

Cortland landlord sues city in federal c

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Cortland landlord Gerald Ruggiero has filed a \$12 million civil rights lawsuit in federal court against the city of Cortland, Cortland County, and 17 public officials, claiming they subjected him to unfair discrimination and retaliation since 2011.

Ruggiero's suit, filed recently in U.S. District Court's Northern District of New York in Syracuse, alleges a series of illegal and retaliatory acts, unfair actions, policies, practices and procedures for discriminatory reasons have violated his constitutional rights since he started investing in rental properties in the early 1990s. He seeks a jury trial.

"I'm not filing this \$12 million

lawsuit to annoy people, I'm filing it because I know I'm right," Ruggiero said Friday.

Ruggiero claims in his suit the discrimination started in 2011 when Brian Tobin, then an alderman and later as mayor, showed preferential treatment toward developer Chris Calabro in getting zoning ordinances and selectively enforced city zoning laws that favored landlords who have connections with city government.

Ruggiero tried to discuss the zoning ordinances at a November 2013 meeting of the zoning board of appeals, but was removed from the agenda, he claims, by Corporation Counsel Richard Van Donsel.

Ruggiero also claims that Van Donsel, Zoning Officer Robert Rhea, Finance and Administra-

Who's named in the lawsuit

The suit lists both the city of Cortland and Cortland County as defendants, as well as 17 individuals:

- Mayor Brian Tobin.
- Corporation Counsel Richard Van Donsel.
- Former Tax Assessor David Briggs.
- Zoning Officer Robert Rhea.
- Director of Administration and Finance Mack Cook.
- Director of Code Enforcement William Knickerbocker.

tion Director Mack Cook and Zoning Board of Appeals Chairwoman Mary Kay Hickey conspired to have Ruggiero removed from other Zoning Board of Appeals meetings in December 2014 and January 2015 as

- Fire Chief Charles Glover.
- Zoning Board of Appeals Chairwoman Mary Kay Hickey.
- Former Cortland County District Attorney Mark Suben.
- Police Chief F. Michael Catalano.
- Deputy Police Chief Paul Sandy.
- Aldermen Ken Dye, Thomas Michaelles, Kathryn Silliman, John Bennett Jr.
- Police officers Brian Myers and Kenneth Bush.

Ruggiero attempted to appeal a decision to grant site approval for work on a property Calabro owned.

Ruggiero was arrested in July 2015 on second-degree harassment charges regarding a con-

frontation with Rhea, although then-District Attorney Mark Suben dropped the case. Ruggiero's suit claims the arrest was in retaliation for publicizing corruption.

Police also searched a property owned by Ruggiero without a warrant regarding a noise complaint in 2011 that resulted in the tenant getting arrested after telling the officer who her landlord was.

Ruggiero also claims there are recordings of various city officials admitting that the city's zoning laws are not enforced equally and emails of officials trying to get him off the agenda of city meetings.

"We've been served with a lawsuit," Tobin said Saturday. "We are aware of it and we will respond in a timely matter. As

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Committee to create ne recommend

The Cortland County Legislature committee ordered to guide the development of a new county jail project — and which recommended postponing the project — will meet Tuesday to decide how to continue.

The Public Safety Facility Needs and Assessment Committee's recommendation to postpone the county's jail project was defeated Thursday by



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