



October 9, 2018

Ms. Cara Pavlicek
Village Manager
Village of Oak Park
123 Madison Street
Oak Park, Illinois 60302

Dear Ms. Pavlicek,

Pursuant to the existing funding agreement between the Village of Oak Park and Visit Oak Park, the state-certified convention and local visitors bureau, I am writing to request a modification to our 2018 contract, which was approved by the Village of Oak Park on December 11, 2017.

Effective immediately, we respectfully request the village remove contract item 1.D in Exhibit 2, which requires the operation of a Visitor's Center.

As you know, tourism is a major economic driver for the Oak Park economy. World-class attractions such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, Unity Temple, and the Ernest Hemingway Birthplace Museum bring thousands of visitors from across the country and around the world to Oak Park each year. Meanwhile, events such as Wright Plus, Uncork Illinois, and Micro Brew Review, not only support local businesses and jobs, but also play a special role in being a source of pride for local residents.

Visit Oak Park's mission has always been to increase the number of visitors coming to our attractions and events and to entice them to stay and frequent local restaurants, boutiques and hotels. But we live in a new era. Mobile is everything. Sixty-percent of destination website traffic is now mobile. Travelers today use their phones for everything, including to plan their trips. They use their phones to get information, not a visitor's center. Indeed, most of the guests to our Visitor's Center are local residents, not visitors.

In addition, the financial challenges of operating a mission-focused, not-for-profit visitor's center in today's retail world are very real. In addition to new trends in consumer behavior, the cost of rent and other operating costs continue to rise. Unfortunately, the financial investment in operating the center has recently become untenable. We recognize our fiduciary responsibility to the Village of Oak Park to invest our donor funds in ways that maximize a return to the community, especially when there are other more cost-effective alternatives to meeting the needs of Oak Park visitors.

We are not alone in our response to these challenges. Choose Chicago, the official convention and visitors bureau for the City of Chicago, closed its last remaining's Visitor Center five years ago.

Closing the Visitor's Center will allow us to repurpose funds into meeting the competitive demands of the tourism marketplace by growing Visit Oak Park's total marketing and advertising spending to 65% of our annual budget. We have already begun the process of building a new, state-of-the-art, mobile-friendly website. We have also begun the process of replacing our current visitor guide with a new annual magazine-style publication to inspire



prospective travelers to visit the Oak Park Area. The new publication marks a shift in strategy by targeting self-identified Midwest travel enthusiasts looking for new travel destinations. Lastly, following our relaunch in early 2019, we will target travelers regionally, nationally, and internationally as part of our digital advertising campaign efforts to bring more visitors to Oak Park and to ensure the village receives a strong return on investment for its donor funds.

With your approval, the Visitor's Center at 1010 Lake Street, Oak Park, Illinois, will cease operations by the end of 2018. We will work to properly inform the public about our transition as well as our vendors, partners and members. We will also ensure that our impacted employees and volunteers will be treated fairly and respectful through this transition. We are deeply thankful for the dedicated service of the many individuals who have helped to keep the center running for all of these years.

I am available to discuss this request with you and the trustees in person at the Village of Oak Park Board Meeting scheduled for Monday, October 15, 2018.

Thank you for your continued support of Visit Oak Park and local tourism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric C. Wagner", is written over a large, stylized, loopy flourish that extends to the right.

Eric C. Wagner
President & CEO
Visit Oak Park