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JAMES A. BOHL, JR.
Alderman, 5th District

The “Truth-O-Meter” Needs re-Calibrating

Statement of Alderman Jim Bohl November 16, 2010

I found out long ago that newspaper reporters generally are not responsible for writing the headlines that appear with their stories, and now I also know that reporters at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* are not likely in charge of setting the “Truth-O-Meter” that goes with their *PolitiFact Wisconsin* articles.

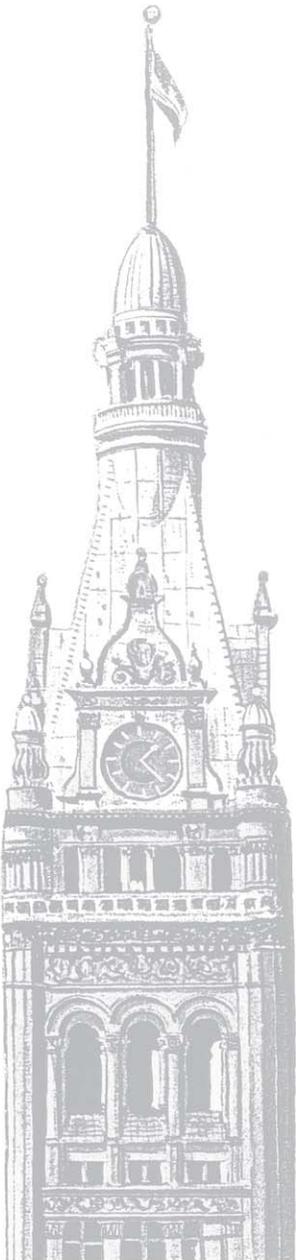
I have great respect for reporter Dave Umhoefer, and his article today on page two of the main section is well done. However, I strongly disagree with the “half-true” rating given to my position – made clear in my news release on November 3 – that the vast majority of the damage caused to homes and businesses in the City of Milwaukee by the record July rain storms came from sewer backups into basements.

In today’s piece, it states that the Department of Public Works “disagrees” with my position that “basement backwater” is water coming up into a basement from sewer pipes. The article says DPW says it could come from a variety of sources, according to City Engineer Jeff Polenske. Further, today’s article then quotes Polenske as stating that the Department of Public Works does not track where basement water comes from.

Really?

In documents I was provided by DPW, some of which are attached to this statement, it clearly shows that in July DPW sent out 33 two-person crews to personally “interview” residents reporting basement backwater problems, and to document their cases. At one point (see attached), it shows that 8,800 backwater calls had come in and that as of July 28 the

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crews had “investigated” about 50% of the cases – or more than 4,440 properties.

To be clear, I provided this very information to the Journal Sentinel showing that DPW, in fact, **was tracking** the basement backwater complaints, which is contrary to what Mr. Polenske is quoted as saying.

In late July the Common Council approved my proposal to create a multi-jurisdictional **Flooding Study Task Force** to examine all key flooding issues, especially long-term remedies for basement backwater events. It’s ironic, given the article, that such a significant focus on flooding related discussion since July has centered both on backflow preventer valves and MMSD’s efforts to fund a \$150 million effort to reduce storm water flows from private property into sanitary sewer lines resulting in overflows into basements.

As part of the task force’s work, I pledge that I will call Mr. Polenske to the table, and my first question to him will be – “Do you agree or disagree that the vast majority of damage caused to homes and businesses by the record July rain storms in the City of Milwaukee came from sewer backups into basements?”

If he disagrees, I will be listening carefully to his explanation of why he holds that seemingly contradictory position, given the records his own department has provided.