

NRHNO invitation to ISD 191 to participate with Sioux Trail Initiative working group

Good evening, Board members and Superintendent. Thank you for this opportunity to address the future of the Sioux Trail Elementary School and its property.

My name is John Doll. I have lived in Burnsville for more than 40 years, and tonight I am speaking on behalf of the North River Hills Neighborhood Organization and introducing the Sioux Trail Initiative.

We are here to begin a dialogue with the School District. We understand that ISD 191 has determined it no longer needs the Sioux Trail property and intends to sell it. We also know the outcome of the District's purchase agreement with M/I Homes. Today, we are no closer to a lasting solution than we were six years ago when the school closed.

Tonight, we are requesting that the Sioux Trail property and its future be placed on the agenda for one of the two October School Board meetings. We believe the community deserves a public discussion of where things stand, what options have been considered, what has been ruled out and why, and what comes next.

A vacant property is not good for the neighborhood or for a financially strained school district. It is time to find a meaningful solution for the District, the City of Burnsville, and the River Hills neighborhood.

For many of us, Sioux Trail is not simply an unused school building. It is a longstanding public asset connected to Tennesioux Park, playgrounds, ballfields, trails, open space, and an established neighborhood.

For decades, the school brought people and programs together. Its closing deeply affected the neighborhood in ways that go beyond the building itself.

We believe a cooperative, community-centered approach could restore some of what was lost while creating new opportunities for education, recreation, health and wellness, arts, youth and senior programs, community gatherings, community gardens, and other uses.

If the District has already explored these possibilities and concluded they are not viable, we ask that the results of that work be shared with the community. If they have not been fully explored, as we contend, we believe it is worth doing that work before another sale is pursued.

That is why we formed the Sioux Trail Initiative: to explore viable, community-centered alternatives.

We do not claim that every community idea is workable. We do not know what the building can accommodate, what rehabilitation may be required, or what uses could be financially sustained. We also do not know whether the safe and open green space comprising approximately four-fifths of the property can be preserved and repurposed into another healthy financially sustainable option.

What we do know is that the results of the work done over the past six years demonstrate that a new approach is needed.

The District owns the property. The City controls its future land use. The River Hills neighborhood will live with the consequences of the decisions made, for generations.

All three should have seats at the table before another proposal reaches the purchase-agreement stage.

To that end, we are formally asking ISD 191 to actively participate with NRHNO and the City of Burnsville in a Sioux Trail Initiative working group to identify viable, community-centered paths for the property.

We propose five meetings over approximately 120 days, beginning in January 2027.

The group would establish shared facts and objectives; tour the building; examine its condition, operating costs, accessibility, and rehabilitation needs; consider community priorities and potential partners; and explore possible ownership, financing, and operating models.

By the fifth meeting, we should know whether a credible path forward exists and what the appropriate next steps should be.

NRHNO can contribute volunteers, research, neighborhood outreach, and community input. We have talented and creative residents who are ready to help. For this effort to succeed, ISD 191 will need to play an active role and help create a productive working environment.

We also believe ISD 191 could consider partnering with a local college on a real-world, college-credit course focused on transforming a closed school property into a thriving community-centered reuse and neighborhood gathering place. That would provide meaningful education while addressing a real community challenge.

We ask the District to allow this limited exploratory process to be completed before entering into another purchase agreement for the Sioux Trail property.

To recap, we respectfully ask the School Board to:

- Place the Sioux Trail property and its future on the agenda for one of the October School Board meetings.
- Participate actively in the Sioux Trail Initiative working group.
- Designate a Board representative and a District representative to participate in the working group.
- Identify a clear District point of contact.
- Share information from previous evaluations, studies, or consideration of potential future uses for the property.
- Refrain from entering another purchase agreement for Sioux Trail until the work of the Sioux Trail Initiative working group is completed.

Our formal request will be delivered to the District offices tomorrow, and we would appreciate a timely response. We are all members of the same community. We all want a strong, vibrant, healthy, and educated community. We have an opportunity to transform a difficult surplus-property problem into a community asset that adds value to Burnsville for years to come. Let's see if the public education we all received can prove it's worth.

We look forward to working with you. Thank you.