

To: Brad Marquardt

FROM: Ben Mielke

DATE: May 6, 2026

RE: Wastewater High Flow Event on April 17, 2026

Follow Up High Flow Event

On the evening of April 17, 2026, significant flash flooding caused excessive inflow and infiltration at the facility, requiring staff to initiate a controlled sanitary sewer overflow. In addition, emergency bypass pumps were brought into route flow around the bar screens, which had failed after being overwhelmed by large volumes of rocks and grit washed into the plant. Once the screens became inoperable, water began to overflow the channels. Through quick thinking and coordinated efforts, city staff used sandbagging to contain the influent wastewater until bypass pumping was established, successfully preventing a treatment plant overflow.

Why did this happen?

Like many communities, Whitewater has sections of sewer piping located in areas that are difficult—or impossible—to access with city-owned equipment, such as marshes and open fields. As a result, these lines are not cleaned or inspected as frequently as more accessible lines, such as those in roadways. Over time, grit, rocks, and other debris accumulate under normal flow conditions. During unusually high flow events, such as the night of April 17, 2026, these materials became suspended and surged into the treatment plant all at once, placing significant strain on downstream equipment.

The facility was not designed with a bypass around the bar screens. Consequently, once the screens failed, there was no way to reroute wastewater to allow for cleaning, inspection, and repair. To address this, bypass pumps were rented and installed to divert flow around the inoperable screens so that maintenance could be performed.

Has this happened before?

A high-flow event of similar magnitude occurred in 2008, when many surrounding communities experienced significant flooding. For Whitewater, however, the April 17, 2026, event appeared to be more severe when comparing the flows recorded during the two events. While bypass pumping had been implemented in the past, there had been no prior instance of bar screen failure, therefore, requiring the need for emergency pump rental. Notably, this was the first time the facility experienced flows of this magnitude

with the two automatic bar screens as opposed to an automatic bar screen and a manual bar screen (such as 2008 event).

Immediate Action

-Multiple miles of “suspect” sewer lines have been walked to evaluate MHs to assess potential for inflow and infiltration. Issues that cannot be repaired immediately are being noted for future repairs.

-Facility staff are exploring options to remove the “old” bar screen that was never replaced in the 2017 facility upgrade. This involves discussions with engineers, other municipalities, and DNR staff.

Long Term Action

-Staff have been aware of Whitewater’s issues of inflow and infiltration for years and as a result has continued to target leaky and damaged sewer pipes annually through the Sewer Replacement Fund. This consists of grouting leaking joints, MH to MH lining, and spot repairs.

-Staff have recognized the lack of condition assessment of the inaccessible sewer lines and had reached out to contractors for quotes (before this event) for televising of some of these remote sewer pipes to establish baseline conditions. This work has been approved and slated to occur at the end of the year pending weather conditions. This information will be used in future sewer replacement projects.

-Televising and cleaning efforts will continue annually.

Resulting Costs (see attached documents for more information)

Labor: approximately \$12,000, with a significant portion being taken as comp time

Pumps: \$11,513.00

Misc. Parts: \$381.70

TOTAL: \$23,894.70