

August 8, 2023

Dear Sheldon,

We are writing to ask that the county immediately reopen Ravine Road to vehicular traffic.

Lake Park Friends recently received an independent engineering assessment of Ravine Road by Kapur and Associates, Inc. Kapur's evaluation (attached) concludes that there is no structural or safety reason the road should remain closed.

Further, reopening the road to pedestrian-only traffic would constitute a fundamental change in the use of the road and undermine the integrity of a beloved historic treasure in Milwaukee. And such a move would violate the historic preservation requirements over which the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission has oversight. In a letter dated April 20, 2023, Tim Askin, the commission's senior planner, wrote: "It is understood that the temporary closure was necessary due to the safety issues presented by the deteriorated bridge. Those safety issues are no longer present and permanent closure would harm the character and purpose of Lake Park and the Milwaukee County Parkway System. ... [A]ll alterations must be reviewed and approved by the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission through the Certificate of Appropriateness process. The following actions would be considered an alteration and include ... closure of the road to vehicular traffic..." A copy of Tim Askin's letter is attached.

We understand that the proposed County budget for 2024 will include \$500,000 for planning and design related to options for Ravine Road, with options in 2019 dollars currently costing up to \$1.3 million. With the budget crisis Milwaukee County is facing, why spend \$500,000 or more than \$1.3 million when you could open the road now for next to nothing? The cost for the "minor maintenance" to which the Kapur letter refers, much of which is covered under the terms of the contract for the reconstruction of the Concrete Bridge, would be minimal.

We know that in your thinking on this issue you are placing great weight on the results from surveys on the road sent out in your newsletters to constituents. Let us remind you once again that your surveys are not scientific polls and that the 400 respondents represent a tiny fraction (<1%) of your 53,000 constituents and none of the other 900,000 county residents who also have use of the park and support it through tax dollars. The park does not belong to East Side or Gold Coast residents, but to everyone. Let us also remind you that decisions regarding sites that have been accorded historic protections should not be based on public opinion instruments, no matter how well designed.

If you continue to believe that these decisions should be based on public opinion, please note that a petition started on [Change.Org](#) in 2019, “Keep Ravine Road in Milwaukee’s Lake Park Open to All,” has 3,812 signatures in support of Lake Park Friends’ historic preservation position. Many who signed included comments about their delightful experiences driving the road.

There currently are five natural ravine trails and two asphalt paths (all of which are maintained by Lake Park Friends) for pedestrian access through the park to the lakefront. The road, a key element of Olmsted’s design, intentionally provides a unique “pleasure driving” experience in the park, especially for people who are not ambulatory. It had been used by cars for more than 105 years before its closure in 2014.

This issue is the highest priority for Lake Park Friends, the non-profit citizen group that has raised millions to support and improve Lake Park over 27 years. We are committed to preserving the historic nature of the neighborhood and the park for everyone to enjoy.

Please e-mail or call us at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Anne Hamilton
President, Lake Park Friends

Copy: Guy Smith