

Overview

The DNR continues to consider the future of the observation tower at Potawatomi State Park. The following public comments have been collected and categorized to provide the public's perspectives and opinions on the future of the tower.

Feedback Summary

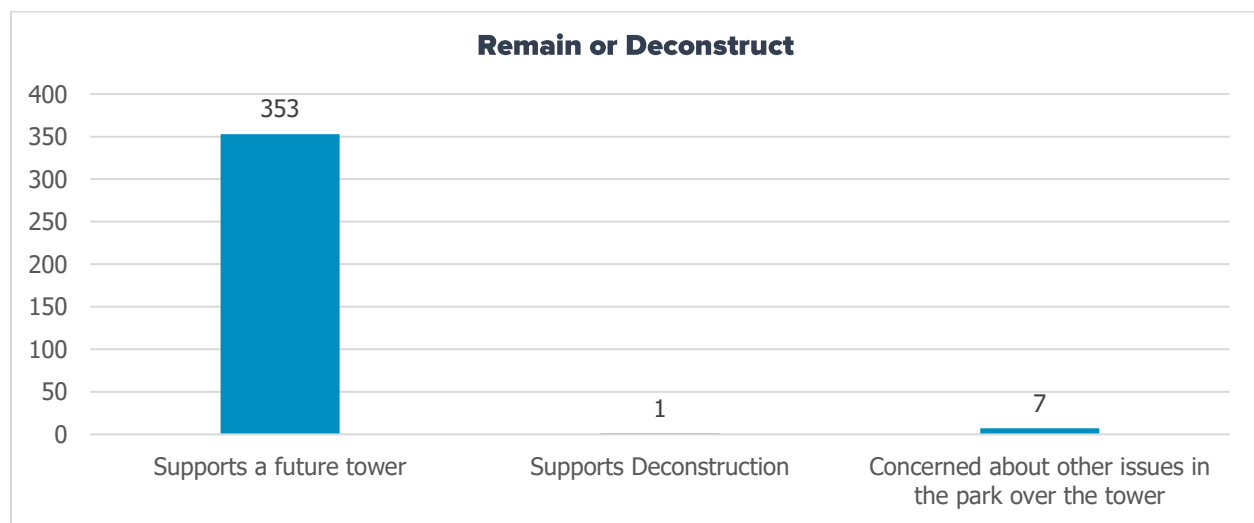
The public was provided with three different methods for submitting their comments on the future of the Potawatomi Tower. From attending the in-person public comment meeting on February 22, 2022 in Sturgeon Bay, to submitting comments through an online survey or via email, over 350 people provided comments on the tower.

An overwhelming majority of people were in favor of saving the tower. Many sought to have it restored and preserved while others were simply interested in making sure that it remains in whatever way is possible. People seemed to acknowledge the challenge of ADA compliance but were unaware of the actual requirements should it be repaired. There is a lack of understanding for the need for ADA compliance should it be restored, with people citing the cost for ADA as a justification for not moving forward with an accessible tower. While many did not specifically mention the importance of the tower being on the historical landmark registry, many made references to its history and landmark status in the park. It is clear the tower has strong support regarding the preservation of its history.

The following charts provide a detailed breakdown of the above summary.

Topic #1: Remain or Deconstruct

The online survey, email comments and those who spoke in-person at the event were asked about their overall thoughts on the future of the tower. In the online survey, where the majority of responses were recorded, there was no additional guidance provided about what the potential options for the tower were. Most online responses reflected what people wanted to see happen in general, as opposed to being presented options and selecting their preference. The online responses plus the email and in-person responses were reviewed and categorized to reflect the various thoughts and ideas of the public on whether the tower should remain in any capacity or be deconstructed.

