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Community groups release research report on Boys Totem Town land and buildings, including vision for the future *Boys Totem Town: Foundation and Vision*

[SAINT PAUL, MN, February 2, 2021] In September 2020 a Minnesota Historical Society [Legacy Grant](#) was awarded to [Boys Totem Town Land Preservation Group](#) and [Lower Phalen Creek Project](#) to **research a 72-acre Ramsey County site** in the Highwood Hills neighborhood of **St. Paul**. The site was formerly Boys Totem Town, a juvenile detention center, and much of the landscape is a degraded [Oak Savanna](#) that has been left practically undisturbed. This site is just along the bluffs from historical [Kaposia Village](#) and just south of the sacred [Dakota Burial Mounds](#) and [Wakan Tipi](#). **The big question was “What will they discover?”** The [106 Group](#) was hired to find out.

The subsequent report includes an initial **property history**, an **architectural and cultural landscape assessment**, and an **archaeological assessment**. The Boys Totem Town property may be **historically and culturally significant** for numerous reasons and associated with key topics and resources.

The property may carry **meaning for Dakota people** given its proximity to Kaposia Village ([Kapoza](#)). In the late 1800s, the property became a farm and may reflect **important agricultural patterns**. In its conversion to a detention home in the early 1900s, and operation for over 100 years, the property may also be significant within the **history of juvenile detention centers** as Boys Totem Town represented a different approach to previous models and encouraged education. Boys Totem Town may also be **significant to the communities from which the residents came** and for the impacts of the facility on those communities.

Some of the later history of the detention facility provides an opportunity to continue to address **issues of inequality and social justice in public policies**. Within the context of the Highwood Hills neighborhood, it may also be significant as a **largely undeveloped parcel of land** used by residents and neighbors for recreation. As there are buildings on the property that were constructed from the 1930s to the 1990s, this property may also reflect important events in **local history** that have not yet been identified.

There are suspected and known burial sites in and near the property and a projectile point was previously discovered. These are indicators that there is a **high potential for uncovering many more archaeological resources** associated with both Indigenous history. In addition, there are **likely archeological deposits** associated with Euro-American history from the Boys Totem Town era. This foundational research provides a baseline of understanding from which a variety of **future studies** can develop. With this research, **a vision for the future and possible next steps emerge**.

“Boys Totem Town provides a unique opportunity for some rewarding partnerships. There are few undeveloped lands left along the Mississippi, and we all need to be very intentional and visionary as we approach the next stages. For the 106 Group team, it has been a pleasure to be part of this grassroots effort, working with Maggie Lorenz and Patty McDonald – two visionary women.” Anne Ketz, CEO 106 Group

“This report underscores the importance of doing the ground work/research on the land before any decisions are made. This site is more than just a piece of land for development - it’s a piece of our collective history; we need to make sure we acknowledge and honor that. It’s also important to note that this is an unusual parcel in that it is sizable, is a degraded Oak Savanna, has largely never been developed and is in the St. Paul city boundaries - we won’t ever get another opportunity like this.” Patty McDonald, Boys Totem Town Land Preservation Group

Report highlights:

The Vision

The Boys Totem Town property is a rare gem in our region. It is a special place that provides a connection to the past, a respite for today, and a potential model for future re-use. Imagine an Environmental and Cultural Education Campus—a place for families, students, hikers, nature lovers, and history lovers to come together to learn, appreciate, and reflect on the meaning of this place or just to simply enjoy the outdoors unhindered by urban intrusions. *A Place to Preserve + Explore*

Highlights for Next Steps:

- **A Master Plan** is the next logical step for setting goals and objectives, and prioritizing actions over a short and long-term period. The plan should link implementation strategies with key stakeholder groups to effectively establish and build momentum for site reuse and a meaningful next chapter for Boys Totem Town.
- Evaluate the property for **eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places**.
- Prepare a **Cultural Landscape Report** that would guide the management and treatment decisions about the landscape’s physical attributes, natural systems, and use in relation to this historic place.
- Prepare a **Natural Resources Management Plan** that includes recommendations for landscape resource management programs; eco-system (oak savanna) restoration; habitat restoration, enhancement, and protection; and education to protect natural resources and encourage broader support for long-term environmental stewardship.
- A **Reuse Study and Land-use Plan** should be prepared to understand how and for what purposes the existing buildings and surrounding lands can be reused.
- Prepare a **Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan** that documents the goals and actions needed to create meaningful visitor experiences, meet management goals, and consider resource protection as visitors use and enjoy the place.
- Undertake **Management and Funding Analysis** to identify and nurture public / private partnerships.

Read the full report at BoysTotemTown.weebly.com/report

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call Patty or Maggie.

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