

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Former West Long Branch Councilman Admits Accepting Bribe

(More)

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NEWARK – Former West Long Branch Councilman Joseph DeLisa pleaded guilty today to extortion, admitting that he took a \$1,500 cash bribe in an Atlantic City hotel room from someone he believed to be a corrupt contractor seeking business with the borough, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Joseph DeLisa, 50, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge William J. Martini, who scheduled sentencing for March 15. DeLisa pleaded guilty to one count of extortion under color of official right, which carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

DeLisa, a councilman from January 1998 through February 2005, admitted that on Nov. 19, 2003, he met the man he believed to be a demolition contractor in the Atlantic City hotel room and accepted the \$1,500 in cash from him.

DeLisa admitted that former West Long Branch Mayor Paul Zambrano introduced him to the contractor, who was actually an FBI cooperating witness, in about October 2003. DeLisa admitted that he and Zambrano agreed that DeLisa would assist the contractor in obtaining demolition and other public contracts from the borough.

Zambrano pleaded guilty to the same charge on Aug. 24, 2005, and admitted that he accepted cash payments totaling \$15,000 dollars from a confidential FBI informant.

DeLisa's and Zambrano's guilty pleas arose from Operation Bid Rig, the same investigation which led to charges being filed against 13 officials and two contractors in February, March and April 2005, including the mayors of Hazlet and Keyport, as well as councilmen from Asbury Park, Far Hills, Keyport, Neptune Township, Middletown and West Long Branch.

Zambrano, DeLisa and others were extensively recorded on video and audio tape in discussions with undercover FBI agents whom they believed were employees of the cooperating witness, and who were purportedly involved in the laundering of loansharking proceeds as well as paying off local officials. In some cases, the defendants, the cooperating witness and undercover agents were recorded interacting with various named and unnamed Monmouth County public officials.

In determining an actual sentence for DeLisa, Judge Martini will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which recommend sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The Judge, however, has wide discretion in sentencing and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial

terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI's Red Bank Resident Agency, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Leslie G. Wiser, Jr. in Newark, for their work in the ongoing Monmouth County corruption investigation.

DeLisa is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Marc D. Larkins and Rachael A. Honig.

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Defense Counsel: John P. McDonald, Esq., Somerville.