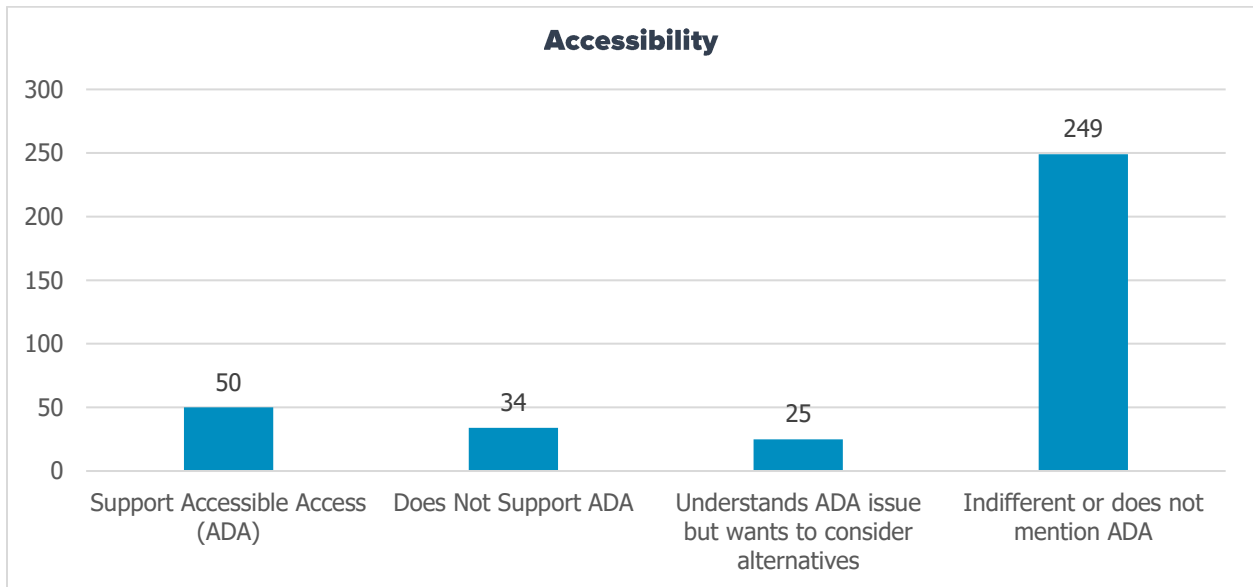


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A selection of comments has been collected to provide further context for each category in Appendix A.

Topic #2: Accessibility

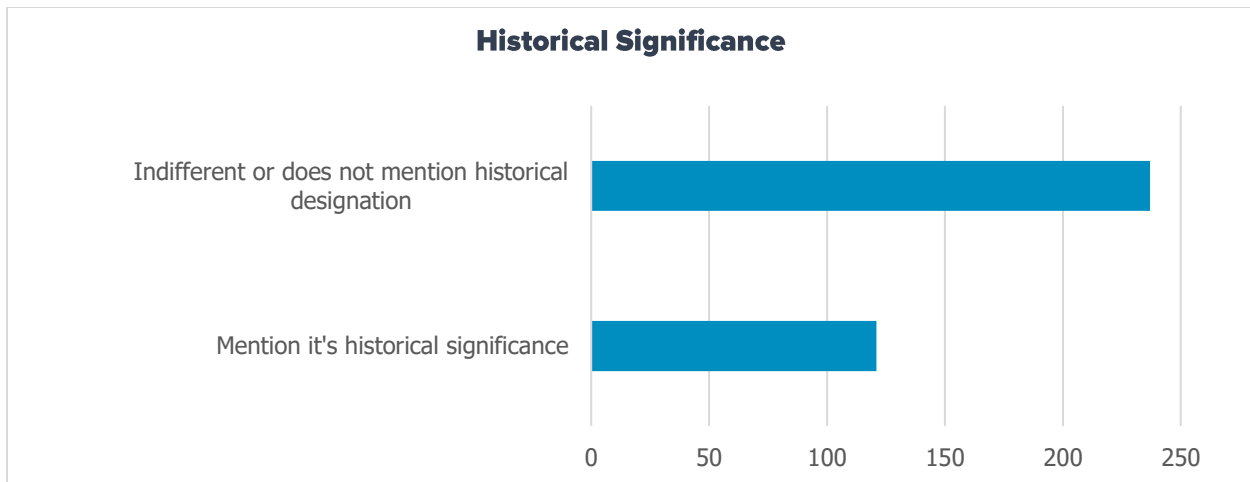
Many respondents mentioned accessibility in their comments. Opinions varied from the desire to have an accessible tower to the belief that ADA is not needed. Some of these comments were sympathetic to the desire for accessibility in the outdoors but asked to pursue alternative methods as opposed to full reconstruction. Responses have been categorized to reflect these differing opinions below.



