

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Former Union City Zoning Board Member Sentenced to Five Months
in Prison, Five Months in Halfway House for Extortion

(More)

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TRENTON – A former member of the Union City Board of Adjustment was sentenced today to five months in prison followed by five months in a halfway house for accepting more than \$20,000 in corrupt cash payments from a contractor in exchange for the promise of official favors, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

U.S. District Judge Garrett E. Brown, Jr., ordered John Medina, 38, of North Bergen, to report to the federal Bureau of Prisons within 30 days to begin serving his sentence.

Medina pleaded guilty on June 19 to a one-count Information and admitted accepting the corrupt cash payments from a contractor who was having difficulty obtaining permit renewals necessary for the construction of a multi-use, six-story building on Summit Avenue in Union City.

The Information charged Medina with extortion under color of official right. Under the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, Medina faced a sentencing range of between 30 and 37 months in prison. However, Judge Brown took note of Medina's cooperation in an ongoing public corruption investigation in Hudson County and reduced his sentence in view of that.

Between 2002 and January 2005, Medina was a member of the Board of Adjustment of Union City, for which he considered various plans for building and development in Union City. As a member of the zoning board he assisted in the approval of development and construction that met the criteria of municipal ordinances and state law.

In January 2005, Medina met with the contractor in the vicinity of 23rd Street and Summit and Central Avenues. Medina admitted that at the meeting, he solicited and demanded a sum of \$35,000 from the individual, ultimately agreeing to accept approximately \$20,000.

Medina admitted that, in exchange for the corrupt cash payments, he would make it easier for the building project during its inspection by Union City authorities and expedite the renewal of permits for the project. At the meeting, Medina agreed to accept the corrupt payment in installments of either four, \$5,000 payments or two, \$10,000 payments.

Medina also said that he intended to share the cash payments with another individual involved in the extortion scheme.

Medina admitted that he had held himself out as a close associate of other supervisory personnel in Union City government who could assist the contractor. Medina also told the contractor that he wanted to be the "real estate person" involved in identifying individuals to rent space in the building.

The investigation is continuing.

Medina was also employed by the Union City Board of Education as an attendance and truant officer at Emerson High School during about the same time he was a member of the zoning board.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with the investigation leading today's guilty plea. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian R. Howe of the U.S. Attorney's Special Prosecution's Division in Newark.

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Defense counsel: Candace Hom, Esq., federal Public Defender's Office