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Neighbors hope Doe Run revitalizes land

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What will happen in the 135-acre area once the buyouts are complete? Land-use committee and public meetings produced some ideas.

By Benjamin Poston
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HERCULANEUM • When it comes to the buyout zone surrounding the large lead smelter, residents here say they would like to see the land revitalized.

City officials want to redevelop the area within three-eighths of a mile of the lead smelter owned by Doe Run Co., which has acquired 140 of 169 houses in that zone through a voluntary buyout negotiated in 2002 by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

But Mayor Gina Vinyard said she had received no indication that Doe Run intended to revamp the 135-acre area. In Vinyard's estimation, the company wants to acquire all properties in the buyout area so it won't have to address recontamination issues there in the future.

"I can't blame them because they are running their business well, but when you drive by there now, it's a ghost town; it's sad," Vinyard said.

E-Squared, a consulting firm hired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to develop a plan for the buyout zone, organized three land-use committee meetings this year and one public meeting in late June, said Kerry Herndon, a Superfund land revitalization coordinator for the EPA.

Ideas for revitalizing the zone include a commercial port east of the smelter, a casino and a blend of light industrial and commercial businesses, city administrator Bill Whitmer said.

"We need to find a plan that benefits both the city and Doe Run," Whitmer said.

Doe Run has proposed a buffer zone to extend its fence line to the west to allow the company to comply with less stringent federal air-quality standards on its own property, said John Rustige, an environmental engineer with the state's air-pollution-control

program.

The state agency's responsibility is to monitor ambient air, defined as air in a space where people have access. The state's Broad Street air monitor is positioned closest to the smelter and typically records the highest pollution levels. By erecting a fence, Doe Run could eliminate the Broad Street air monitor.

"If (Doe Run's) footprint swallows that monitor, then that area is no longer in the ambient air zone," Rustige said.

The fence line is one part of a state plan to be completed next April. Doe Run will have one year to implement the recommendations of the plan, which is intended to make sure the company tests below the federal air-quality standard of 1½ micrograms of lead for each cubic meter of air.

Herndon said Doe Run, budgeted to produce 176,000 tons of lead this year, is in a waiting game on redeveloping the buyout zone until the implementation plan is submitted.

"(Doe Run) can figure out where the fence line will be and then develop the area out-

side the fence line; it doesn't even take up half the buyout area," Herndon said.

Gary Hughes, general manager of Doe Run, said it's premature to discuss what will become of the land in the buyout zone until the implementation plan is in effect and executed in the next two years.

"We have to see how successful we are in that process; that is our key," Hughes said. "The best use (of the buyout zone) may be as a green field site, but I would never rule out further development of that land. We want to be a good neighbor and protect the public health first and foremost."

Bruce Morrison, the Herculanum lead cleanup project manager for the EPA, said his agency continued to monitor yard soils for recontamination within four-fifths of a mile from the smelter, a process that began in 2002. The U.S. EPA recently has detected eight samples within one-half mile of the smelter that contained lead contamination exceeding the acceptable federal level of 400 parts per million.