A selection of comments has been collected to provide further context for each category in Appendix B.

Topic #3: Historical Significance

The Potawatomi tower has been included in the state's historic preservation database which allows it to be considered pursuant to Wisconsin's historic preservation statute (Wis.Stats. 44.40). The tower has also been listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places. The historical significance of the tower was important to respondents and is noted in many of their comments. The online, email and in-person comments have been categorized to show the number of people who mentioned the tower's historical significance versus those who did not.



A selection of comments has been collected to provide further context for each category in Appendix C.

Appendix A

Below is a selection of comments that provide further context for responses to Remain or Deconstruct.

Supports a future tower

"I would love to see the tower restored to original design. I would not want trees and trails to come down to build something else in its place. Fundraising would provide funds likely!"

"The tower should be repaired and preserved for future generations to stand as an example of the efforts of those who built it during the depression years."

"I used to visit the park and tower consistently before the tower closed. I have not been to the park since. I really hope you choose to repair the tower so I can resume going and show my son how amazing the view from the top is. The tower was the primary reason I choose the park."

"I support restoring the Potawatomi tower. I think our natural resources are a main draw for our tourism economy and this tower would be another attraction. As a year-round resident, I would appreciate having this tower as a recreation opportunity for my family."

"Potawatomi Park tower should be restored by preserving the original design. It's a landmark that epitomizes natural Door County."

"The Tower is a link to the past of Door County and the history of the State Parks System. Let's keep the ORIGINAL."

"A tower should be restored/constructed for this location. As a family we would bike up the steep hill and would always stop at the tower with our children. It was a great way to create wonderful memories and enjoy nature from the top of the tower."

"I would like to see the tower replaced, similar to the one in Peninsula state park. If it is possible to repair it, that would be good too. Thank you,"

"The tower location is wonderful and I support plans seeking to repair or replace the tower. I would be willing to donate funds towards this end."

"The tower is one of the biggest draws to the park and must absolutely be saved or replaced. I have lived in the area most of my 44 years and cannot stress enough how important that tower is to

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the area. Also, its view is definitely better than the view from the new tower at Peninsula State Park. Please make sure we do not lose this important, beautiful, and impressive piece of infrastructure."

"Wisconsin would be wise to repair or rebuild the Potawatomi Tower at its current location for a variety of reasons. First, I have traveled to many of the other towers in Wisconsin, but Potawatomi, in my estimation, has the most beautiful panorama of them all. Secondly, I believe the economic draw from this State Park feature is grossly underestimated. Third, it is arguably the main reasons I visit Door County. I am sure others feel likewise. Since the state currently has a budget surplus, why not put some of that money towards replacing the Potawatomi Tower. It would be an investment in not only the Park, but also in the businesses of Door County, and a draw for the multitude of visitors that visit the area."

"I think the Potawatomi Tower should be demolished and a new tower should be constructed similar to what was done at Peninsula State Park. From a cost/funding perspective, I wouldn't object to a daily or annual park fee increase, but a little bird told me the state also has a budget surplus this year."

"I think it should be rebuilt. Many people come through the park to go to the tower. It is an attraction. Let's rebuild so it lasts a long time from here on out."

Supports Deconstruction

Only one comment directly supported tearing the structure down.

"Tear it down or sell it to Door County & let their taxpayers REAP THE LARGE REWARDS FROM all the tourists \$\$\$ they will make from this. I would love to see the plan to make it accessible per the ADA specs & the extra cost."

Concerned about other issues in the park over the tower

There were a few comments that addressed other concerns in the park as needing to take priority over saving the tower.

