

BROCK'S BANTER: How much is \$56?

By Brock Weir

The above might sound like a stupid question, but I will be very interested to see if the answer ever comes.

\$56 is the magic number behind seemingly endless Council debate for the better part of five months, debate which has been dripping with drama and intrigue. It has been at the root of accusations and insinuations on any variety of sins, real, imagined and otherwise hawked at the general public.

But it is also the magic number which underscores a fundamental problem which has been brewing for far too long at Council, well beyond this saga of whether or not Councillors should be able to expense alcohol.

After months of handwringing in certain quarters, Town Staff revealed more detailed information on Council's expenditures last year. When the dust settled, Mayor Dawe was revealed to have been the 'culprit' that had an alcohol expense last year, resulting in undoubtedly sleepless nights for Councillor Ballard.

Yes, the hullabaloo was over a whopping \$56.

'Much ado about nothing!' said Councillor Abel at the Aurora Home Show (which was terrific once again, incidentally. See for yourself on Page 18!) when asked about the numbers coming forward.

On a monetary value that might be true, but the prolonged, pained debate has made that number accrue some interest.

I am on the record as not having as much concern as some in this community with Councillors expensing alcohol. There is a time and a place for everything. If it was something like recklessly expensing a few Jell-O shots every Tuesday to drown post-Council sorrows, that would be one thing, but sometimes other instances can be justified.

When the debate came up the first time several months ago, Mayor Dawe raised the example of what would happen if he was entertaining a potentially significant investor in Aurora, such as Bulk Barn, on home turf and he or she ordered a pint of beer or a glass of wine?

If it gets them one step closer to making a significant investment in this Town, one which will bring hundreds of new jobs to the area, a few million which could be invested in local companies to make their buildings and infrastructure a reality, and thousands upon thousands of tax dollars flowing annually into Town coffers, that is \$10 well spent.

The problem lies in the fact Mayor Dawe just didn't bite the bullet months ago and say, 'You know what? Yes, I made the expense, and I had good reason for doing so.'

Was the expense as outlined on Page 8 this week a justifiable one? I think so, but by sitting on his hands and letting this circus take over Council proceedings, he has shown a very puzzling aspect of leadership.

Everyone at the table has their own base. It is easy to see why raising this issue would be important for Councillor Ballard and the people who support what he stands for, but I can't for the life of me think of any strategic benefit for the Mayor to have let the debate continue as it did, when he could have swiftly nipped it in the bud months ago.

Raising at least one of these hands months ago would have put this all out in the open and allowed them to get back to the business of the Town. But, alas, it was not to be. And all over a measly \$56.

Instead, we first had accusations flying left and right about whether or not Councillor Ballard had proof to back up his assertions that a member of Council had expensed alcohol. By refusing to name names, his comments cast a pall over the entire Council with people who may have been interested in such things wondering just who the 'culprit' was, a minor blow to the entirety of Council. If the Mayor spoke up, this could have been quickly avoided.

We had Councillors raising their hands, perhaps feeling impugned by the accusation thinking they could be in under suspicion, lining up to demand Councillor Ballard produce the documents and name names.

If the Mayor spoke up, any embarrassment felt by Councillors, who could very well be feeling foolish right now, could have been spared.

Last week, we nearly saw Municipal staff get swept into this vortex and directly into this mucky debate. After Councillor Ballard claimed the documentation was provided to him by staff in the Town's Finance Department, the suddenly furrowed brow that appeared on Town Treasurer Dan Elliott's face when the words passed Councillor Ballard's lips spoke volumes—one of which appeared to be, 'This is news to me.'

If the Mayor spoke up, municipal staff would not have come perilously close to being drawn in to what appears to be the stalemate between the politics Councillor Ballard is seen to represent and the politics of Mayor Dawe.

Hopefully, now that these numbers are released, this game of cat and mouse will end, and everyone will go back to doing their jobs,

do a serious evaluation of their intentions and how they would like to serve the community, when to speak up when one needs to, and question if it was all worth it for a paltry \$56.

?Nobody asked me,? said Mayor Dawe on Saturday when asked why he didn't volunteer that the bill was his.

Should one have to?