

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 31, 2008

West New York Code Enforcement Official
Admits Accepting More Than \$30,000 in Bribes

(More)

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TRENTON – A Construction Code Official for the Township of West New York, New Jersey, pleaded guilty today to extorting and accepting more than \$30,000 in corrupt cash payments, as well as other benefits, in exchange for official favors, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Franco Zanardelli, 58, a resident of West New York, admitted accepting from individuals and business owners located in Hudson County corrupt cash payments and other benefits in exchange for exercising and agreeing to exercise his official influence as the Construction Code Official for the Township of West New York in their favor.

Zanardelli, who was expected to resign today, pleaded guilty to a one-count Information before U.S. District Judge Garrett E. Brown, Jr. The Information charged him with extortion under color of official right. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian R. Howe.

Today was Zanardelli's first appearance in court in connection with the corruption investigation. Judge Brown released him on an unsecured \$100,000 personal cognizance bond pending sentencing scheduled for Nov. 10.

From at least in or about 2002 to on or about June 25, 2007, Zanardelli was the Construction Code Official for the Township of West New York. In that capacity, Zanardelli stated he was responsible for inspecting work performed, issuing permits and Certificates of Occupancy, and enforcing the construction code to ensure compliance with pertinent federal, state, and local regulations. During that time period, Zanardelli admitted that he accepted from individuals and business owners corrupt cash payments and other benefits. In exchange, Zanardelli admitted that he expedited permits, certificates of occupancy, and other approvals for the payors.

By way of example, Zanardelli admitted that he accepted a series of corrupt cash payments in connection with exercising his official influence in connection with a building project on Johnson Place in West New York. In total, Zanardelli admitted that he accepted more than \$30,000 in corrupt cash payments and other benefits in exchange for exercising his official influence as West New York's Construction Code Official.

In addition to his position as West New York's Construction Code Official, Zanardelli became the Construction Code Official for the Town of Guttenberg in or about 2006, having first been employed as a Building Inspector by that Town from in or about 1999 to in or about 2006. Also, Zanardelli was employed as a Building Inspector by the Town of Secaucus since in or about 2004.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in

Charge Weysan Dun, for the investigation leading to today's guilty plea. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian R. Howe, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Attorney's Special Prosecution's Unit in Newark.

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Defense counsel: Paul J. Nittoly, Esq. – Florham Park