

BROCK'S BANTER: Pulp Friction

By Brock Weir

Growing up for the bulk of my formative years in what was once a very countrified area of Newmarket, we were privy to our own kind of 'Secret Garden'.

It wasn't a 'garden' in the true sense of the word, it was otherworldly nonetheless. To passersby standing at the foot of our driveway looking northward toward our house, it seems as though our property featured two very large and undoubtedly ancient apple trees. When they were in full bloom, the bursts of green and white were decidedly hard to miss.

The caveat, however, was in public planning. For reasons which I can only chalk up to a land surveyor intoxicated to some degree, these two trees actually belonged to our next-door neighbours despite being on our side of what would have been the obvious geographical divide.

Nevertheless, they kindly allowed us kids to play amongst their branches and the larger of the two was indeed this near-paradise of a secret garden. It was so expansive there was a clearing within its branches big enough for four or five people if you knew the right way to get through the tangled limbs.

At the centre was a primitive, but very effective, rope swing, affixed to the largest branch hanging over a veritable carpet of white and purple trilliums. Once inside, the sun shone in but you were really cut off to the outside world.

Given the age of the trees - and one of them a bit rickety compared to the other - it was made clear to us by our parents (the trees were popular with the neighbours as well) that they did not belong to us and if one or both ever had to go it was something we had to deal with.

We dreaded the day, but it was a reality we had to deal with.

Our house has since been sold. Sadly, one of our neighbours is no longer with us either, but the trees remain. And it is likely the new homeowners feel the same way.

Over the past few weeks, those of us who sit in the Council chambers week after week to take in the debate, have witnessed hour upon hour of debate over three piddly little trees in the southeast corner of Aurora in the heart of a relatively new subdivision.

I mean no disrespect by the use of the word 'piddly.' It is not reflective of the neighbours' passions or the importance of the trees to this particular subdivision, but entirely tied to the importance of them in the grand scheme of things in keeping our town chugging along.

Thinking back to 'our' trees, I certainly feel the neighbours' pain, but there seems to be a disconnect between what is practical and what is, from an emotional standpoint, viewed as right and just. Reports have been made clear that while two of the three trees are in fine shape, the other is in a more precarious state. Substantial investments will have to be made to prop the third one up, but thus far I haven't seen any vote of support given by the neighbours or Aurora Councillors to help finance that endeavour.

Despite the extensive debates, as hundreds of logs were felled in the 2C Developments, with little more than a few batted eyelids, there are no practical solutions on offer for these three trees by any of the three bodies.

In the middle of last week's debate, Councillor Gaertner said it was a situation created between the developers and Town Planning staff in drafting and subsequently approving a plan that was ultimately doomed to failure.

'This is not our responsibility, it is not our doing, and I am very, very sorry the homeowner finds himself in this situation.'

Somebody has messed up and it wasn't Council. I don't think we should take those trees down to accommodate that mistake.'

At the end of the day she is, of course, correct.

It wasn't Council's fault, but I'm not as convinced it is not their responsibility. The homeowner has come to Council seeking help and guidance on how to proceed with his new home. His neighbours have come to Council seeking help on how to maintain the trees they hold so dear. Council is in an unenviable position. They eventually have to back one party, their vote will ultimately please someone, but not everyone. In my view, it should come down to the most practical solution and be determined by discussions the lengths of which are proportionate to the Town as a whole.

After all, many, many things of much greater importance to the entire community - from what the Town is looking for when it comes to a new tennis facility at Stewart Burnett Park on the lower side of the scale, to the (let's pause for emphasis) the 2013 Budget itself! - have passed entirely on consent when it was time finally seal them with the Mayor's signature.

DOG-EARED BUT NOT BRUISED

I would like to thank everyone who took me for a spin last week. I am, of course, referring to the Human Library event held at the

Aurora Public Library on Saturday afternoon. Not knowing exactly what to expect from it, I had an absolute blast meeting new people, fielding their interesting questions, and learning more about their fascinating stories.

I look forward to the Library's roster for Culture Days 2014 and promise to be a very active patron myself.

On a final note to Matthew and Alexandra, my youngest checker-outers from Saturday, best of luck in your upcoming festival. I'm sure you'll be great!