

Bail hearing for attorney over 'fraudulent' Joburg land deals

THE PRETORIA attorney arrested for his involvement in the alleged fraudulent sale of prime Joburg municipal land was due to apply for bail today in the Pretoria Magistrate's Court.

Piet Viljoen, who handled the transfer of millions of rands worth of council property, including a section of the Norscot Koppies and Kingfisher Nature Reserve, was arrested by the Hawks with four others on Thursday night on charges of racketeering and fraud.

He is being held at the Pretoria Central police cells.

Prosecuting Authority spokesman Mthunzi Mhaga confirmed that Viljoen and another attorney, Edwin Maringa, had been arrested on Thursday with three women.

Two of the women, Ronel van Vuuren and Anele van der Berg, work in Viljoen's office.

The other woman, Dorah Madisa, works for the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC), which is responsible for the transfer of council land. Madisa

is named on the municipal website as an assistant property portfolio manager relating to schools.

Mhaga said the women were released last week on R5 000 bail. Viljoen and Maringa's bail applications were postponed because of the State's concerns that the two would intimidate witnesses.

When The Star exposed the illegal land transfers in May, several people came forward claiming they had evidence of similar questionable deals.

Many alleged Viljoen was involved in acts of intimidation and fraud, and several charges have been laid against Viljoen at police stations in Pretoria.

A Pretoria-based broker laid charges of theft against Viljoen for allegedly stealing R1.5 million from him. Viljoen reportedly called him last year to borrow R1.7m for just one day so that he could finalise a property deal.

He claimed Viljoen also threatened his clients with violence and laid a charge of intimi-

gation against the attorney.

Viljoen confirmed he was the conveyancer attorney for the transfer of council land first from the JPC to an intermediary company called Eildoug, before being sold to other companies. His corresponding attorney for the deals was Maringa.

Viljoen said then, when asked about his role in the land deal, that he had correspondence from the JPC confirming that the transactions were in order. He said he attended several meetings at the JPC and

"never suspected that the JPC was not a willing seller".

But in court papers submitted by the JPC, it emerged that some of the transactions were transferred on the same day or overnight. It would usually take at least a week for a property to be registered after it was lodged.

Viljoen's signature appears on documents that were found to have been forged. The signatures of Van Vuuren and Van der Berg also appear on the power of attorney to pass

transfer documents.

Two of the companies that bought most of the 33 tracts of municipal land, Zamien and Zambrotti, said it was Viljoen who told them that his client, Eildoug, had land to sell. The companies said that they were assured by Viljoen that due process had been followed. This was also reportedly confirmed in writing by Madisa, who said the council backed the deal.

Viljoen is no stranger to controversy. He has been under investigation by the Law

conduct and was embroiled in a spat with former rugby player James Dalton. Viljoen also resented former Springbok Joost van der Westhuizen in his videotape scandal.

Other high-profile clients include Steve Hofmeyr, who later reported him to the Law Society. The JPC reported Viljoen and Maringa to the Law Society for their involvement in the illegal land sales.

Nedbank threatened to attach Viljoen's Silverlake properties earlier this year as he owed the bank R17m.

