

Sen. Jacque: Evers' DNR blocking Potawatomi Tower preservation

Posted on Wednesday, Apr 13, 2022

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MADISON... The Evers Administration's shifting blame for its failure to restore and preserve the historic 90-year-old Potawatomi State Park Observation Tower shows it simply does not want to do the project and never has, State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere) said today.

"Money is not an issue," said Sen. Jacque, a member of the State Building Commission. "The current state budget, which the Governor signed last summer, includes over \$200 million for maintenance projects for state facilities - not to mention all the federal ARPA money he is distributing throughout the state. The DNR could have submitted a request to the Building Commission at any time, but they have failed to do so."

"We wish the Governor would tell the DNR to prioritize repairing the Tower instead of studying it to death," said Christie Weber, former President of the Sturgeon Bay Historical Society Foundation. "This is the fifth study, and the administration's own Brander Report, which claimed the Tower was not historic, has already been debunked."

The iconic tower was targeted for demolition by the DNR in 2018 after the agency claimed that the structure, which is now listed on both state and federal historic registries, was unsafe and would require a costly rebuild, rather than a much less expensive repair. After repeated rejections of Sen. Jacque's request to meet with DNR Secretary Preston Cole to discuss the tower and urge reconsideration, a meeting was finally allowed months later where the DNR indicated a willingness to support repair, instructing Sen. Jacque to submit the plans commissioned by the

Sturgeon Bay Historical Society Foundation to Building Commission staff. However, the DNR subsequently withdrew its backing of the stamped architectural plans for Potawatomi Tower repair from a timber repair expert – plans consistent with the similar Mountain Park Watchtower repair authorized on Door County’s Washington Island by the town government just this past year.

“Actions speak louder than words,” Sen. Jacque said. “The Building Commission cannot approve a project that the Evers administration has not submitted for approval.”

Sen. Jacque noted that the most recent stall tactics announced by the Evers Administration and their stated timeline would push out the ability for any repair approval to occur beyond this fall’s gubernatorial election.

“The campaign to save the Potawatomi State Park Observation Tower is an example of public engagement at its best,” Sen. Jacque said. “It is shameful that the Evers Administration continues to string good people along with no intention of taking any meaningful action.”

Sen. Jacque said his goal has always been to help save this treasured landmark in a manner that preserves it for future generations.

“Today, promoting tourism and outdoor recreation and preserving our history is more important than ever,” Sen. Jacque said. “The Evers administration’s willful negligence toward the Potawatomi Tower is putting a vital piece of our area’s livelihood and heritage at risk. It is critical that action be taken now to repair the Potawatomi State Park Tower before further damage and deterioration can occur.”