

Sen. Jacque, Rep. Kitchens: DNR's Ludicrous shell game on Potawatomi Observation Tower continues

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MADISON... The Evers Administration's tone deaf refusal to listen to the overwhelming input of citizens and make critical repairs to a historic structure were on full display last night, as the Department of Natural Resources went through the motions of putting on an essentially canned and ironically named "Public Information Session" on the Potawatomi Tower. The online-only presentation denied any opportunity for questions or comments from the public and left the door wide open to demolishing the treasured landmark as part of a series of invented criteria and false 'choices', complete with a red herring 'poll'. The less than half hour session featured a single department staff and a single contractor without any options for public interaction, and was a marked contrast to those put on by state agencies for projects of similar magnitude and public interest, which typically involve both in-person and virtual question and answer periods.

"I've already heard from numerous confused and upset constituents wondering why their questions and input apparently aren't important enough for the Evers Administration to take seriously- misleading the public with such a short, scripted session is a sham, and a perfect example of why the DNR has been experiencing a crisis of credibility," said Sen. Jacque, questioning ***,"Why conceal the results of their study from legislators and the public for weeks, only to tell them to log on at 6 PM for a 'live' video that could have been recorded and posted at any time? The only thing more virtual than last night's meeting is Gov. Evers' commitment to preserving the historical heritage of the Potawatomi Tower."***

After years of the DNR falsely claiming historic restoration of Potawatomi Tower was

impossible and seeking to demolish it, the Department's engineering consultant, GRAEF, admitted that repairing it is, and always has been, possible- not a surprise since the demonstrated repair of a similar wooden structures like the Mountain Park Watchtower on Washington Island, and other expert studies with that conclusion had been brought to the Department's attention by numerous community stakeholders. Unfortunately, details were largely hidden on the lesser cost of simply making the vital repairs to the existing structure immediately without adding much more expensive and disruptive new construction using additional invented criteria demanded by the Evers Administration for the options presented. A DNR 'poll' linked on Department's Potawatomi Tower webpage to create a mirage that input is being considered prevents respondents from submitting a preference for demolishing or restoring the existing tower without simultaneously conceding to select a form of additional ramp construction not required for ADA compliance that multiplies the cost of project to a point of making it cost prohibitive.

Rep. Kitchens said, ***"My office has received hundreds of contacts regarding the tower since it was shut down. Not a single person was asking for a new tower. Everyone wants to repair the existing Tower. All of our local governmental units passed resolutions asking for repair of the existing Tower, not replacement. The administration has absolutely refused to listen to the people of Door County."***

Both legislators also noted the importance of restoring the structure immediately before further deterioration can occur, and that an overwhelming majority of respondents to the DNR's past public comment requests were in strong support of *repairing* the existing tower.

Sen. Jacque said there is no reason to wait until the next state budget six months from now. ***"The current state budget, which the Governor signed 18 months ago, includes over \$200 million for maintenance projects for state facilities. The Evers administration has the money right now to repair the Tower - if it wanted. There's still time to do the right thing without intentionally concocting plans to make the whole situation ridiculously more costly and complex than it needs to be,"*** said Sen. Jacque, adding ***"I will be requesting an examination by the State Historical Society as to how the DNR can even be putting forward preferred options to the public that call for the demolition of the existing historic structure of Potawatomi Tower that is listed on both the State and Federal Registries of Historic Places when historic restoration has clearly already been established as***

feasible.”

Rep. Kitchens added, ***“The administration not only has a moral responsibility to repair the Tower, but a legal one. Owners of properties on the historic registry are required to submit a preservation plan, which they have not done. As stewards of our heritage, they have utterly failed. They have spent more on repetitive “studies” and political games than it would have cost to repair our beloved Tower.”***