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August 25, 2023

Dear Lake Park Friends member,

We have received questions from members about the status of Ravine Road, so I am writing to explain why the Lake Park Friends Board concluded that the road should be saved. First, some background. As you may know, in 2019, the board adopted a resolution documenting the road's historical significance. It had been closed in 2014 due to concerns over the safety of the Concrete Bridge. Now that the bridge repairs are near completion, we recently sent a letter to our County Supervisor Sheldon Wasserman calling on the County to reopen the road to automobiles, consistent with the reasoning articulated in the resolution.

Our conclusion to save Ravine Road boils down to three key points. Supporting documents (attached) provide more detail.

1. **Historic preservation.** Since this is key to our mission<sup>1</sup>, it necessarily guides decision making. A central feature of Frederick Law Olmsted's park design, the road was intentionally designed as a 'pleasure drive' to engage passengers with the landscape and scenic views, especially visitors who might not be able to access the landscape on foot. While cars were not the primary mode of transportation when he designed the park, the concept of 'pleasure driving' quickly transitioned from carriages to automobiles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, when Ravine Road was built in 1905, it immediately became a popular drive for automobiles. From a historic preservation perspective, it is not about the vehicle type, but rather the unique experience of being a passenger in a vehicle, engaging with the moving landscape. Given our mission, we advocate retaining this historic vehicular road use, but also support bicycles sharing the road with cars, and periodic road closures for pedestrian-only use.

Also, as a registered historic landmark, there are federal, state, and local regulatory processes that must be followed when proposing to make changes to the park. We have not conducted a survey of our members on this issue because we believe that historic preservation concerns, not personal preferences, should direct all decisions.

2. **Accessibility.** Olmsted believed that everyone should have equal access to restorative natural spaces, regardless of class differences or physical ability. The park's design purposely included features to achieve that, with paths and drives to highlight distinctive natural features via different modes of transportation: walking, biking and, in this case, a road for 'pleasure driving'. Olmsted's park designs also connected green spaces, and Ravine Road uniquely serves as a linkage between the lakefront and the river (in Riverside Park). Olmsted's idea of parks connected to parks and as accessible places for people of all classes shaped the ways parks have been designed across the country ever since. Ravine Road facilitates access to the park for all Milwaukeeans, not just those who live in the neighborhood.
3. **Funding priorities.** As stewards of the park, Lake Park Friends provides financial support to the County to preserve and maintain it. Milwaukee County has proposed to spend \$500,000 – just to study what might be done with the road. A 2019 study of road alternatives cited costs up to \$1.3 million to convert the road to a path. At a time when the County is facing severe budget

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<sup>1</sup> Lake Park Friends Mission: "The mission of Lake Park Friends is to promote the preservation and enjoyment of Lake Park, to sponsor educational, recreational and cultural events in the park, and to raise funds for the restoration and enhancement of the park in the spirit of Frederick Law Olmsted."

issues, why spend this much studying a valuable historic road when there are many other critical deferred park maintenance items, including repair of six footbridges in the ravines, the Iron Bridge and existing paved walking paths?

People had been driving Ravine Road for over 105 years before its closure. And, despite what you might hear about the road's current condition, a recent engineering study concluded that there is no reason to unnecessarily delay its reopening to automobiles.

I hope this information helps explain our position. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments. Also, we encourage you to attend one of the public meetings that Supervisor Wasserman has organized on the issue. They will be held on September 7 (at 7 pm, in the Marcia Coles Community Room, below Lake Park Bistro) and on September 12 (at 6 pm, in the East Library).

Thank you for your continued membership and support of Lake Park.



Anne Hamilton  
President, Lake Park Friends

Attachments:

- LPF letter to Supervisor Wasserman
- Kapur road assessment
- Letter from Tim Askin of the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission to Alderman Brostoff



Tim Askin  
Senior Planner  
tim.askin@milwaukee.gov

April 20, 2023

Dear Alderman Brostoff:

You requested a summary of the Historic Preservation Commission's position on Ravine Road in Lake Park. To begin, the entirety of Lake Park is regulated by Milwaukee's Historic Preservation ordinance and there are specific rules in place governing alterations to the Park.

