



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. Box 7882 • Madison, WI 53707-7882

March 8, 2023

Governor Tony Evers
State Capitol
Room 115 East
Madison, WI

Dear Governor Evers:

We are writing to again request that you immediately direct the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to stabilize and repair the Potawatomi Observation Tower in a manner that preserves its current historic structure utilizing the emergency repair funding under State Building Commission procedures that is already available for that purpose. As referenced in the Wisconsin Building Commission policy manual, Wis. Stats. 16.855(16)(b)2 provides for the Governor to authorize emergency projects up to \$500,000 with actions to be reported to the Building Commission at its next regular meeting.

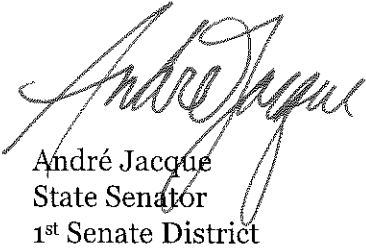
While your current Capital Budget request does include repair of the structure, the timeline it proposes would not see any stabilization of it begin until January of 2025, at which point there is a strong likelihood that the tower will already have succumbed to the elements and have fallen over. While there is widespread, and now administration, recognition of the fact that the structure can feasibly be restored (a finding that should be no surprise, as brought to the DNR's attention by numerous community stakeholders the demonstrated repair of similar wooden structures like the Mountain Park Watchtower on Washington Island) there is repeated professional observation of the immediate peril faced in preventing a total loss to the Tower based on the natural rigors it is experiencing in our Wisconsin weather unless immediate action is taken. It is critical that such action be taken now to repair the Tower before further damage and deterioration can occur through yet another change of seasons. As referenced in the 2018 USDA Forest Products Lab report and reiterated by several studies since, including the GRAEF report from January of this year, "The tower contained support members that were deteriorated, surface decay is present on all four support poles. The southwest support contains internal and surface decay over a significant length. The central stair support is decayed. The inspections performed revealed several areas of decay in the tower. Given the current state-of-the-art in timber inspection, it would be difficult to accurately determine, in-place, the extent to which the deterioration has spread. Although it can be stated with certainty that the load-carrying capacity of the tower has been compromised, and the residual load-carrying capacity is unknown."

Setting aside ongoing discussions of what additional construction and ADA accessibility will ultimately occur at the site before it could be reopened to public access (as would remain the DNR's prerogative), as will be discussed during the regular budget process, we are in agreement that there is need to repair the existing historic structure that is listed on both the state and federal registers of historic places. For long term discussions of the Observation Tower at Potawatomi Park to even be possible later this year, we must take action now, and willful negligence toward the Tower by the DNR and DOA is putting a vital piece of our area's livelihood and heritage at risk.

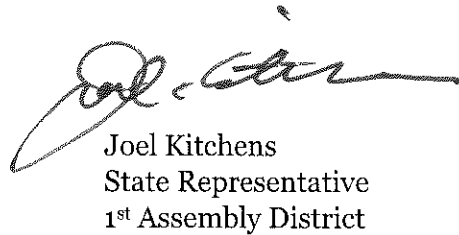
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This issue has seen countless delays by the DNR, following years of it promoting the Tower's demolition. The local campaign to save the Potawatomi State Park Observation Tower has been an example of public engagement at its best. A recent poll of residents included 647 completed surveys, with 94% wishing to restore the historic Tower immediately, and numerous local governments (including a formal resolution of the Door County Board of Supervisors) and community groups have weighed in with similar strong sentiments. It is way past time to be truly responsive to their concerns by taking meaningful action to preserve this treasured landmark for future generations. Today. Thank you for your immediate consideration of our request to approve this emergency action.

Sincerely,



André Jacqué
State Senator
1st Senate District



Joel Kitchens
State Representative
1st Assembly District