

Snake River Heritage Center
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Weiser, ID 83672
SnakeRiverHeritageCenter.org



September 12, 2026

Mayor Herb Haun
City of Weiser / Historic Preservation Commission
55 West Idaho Street
Weiser, Idaho 83672

cc: natasha.mcdaniel@cityofweiser.com

Dear Mayor Haun,

Many of us grew up hearing about the Intermountain Institute the way you'd hear about a beloved relative – secondhand, in fragments, from parents and grandparents who remembered it firsthand. A group of us has spent the past couple of months turning those fragments into a plan, and we'd like to bring it to you and the Historic Preservation Commission first.

We are forming the Institute Foundation, a nonprofit partner to the Snake River Heritage Center, with a single founding purpose: to buy and restore **Billings Memorial Gymnasium** – the vacant 1929 gym at the entrance to the old Institute campus – and turn it, together with the campus's nearly two acres of open lawn, into a year-round venue for weddings, reunions, summer camps, and community events. We've attached a short summary of the plan.

We're hosting an informational presentation on **Wednesday, October 21st, 2026, at 6:30 PM**, in the auditorium of Hooker Hall, to walk through the plan in full and ask for volunteers – for our founding board, for the capital campaign, and for event programming. We would be honored to have you or a representative from the City Council there and especially somebody in the Historic Preservation Commission, who would be valuable partners in this endeavor.

The specific request: after the presentation, we will be asking the City to consider a formal letter of support for the Foundation's capital campaign. This is not a request for funding. Nearly every state and federal historic-preservation grant we intend to pursue asks whether local government backs the project, and your endorsement carries real weight in those applications. A one-page reference on exactly what this would and would not commit you to is enclosed.

We'd welcome a short conversation before the presentation if you'd like, at your convenience, to answer questions and make sure there are no surprises when this comes before you formally. Please don't hesitate to call Stephen Cook at 208-817-1359 or email SnakeRiverHeritageCenter@gmail.com.

Thank you for considering this, and for everything you already do for Weiser. We hope you'll come see what we're building (and hoping to build!)

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Cook', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Stephen Cook
Vice President, Snake River Heritage Center
208-817-1359
SnakeRiverHeritageCenter@gmail.com

Enclosure: What a Letter of Support Does (and Doesn't) Commit You To

A letter of support / resolution DOES:	A letter of support / resolution does NOT:
Confirm your body is aware of and does not oppose the project	Commit any funding, staff time, or in-kind services
Strengthen grant applications to state and federal historic-preservation programs, which routinely score or require local government buy-in	Approve any specific zoning, permitting, or construction decision — those remain separate, ordinary approval processes
Signal to other funders (foundations, banks, individual donors) that the project has credible local standing	Obligate your body to future funding requests; those would come back as their own, separate ask
Cost nothing and can be as short as a single paragraph or a one-line resolution	Require ongoing oversight, reporting, or involvement from your office

Suggested minimal language:

“The City Council of Weiser supports the Institute Foundation's efforts to preserve and restore Billings Memorial Gymnasium and the historic Intermountain Institute campus for continued community use, in furtherance of the City's Historic Preservation Plan.”

We're happy to provide a draft on request, or to work from language your attorney or clerk prefers.



THE INSTITUTE FOUNDATION

Saving Billings Gym and Reuniting the Intermountain Institute Campus
Plan Summary in Plain Language | Weiser, Idaho



The Big Picture

- We want to buy and fix up Billings Gym, a historic 1929 building sitting empty near Weiser High School, and turn it into a year-round event venue.
- Goal: raise about \$1,000,000 to buy the building, bring it up to code, and renovate it.
- Once finished, it will host weddings, reunions, camps, and community events, and eventually pay for itself.

Our Mission, Vision & History

- Mission: preserve the old Intermountain Institute campus and give Weiser families a place to keep making memories on the same ground their grandparents did.
- Vision: reunite the whole 5-building campus in spirit and appearance, matching roofs, paint, and landscaping, even though buildings stay under their current private owners.
- History: founded in 1899 as a working boarding school, closed during the Great Depression. Billings Gym has sat empty but structurally sound for about 60 years.
- Today's five buildings: Hooker Hall (Weiser Museum), Slocum Hall (Fiddlers' Festival), Beardsley Hall and Carnegie Library (private owners), and Billings Gym (for sale, our project).

How We're Organized

- The Foundation will be a new nonprofit (501(c)(3)), working as a partner to, not a competitor of, the Snake River Heritage Center (SRHC), which already runs the museum next door.
- Run by a volunteer board of at least 7 people: a chair, treasurer, fundraising lead, renovation lead, events lead, and a history/education lead.
- Starts mostly with volunteers, then adds a part-time coordinator once the building is ready, growing to full-time as bookings increase.

Why Billings Gym Is a Great Opportunity

- The hardest, most expensive work is already done. The building has a brand-new roof and has been cleared down to a clean shell.
- It already has space for a 10-shower, 5-restroom wing, perfect for weddings, overnight camps, and festival crowds.
- Right next door sits almost 2 acres of already-manicured lawn, perfect for outdoor weddings and events, directly across from Weiser High School's athletic fields.
- Our big advantage: if weather turns bad, guests can walk straight into Billings Gym or Hooker Hall. Few other local venues can offer that indoor backup.

The Renovation Plan (4 Phases)

- Phase 1: Buy the building and complete full inspections (structural, electrical, environmental).
- Phase 2: Plan for accessibility (ADA) and fire-safety compliance.
- Phase 3: Do the actual construction, including repairs, plumbing/electrical, restrooms, and finishes.
- Phase 4: Open for business. Hire staff, start booking events, and build a maintenance fund.

How the Venue Will Make Money

- Weddings (indoor and outdoor) are the main driver, expected to bring in roughly \$54,000 to \$88,000 a year once established.
- Other income: family reunions, summer day camps with overnight camping, farmers markets, tailgate parties, and history events.
- Combined, all revenue sources are projected to reach about \$100,000 to \$180,000 a year once fully up and running.

The Money: Fundraising & Budget

- We need about \$1,000,000, coming from several sources: community donations, historic preservation grants, USDA rural development funds, local government support, sponsorships, and fundraising events. No single source carries the whole load.
- Year 1 is mostly construction with little income. Year 2 brings partial bookings. Year 3 is fully open and expected to turn a modest profit (\$46,500 to \$111,500) that gets saved for future upkeep.

Spreading the Word, Managing Risk & Timeline

- Marketing leans on nostalgia: family stories, local pride, and piggybacking on the Fiddlers' Festival's 7,000+ annual visitors.
- Main risks (falling short of \$1M, hidden building problems, bad weather, ADA costs) are each matched with a specific backup plan, like phasing work to match funds raised.
- Rough schedule: set up the nonprofit and start fundraising in the first year, renovate in Year 2, and be fully open with a stable events calendar by Year 3.

Bottom line: A low-risk chance to turn community nostalgia into a self-sustaining home for Weiser's future memories.