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Special Announcement Regarding the Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site

1 message

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Latest Developments on the Shawnee Indian Mission

For previous announcements about the Shawnee Indian Mission, [click here](#).

It's been another busy week in terms of activity surrounding the Shawnee Indian Mission and we want to take this opportunity to provide you with the latest developments.

Meeting with legislators. Mayor Hepperly and City Administrator Nogelmeier have begun meeting with Kansas legislators expressing the City's concerns regarding Shawnee Chief Ben Barnes attempt at an acquisition of the Shawnee Indian Mission, a National Historic Landmark. These meetings will continue so long as Chief Barnes continues to spread blatantly false and misleading statements about the Shawnee Indian Mission, the Kansas Historical Society, the City of Fairway and the Shawnee Indian Mission Foundation.

State of the Cities. Yesterday, Mayor Hepperly presented the State of Fairway at the NE Johnson County Chamber of Commerce's State of the Cities event. Her remarks focused on the Shawnee Indian Mission and she labeled the intentions of Chief Barnes as the "greatest threat" facing the Mission. Mayor Hepperly recounted numerous times over the last 18 months where Chief Barnes words have been vastly different from his actions.

Press Release from the Kaw Nation. Also yesterday, the Kaw Nation issued a press release which stated, in part, "The Kaw Nation has become aware of a legislative effort to pass title to the Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site near Fairway, Kansas to the present-day "Shawnee Tribe," one of three successors to the historic Shawnee Tribe (the others are the Eastern Shawnee Tribe and the Absentee Shawnee Tribe)." It went on to say, "The Kaw Nation opposes any legislative effort related to conveyance of the 'Shawnee Indian Mission' lands to any tribal entity other than the Kaw Nation." You can read the full press release [here](#).

Press Release from the Shawnee Tribe. Today, the Shawnee Tribe announced their "plan to save the Mission". The four-page document regurgitates much of what Chief Barnes, who's a

former Director of Tribal Gaming, has been claiming over the past several months. The document is ripe with errors and misinformation as articulated below:

- Claims that the buildings are in “deep distress”. We’ve touched on this before however the Kansas Historical society is on record stating they have “preserved the property at the highest preservation standards as they have evolved over time.”
- The plan says they have experience in preservation, exhibit development, interpretation and site management. The reality is that when asked if the tribe would like to interpret the North Building with their own exhibits, Chief Barnes informed the Historical society that the Tribe did not have the capacity or funding to do so.
- The plan touts the Shawnee Cultural Center which opened in 2018 near their headquarters in Miami, OK. However, if you look at the center’s website and social media pages, the Shawnee Cultural Center has been closed for over a year. Chief Barnes has not demonstrated that he can keep a one-building, modern center open in his own community. How can our community trust him to keep a nationally significant site with three buildings that are more than 180 years old properly preserved and open to the public?
- The plan refers to the Shawnee Indian Mission as “understaffed and underutilized, leaving most of its rich history hidden from public view”. The fact is that the Mission is staffed by a museum professional with extensive historical knowledge who works with a network of community members and organizations who donate thousands upon thousands of hours to the Shawnee Indian Mission. Moreover, should the Shawnee Tribe acquire the land through a conveyance from the Kansas Legislature, the very real threat is that Tribe could hide all of the site’s rich history from view and even wipe it away entirely.
- In the plan, Chief Barnes continues to associate the Shawnee Indian Mission with federally mandated Indian Boarding Schools. For nearly two years, we’ve been correcting this misinformation he continues to spread. The Shawnee Indian Mission preceded the mandated schools by decades. Students were not forced to attend the Shawnee Indian Mission. Historical records indicate Tribal Chiefs, at times, personally brought students to the school. The school operated three sessions per year (fall, winter, spring) and students returned to their homes during the summers and school breaks. There are even documented experiences where former students who graduated would return to the school to become paid instructors.
- The plan’s price tag has climbed to \$15 million dollars and the document says the Tribe’s Business Council (which oversees the Tribes enterprise operations, including gaming) has pledged up to \$15 million dollars to “carry out this restoration and revitalization plan, which is contingent on the conveyance of the site back to the Tribe...”. To date, the Tribe has provided no proof it can back up this pledge. In addition, it has produced no evidence of the expertise and experience it claims to have.
- Of the \$15 million cost, up to \$8 million of that is identified for new interpretation (exhibits

and displays) which have nothing to do with the current condition of the buildings. Further, construction costs include adding new elements that don't currently exist. For example, new restrooms for the West Building are included in the estimate which they say will cost nearly \$200,000. Some of the suggested work more closely resembles a remodel rather than a restoration.

We will continue to provide community updates as appropriate.

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