8.0 billion.

Menard, Inc. is a privately-held company, founded by John Menard, Jr. in 1962. It is estimated that they have 45,000 employees. Menards uses distribution centers as does Lowes. Home Depot is a direct shipment operation. In 2006, Forbes ranked Menard, Inc. as the 24th largest privately-held companies in the country. As subscribers of the WT-E have seen, Menards is a major promoter. In addition to the print flyers they regularly distribute, their television jingle has been the same for seemingly decades.

Everyone in the Midwest is familiar with their "Save big money at Menards" jingle.

A recent expansion was thwarted by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Menard, Inc., instead divided the jobs between distribution centers under construction in Iowa and Ohio, costing Eau Claire between 600 and 800 jobs.

So, it will be interesting to see if Menard, Inc. has the patience to work through the "regulatory roadblocks" in Cheyenne that they faced in their hometown of Eau Claire. It doesn't look like they have all the patience in the world so this potential addition may be lost to our city government's incompetence.

Is this a sure thing? No. But all signs point in that direction. Will it necessarily be at that location? Almost certainly. They won't want to wait for a south industrial park to be completed.