"It is unfortunate that a debate continues whether to spend thousands if not millions of dollars on an observation tower within a property that has failing roads, is understaffed, a garage as a makeshift Nature Center and an office/visitor's center that by the states own code would fall quite short. If the legislators and special interests involved were truly concerned about the property, park visitors, local economy and tourism they would see there are far greater needs within the property for funds that would reach a much larger number of users to Potawatomi State Park than the 'Tower'."

"I think COVID attendance numbers have proven that the park can sustain success without a tower but with it's many other features including the two overlooks that cover the same scenic views. Funding for a new tower could possibly cover all existing project proposals for the park and/or repair the horrendous roads. The park is more than just one feature and has been successful without the tower for 4 or 5 years now."

"Sending \$5 million on the tower is a poor use of taxpayer money. The Forest Products Lab is the foremost experts in woods and they have judged the structure beyond reasonable repair 4 years ago. It is safe to assume deterioration has advanced further in the past 4 years. The Sturgeon Bay Historical Society is a special interest group promoting tower repair. Their expert who says it can be

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repaired is also the company proposing to do the work, a real conflict of interest and not an independent engineering evaluation. This special interest group has not considered the needs of state parks which \$5 million of work on other park project would benefit. The roads in the parks are in horrible condition. Everybody uses them to access the parks. Potawatomi need shoreline repair, a nature center, camp site drainage and the list goes on. If the tower was repaired and brought up to ADA standards consider this, probably 1/3 of the public has a fear of height and will never ever want to climb it. In conclusion, demolish the and spend the \$5million on project the benefit a much greater number of people."

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Appendix B

Below is a selection of comments that provide further context for responses on Accessibility.

Support Accessible Access (ADA)

Comments regarding ADA support spanned from a desire to see a new tower built similar to the one at Peninsula to the possibility of repairing the tower as it stands but either providing an accessible option in some way or just maintaining it as a historical site.

"Please comply with ADA standards for the Potawatomi Tower. I'm a full-time wheelchair user and would love to have equal access to the tower."

"Please, please consider what it would mean to people with disabilities to have that recognized as a reason to repair/rebuild the tower as they have at Peninsula State Park so that those with disabilities can access it. If that isn't possible, please consider it becoming an historical site, however not repairing it, so that in fairness to everyone, no one can climb it. Or, if all else fails take it down completely. I truly hate to see that happen, but people with disabilities have long been in the shadows and not considered in making decisions like these. Please consider those people now."

"I think the Potawatomi Tower should be demolished and a new tower should be constructed similar to what was done at Peninsula State Park. From a cost/funding perspective, I wouldn't object to a daily or annual park fee increase, but a little bird told me the state also has a budget surplus this year."

"My wife and I always loved that tower, and the tower at peninsula state park for which I got engaged on 22 years ago. Now that we have a handicapped daughter, we love the new tower at Peninsula State park and would love to see the same done at Potawatomi State park. We enjoy all of the parks in Door County. And always donate to the efforts of improvements and beautifications."

"I think the tower should be upgraded and made handicapped accessible for ALL residents to enjoy."

"The Potawatomi State Park tower is iconic, historic and crucial for the complete and fulfilling experience this gem of a state park offers. It should be rebuilt so generations from near and far, able or disabled, can enjoy it as so many have in the past."

Does not support ADA

Comments that did not support ADA did so with the belief that because the structure is historic it does not need to conform to ADA standards or because there is an accessible tower available at Peninsula.

"Preserve the original tower. Do not make is handicap assessable. I have been to Peninsula's tower many times and have never seen a true handicapped person on it. It was a big waste of money and forest destruction."

"Restore and repair this historic tower to usable condition. There is already an ADA-accessible tower at Peninsula State Park"

"I would like to see the Observation Tower at Potawatomi preserved as a historical object. I'm glad that Peninsula has a new accessible tower. That park gets visited a LOT. Potawatomi is used much less so the DNR should preserve the historic tower."



