

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 11, 2009

West New York Property Owner Admits Bribing
Building Official; Another Owner Recently Indicted

(More)

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TRENTON – A prominent property owner in West New York admitted today to bribing the Construction Code Official for the Town of West New York, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

Meyer Mussafi, 69, of West New York, admitted that he paid the now-former official, Frank Zanardelli, \$500 on April 1, 2008, to obtain unspecified future favors. Mussafi stated that he owns at least two buildings on 55th Street in West New York.

Mussafi pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Garrett E. Brown, Jr. in Trenton to a violation of the so-called Travel Act. The crime carries a statutory maximum term of five years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Judge Brown allowed Mussafi to remain free on a \$100,000 unsecured bond pending sentencing scheduled for Aug. 3.

Zanardelli pleaded guilty on July 31, 2008, to extorting and accepting more than \$30,000 in corrupt cash payments, as well as other benefits, in exchange for using his official influence as the Construction Code Official for the Township of West New York.

In a recent and related development, another West New York building owner was indicted on Feb. 24 in connection with bribing Zanardelli. Herman Friedman, 48, of Union City, was arraigned before Judge Brown on Monday. The Indictment alleges that Friedman owned a building at 235 56th Street in West New York that contained an illegal apartment and lacked a Certificate of Occupancy, which is a legal document certifying that the building is suitable to be occupied.

The Indictment alleges that on Aug. 30, 2007, Friedman met the West New York Construction Code Official at the illegal apartment and offered to pay the official as much as \$5,000 to legalize the apartment. It further alleges that Friedman paid the \$5,000 bribe on March 25, 2008, during a visit at the Construction Code Official's office.

The investigation is continuing.

Friedman, who was first charged on Sept. 4 in a criminal Complaint, was charged in the Indictment with violating the statute that prohibits bribery of agents of programs that receive federal funding. If convicted of the bribery charge, Friedman faces a maximum statutory prison term of up to 10 years and a fine of \$250,000.

Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with the investigation.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Bradley A. Harsch and Brian Howe of the Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense counsel:
for Mussafi, Peter W. Till, Esq.,
for Friedman, Lawrence Lustberg, Esq., Newark