Like the bridge above it, Ravine Road is a major contributing feature in Lake Park which has both a National Register listing and city historic designation as part of Milwaukee's North Point Historic District. This roadway has served as Lake Park's major link to the lakeshore below ever since its design by Frederick Law Olmsted. It was part of the original circulation plan of the park and allowed park users to get to the lakeshore without having to go out of the park and around its perimeter. Unlike the small rustic pathways that led down to the lakeshore, Ravine Road was always meant for vehicular traffic.

The "[Milwaukee County Parks and Parkways Historic Properties Management Plan](#)" from 2013 has guidelines for internal decision-making about park roadways as part of an historic system. The plan specifically notes the requirement to comply with Historic Preservation Commission rules regarding Lake Park.

The Historic Preservation Commission's guidelines for the park observe that "Lake Park still exhibits many features of the Olmsted scheme including the pathways and bridges,

vehicular and pedestrian circulation system in the park including drives, paths, stairways, and bridges." Per Milwaukee's Historic Preservation Ordinance (MCO 320-21-11), all 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, but are not limited to, closure of the road to vehicular traffic; modifying the shape, width, or path of the roadway; or removing the roadway in its entirety. 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.

Further, as the Park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the County is required to consult with the Wisconsin Historical Society for any facilities planning efforts (Wis. Stats. 44.42 & 66.1111(4)). I would note that the state process is not a substitute for review by the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission.

Thank you for your interest in this topic. Please let me know if I can assist you with any further clarification.

Sincerely,



Tim Askin  
Senior Planner

## memo

Date: July 24, 2023

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To: Colleen Riley - Friends of Lake Park  
PO Box 71197, Milwaukee, WI 53211-7297

ckreilly@outlook.com

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CC:

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From: Tim Anheuser

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Re: Lake Park - Ravine Road Pavement Review

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On June 29, 2023, I field reviewed the condition of the pavement on Ravine Road in Lake Park in Milwaukee, WI. I additionally had a representative from Walbec inspect the pavement.

The pavement looks to be in fair condition with 50-60% residual value remaining and I offer the following professional opinions.

Failure to manage the tree canopy and vegetation on the adjacent slopes has significantly contributed to the failure of the surface course. Under conditions of 90% or more canopy cover, the persistence of moisture on shaded pavements causes deterioration and a decreased service life. Much of the pavement deterioration, however, is only in the surface course and not in the lower asphalt course or in the subsurface.

There is some subsurface failure near the lower flatter portion of the roadway where failure to maintain the curb edge joint has allowed water to infiltrate into the base and resulted in base and curb failure.

With tree trimming and minor maintenance I believe that the roadway could be quickly reopened. I recommend removal of the vegetated understory within 15' of the edge of the roadway, trimming the over-story to open tree canopy, sweeping the roadways, cleaning the inlets, patching the locations of missing surface course, and crack filling. At this time, I recommend reinspection to determine if any full depth

patching needs to be done. I would also recommend that the road be marked “No Trucking.”

After reopening, the pavement should be closely monitored for any further deterioration. If any rutting or surface deterioration develops, I recommend a more extensive rehabilitation consisting of removal and replacement of failed sections of curb and gutter (+/- 10%), remove and replace failed base (+/- 20%) and then 2 inch mill and overlay. I further recommend that regardless of any more deterioration, a similar rehabilitation be done within 3 years to extend the life of the pavement.

After rehabilitation, and with proper maintenance and tree trimming, I do not anticipate that full reconstruction will be necessary for many years.





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Ann Wollmer

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne W. Hamilton".

Anne Hamilton  
President, Lake Park Friends

Copy: Guy Smith