

## **A \$2.8 million lawsuit, on guess whose dime?**

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**During the early stages, observers predicted Venice's Government-in-the-Sunshine lawsuit could cost the city \$1 million.**

**Boy, were they wrong. The bills are at nearly \$2.8 million and rising. Based on a population of 21,000, that averages to more than \$133 for every man, woman and child in town.**

**And we're not done. The attorneys for both sides are calling in expert witnesses for a two-day hearing in September to justify or dispute -- you guessed it -- the billings.**

**Members of the City Council and an advisory committee were accused of deleting public records and/or communicating improperly through private e-mails.**

**Some hired private lawyers. The city attorney and a specialist hired by the city represented the rest. Their bills total \$576,000 so far.**

**To that, we must add \$843,000 in fees compiled by the plaintiff's attorneys, multiplied by 2.5. State law established the multiplier to encourage attorneys to pursue less lucrative public-interest cases.**

**Unfortunately, in this case, because the targets of the lawsuit settled before trial and thereby averted a ruling on their actions, the public pays the bills.**

**Circuit Court Judge Robert Bennett will decide how much. The plaintiff's attorneys deserve fair compensation for safeguarding public access, but here's hoping Judge Bennett doesn't make the public pay 2.5 times the going rate for that advocacy.**

**Someone has to stop the madness.**