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CITY INSPECTOR CHARGED WITH BRIBERY IN PROBE OF CROOKED PERMITS

CHICAGO – A city of Chicago zoning inspector was arrested today on federal charges for allegedly accepting a \$600 cash bribe from a cooperating individual to provide two residential certificates of occupancy in 2006, federal law enforcement officials and the city’s Acting Inspector General announced today. The defendant, **Dominick Owens**, allegedly accepted more than \$20,000 from the cooperating individual in 2005 and the first half of 2006 in return for certificates of occupancy for many single-family and several multi-unit new construction projects in the city, according to a criminal complaint unsealed this afternoon. The case is part of an ongoing federal corruption investigation, code-named *Operation Crooked Code*, which became public in 2007 and has resulted in previous charges against more than two dozen defendants, including 13 city inspectors.

Owens, 43, of Chicago, an inspector in Chicago’s Department of Zoning since 1995, was released on his own recognizance after appearing before Magistrate Judge Nan Nolan in U.S. District Court. A status hearing was set for 1:30 p.m. on October 7.

According to the complaint affidavit, Owens allegedly had a corrupt relationship with the cooperating individual, who worked as a permit “expediter,” since the beginning of 2005. The

complaint charges Owens with accepting a \$600 bribe from the cooperating expediter on July 20, 2006, in return for Owens providing occupancy certificates for single-family residences on West 37th Place and North Wolcott Street, both in Chicago. The affidavit states that in the cooperating expediter's experience, city inspectors generally do not inspect residences of three units or less, but builders are often willing to pay money to obtain occupancy certificates expeditiously and to avoid having city inspectors drop in and find deviations from approved plans that could result in expensive additional work and closing delays.

The cooperating expediter has previously pleaded guilty to charges in the investigation and was sentenced earlier this year to 18 months probation, according to today's complaint affidavit.

The arrest and charges were announced by Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Thomas P. Brady, Inspector-in-Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in Chicago; and Mary Hodge, Acting Inspector General for the City of Chicago.

Anyone with information about alleged corruption in the city permit process is encouraged to contact the City Inspector General's Office either through their hotline – (866) 448-4754, or through their web site at www.chicagoinspectorgeneral.org

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Juliet Sorensen, April Perry and Christopher Hotaling.

If convicted, Owens faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed under the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.