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"I am strongly in favor of securing an option to repair the existing tower to restore it to use by the public. I worked at Potawatomi Park as an LTE ranger in the late 70s and early 80s. I clearly recall the hundreds of visitors that came to the park for the primary purpose of seeing and climbing that famous tower. It was quite an attraction then, and has remained an attraction for visitors to the park. I now live in Sturgeon Bay within a short drive to the park and have remained a frequent park visitor. The tower has always been popular with visitors, even though some members of the visiting groups didn't feel they could climb that distance. That didn't stop them from cheering on the other members. I understand that the tower is not handicap accessible. Apparently they didn't worry about that back in the 1930s when it was built. But the historical significance remains. Construction under President Roosevelt's CCC program is a big deal in historical significance. It would be a true shame to destroy the tower for all because a very small minority aren't able to take full advantage of it. It is important that the tower retain its historical form so visitors can see how they built this almost 100 years ago."

"I understand the Potawatomi Tower is the first observation tower built in Wisconsin (1931) and was the model for those towers that came after, provides a beautiful view across Green bay, is as loved by thousands, on the national register of, historic places, and easy and inexpensive to repair for another 90 years (\$300,000)! As historic it is exempt from ADA standards but if altered to comply with ADA standards it loses its historic designation and costs millions to alter to comply with ADA! Please simply repair it as is for future generations to enjoy! Also, with modern video technology it can be made accessible to the handicapped to enjoy from the ground. (I also understand adding ADA ramps costs millions but actually only provides access to 30% of the handicapped)."

"Repair the tower. The historical context, location and view hold importance to so many people. Tearing the structure down is a disservice to the public. Building an entirely new structure which is ADA compliant is not a sustainable idea having surveyed the tower constructed at Peninsula State Park. Given the cold climate and harsh winters, the most sensible idea is to repair the existing structure and move on with it. Make a decision already."

"I urge that the tower is restored in the form that it was built. i.e. without access. To do otherwise dishonors its historical value."

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Appendix C

Many respondents mention the historical significance of the structure. Below is a selection of comments that reflect opinions regarding preservation and restoration of the tower and its history.

"I strongly support repair and continued use of the Potawatomi State Park Observation Tower. The tower has strong historical significance and has been enjoyed recreationally by visitors since its construction in 1932 to its closure by the Wisconsin DNR in 2017."

"The tower is an asset to the state and community. It reflects the state's long tradition of providing unique opportunities for residents and visitors to gain an appreciation of (and thereby become stewards of) our state's diverse landforms. Preservation and enhancement of the tower will absolutely be an investment that is in the public interest."

"I support the renovation of the Potawatomi tower. It makes sense to spend \$249,179 to repair it instead of spending \$153,100 to demolish it. I loved my numerous visits to the tower. The view is breathtaking. Door county is such a wonderful place to live and visit. I owned and renovated the Carnegie library in Sturgeon Bay. I believe it is our right and responsibility to preserve our history for generations to come."

"Many issues surround the future of this tower. Having handicapped access would be wonderful, but the historical and cultural benefits of saving the original structure should be the most important consideration moving forward. It is also the quickest and most economical way to return the tower to use."

"Why remove a piece of history that can be restored for the people to enjoy the beauty of Door County? Your taking away the memories of people who come to enjoy the historic view and for what reason? I'm not talking about a few hundred people; I'm talking of thousands and thousands of people who enjoy the history of Door County which the business make money on. Your taking away what people love to see, the Granary for example. Stop spending money on arguing about keeping Door County's history in place, you are taking away what people love to see and do."

"It's time to concede this battle, DNR. Too many communities are bereft of individual icons, things that cannot be reproduced or easily duplicated. If these treasures can be saved, it's important that we work together to save them. Let us celebrate our sense of place by keeping the structures that tell us a bit about our past. And, on top of everything else, this is the terminus of the Ice Age Trail!"

"I have great memories as a kid camping at Potawatomi State Park. The highlight was always climbing the tower. I would hate to see it torn down! Especially since it has such historic significance. I would like to see it restored as close as possible to its original condition."

"Please preserve the Potawatomi tower at Pot Park. It's an iconic historic structure that is the well-recognized symbol of the eastern terminus of the National Ice Age Trail plus, it's location gives people a great vantage point to oversee the unique beauty of the Door County landscape, shoreline, and escarpment. This tower is a real jewel of the state park system."