

Top city lawyer in hot water

To apply for bail in land fraud case

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A CONTROVERSIAL city attorney arrested for his alleged involvement in the fraudulent sale of prime Johannesburg municipal land is set to apply for bail in the Pretoria Magistrate's Court today.

Peet 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 last Thursday night on charges of racketeering and fraud.

He is being held at Pretoria Central police cells. National Prosecuting Authority spokesman Mthunzi Mhaga confirmed that Viljoen and another attorney, Edwin Maringa, were arrested with three other 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) responsible for the transfer of council land. Madisa is named as an assistant property portfolio manager relating to schools on the municipal website.

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 they would intimidate witnesses.

Viljoen is no stranger to controversy. He has been under investigation by the Law Society of the Northern Provinces for charges of misconduct and was embroiled in a spat with former rugby player James Dalton. Viljoen also represented former Springbok Joost van der Westhuizen in his videotape scandal.

Other high-profile clients included Steve Hofmeyr, who later reported him to the Law Society.

The JPC reported Maringa and Viljoen to the Law Society for their alleged involvement in the illegal land sales.

Nedbank threatened to attach Viljoen's Silverlake properties earlier this year as he owed the bank R17 million.

When Independent Newspapers exposed the illegal land transfers in May, several people came forward claiming they had evidence of similar questionable deals or transactions.

Many alleged that Viljoen was involved in acts of intimidation and fraud. A Pretoria-based broker laid charges of theft against Viljoen for allegedly stealing R1.5m 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 threatened his clients with violence, and laid a charge of intimidation against the attorney.

Viljoen confirmed that 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.

