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THE CHEYENNE HERALD

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Skywacky

***If it takes the last of your dollars,
this administration is bound and
determined to open the Hynds.***

With excitement tantamount to announcing that the City of Cheyenne had just bought a new stagecoach, the news of a proposed "skywalk" down the alley behind the Idleman Hotel fell flat on the residents.

It is the latest example of this city's elected group charging pell-mell into the 1960's.

What's next? Leisure suits for the councilmen? Seeking a new drive-in movie theater? Investing in dime store stocks?

**by
Dave
Featherly**

Has any of this crew read anything from another market? Have any of them ever lived anywhere but Cheyenne? In the real world out there, these tunnels elevated over the street level have fallen into disfavor.

In the cities that invented these walkways, they are called "skyways." In other copy-cat places, they are probably known better as "skywalks." Call them what you want, they have a purpose and some measure of success only in certain places.

In downtown St. Paul, over 50,000 downtown employees work in offices, banks, restaurants, retail stores, and in government buildings. In downtown Minneapolis, that number is dwarfed.

The distinction, other than tens of thousands of potential users for their skyways, is that in the winter, it is colder than hell outside. In the summer, the humidity and temperature strive to outdo each other.

The buildings either hosting skyways, because they run through the inside of these buildings, not just over streets below, or adjacent to them, are accessible throughout the downtowns of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Having a great deal of experience in navigating the St. Paul maze of skyways - as a downtown retail executive from 1968 to 1977 and a visitor regularly since - the evolution from a walkway of importance to one of embarrassment has been painful to witness.

The notion of a tunnel from the recently completed - and still basically unused - parking garage to empty out a block away from any activity of the downtown, is silly. Preposterous. Unnecessary.

"Not since the Ed Ames tomahawk throwing episode on the Tonight Show years ago have people laughed so hard for so long when trying to relate the "skywalk" announcement to friends."

Consider the possibilities. Or, rather, the impossibilities.

An insecure tunnel will be constructed from the unused third floor of an unused parking garage and will follow a path down an alley behind a building best known for a recent murder. The next structures along the alley are two more buildings which have recently burnt out. Then, the long-abandoned Hynds Building.

Contemplate that. This tunnel will have no outlets for the block of its length. Then, after walking a block in a tunnel with no escape, walkers will take stairs or an elevator down to Capitol Avenue. Across Capitol Avenue is the Majestic Building.

To the right, after exiting the tunnel, is the Wrangler. Another block, the tavern.

But, remember that no one parks on the third level of the parking garage. In fact, it is set up so that the in and out parkers - hopefully customers for downtown businesses - will park on the first level.

These parkers (as few as they may be) will be expected to park on the first level, find an elevator (or use the stairs) at the northeast or southeast corner of the structure, go up to the third level and enter the tunnel.

Having at least average intelligence here in Cheyenne, most would opt to leave the garage on the first level where they parked and walk over to Capitol.

Odds being what they are, wouldn't only one-fourth of those departing the garage want to head east - the other 75% would

more likely want to go north, south or west, wouldn't they?

Sorry to complicate their goofy scheme to try to help occupancy of the Hynds

Building for this new ally of the mayor, but I couldn't remain silent.

Cheyenne does not have severe weather. The wind here is seldom severe. Try minus 20 or 30 degrees like St. Paul has every winter - often for extended durations - now that's severe weather.

As is being proven every single day, the parking garage has not drawn flies. Literally - not figuratively. It never will. They can build tunnels out of all four sides and it will not help camouflage their blunder.

Even if it could, having an enclosed tunnel to escape the structure for a single block before being dumped out into the elements again will not eliminate exposure to the Wyoming wind or other weather.

In the nearly three years that the Cheyenne Herald has been published, I cannot think of any other project announced to the public that has been met with the public ridicule of this one-block long tunnel. The 40-foot call girl proposed by the infamous J. Greg Smith was the equal but we weren't doing the Herald at that time.

The premature announcement of plans to annex the base and the southside were met with guffaws but those had a measure of fear and concern with the mirth.

This skywalk announcement has provided comic relief to many who have become accustomed to the wackiness of this group of city elected officials. Compounded by a city employee stating - for public consumption - that they could, in effect, take advantage of the destruction brought by the neighboring fire, this plan has brought

tears to the eyes of many who have asked what the Herald was going to do with the story. Plus, disgust for the comment.

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Even in St. Paul, where there is some need for the sheltered skyways, most of what has happened over the past 30-40 years has been negative. Shops of sizes from a major department store to dry cleaners, travel agencies and gift stores, have closed. At one point, a four or five floor water fountain came up from the basement. It has now been turned off because of lack of businesses and skyway users. The apparatus for the fountain sits in the basement level. Dry and rusting.

Security is always a concern with an enclosed tunnel such as the one proposed for Cheyenne. To have a policeman walking back and forth for the one block length sounds goofy. But, that will be necessary.

The intersection of two major interstate systems not only makes Cheyenne ideal for distribution centers, it feeds a volume of transients unmatched in more remote cities. Not to mention the railroads from every direction.

Transients seek shelter and warmth from the same weather the City wants to protect garage parkers from.

This administration has demanded that the baseball community pony up large sums of money to enable building a "blue ribbon" baseball field. Now, they're demanding the same of skateboarders.

Will they put the same demands on the owners of nearby downtown buildings that are supposed to benefit from this tunnel? They didn't demand one nickel from those same property owners to build the white elephant parking garage.

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