

NEWS

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Two Atlantic City Councilmen Admit Taking Bribes in Exchange for Their Influence on City Contracts

(More)

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CAMDEN – Two Atlantic City councilmen pleaded guilty today, admitting that they both accepted bribes – one from an undercover FBI agent and a contractor working with the FBI, the other from a businessman seeking city contracts for an associate, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Ramon Rosario, 48, admitted before U.S. District Judge Joseph H. Rodriguez that he accepted a total of \$14,000 in bribes from between August 2004 and November 2004 in exchange for his official influence in the award of city development contracts.

Gibb Jones, 79, admitted before Judge Rodriguez that he accepted more than \$5,000 in regular cash payments in 2003 from a businessman seeking city development contracts for an associate.

“Sadly, this is more of what we’ve already seen in Atlantic City – council members sworn to protect the public interest selling their oaths for bribe money,” said Christie. “The culture of corruption persists from north to south Jersey. Hopefully, corrupt public officials will finally start to recognize the peril of their conduct and resist their greedy, criminal impulses.”

The FBI and U.S. Attorney’s Office investigation into public corruption in Atlantic City and Atlantic County is continuing.

Rosario pleaded guilty to one count of attempted extortion under color of official right, which carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine. Jones pleaded guilty to extortion under color of official right, which carries the same maximum penalties.

However, under the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, Rosario and Jones each face a probable sentencing range of between 24 and 30 months in federal prison. Judge Rodriguez, however, is not bound by the Sentencing Guidelines and can impose sentences within that range, above it or below it. Sentencing for both men is scheduled for Feb. 1.

Rosario, who has been an Atlantic City councilman since January 2002, acknowledged at his plea hearing that the city was interested in development a 6.4-acre waterfront site – known as the Garwood Mills site – as well as the 190 acres of land comprising the Bader Field Airport.

Rosario admitted that in 2004, he met with an individual who held himself out to be a “Wall Street investor,” who, unbeknownst to Rosario was actually an undercover FBI agent. A contractor that the “Wall Street investor” was purportedly backing was a cooperating witness for the FBI.

Rosario said that the cooperating witness told him he wanted development and construction work in Atlantic City, including the Gardwood Mills and Bader Field sites.

Thereafter began a series of payments accepted by Rosario from the undercover FBI agent and cooperating witness. Rosario admitted taking:

- a \$5,000 cash payment on Aug. 31, 2004
- a \$4,000 payment on Aug. 4, 2005
- a \$1,500 payment on Nov. 22, 2004
- a \$3,500 payment on Dec. 7, 2004.

Jones, on the city council from 1997 until his resignation this August, admitted that he took regular cash payments that totaled more than \$5,000 from a businessman interested in obtaining city contracts for a business associate. In fact, Jones admitted, he voted in favor of contracts for the business associate.

Christie credited Special Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Leslie G. Wiser, in Newark, with the investigations of Callaway, Sloan El and Jacobs.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Thomas J. Eicher and Judith H. Germano, both of the U.S. Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense Counsel:

for Jones – Jerrold Colton, Esq.

for Rosario – Michael Huff, Esq.