

Ex-township manager sentenced for theft

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By LAURIE MASON
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Calling his crime a "major violation of public trust," a Bucks County judge in Doylestown

Wednesday sentenced former Northampton township manager D.

Bruce Townsend to one to two years in the county prison and ordered him to repay the township more than \$157,000.

"When something like this happens, people question the integrity of all public officials," Judge Kenneth Biehn told Townsend.

"This violation of trust reflects negatively on all those who serve honorably, especially at the local level."

Townsend, 55, must also serve five years of probation when he gets out of jail and complete 300 hours of community service. Biehn granted Townsend immediate work release and said he can apply for house arrest after six months.



Townsend

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"It's stunning to see that yet another township manager is being taken away in handcuffs," said First Assistant District Attorney David Zellis, referring to the recent incarceration of Bristol township manager Suzanne Newsome.

"Mr. Townsend used this money to make himself look like a big shot. He thought he was entitled to go to town with taxpayers' money," Zellis said.

Townsend, who had been Northampton's manager for more than 25 years, pleaded guilty last month to charges of theft, receiving stolen property, unlawful use of a computer and misappropriation of government property.

The theft came to light after someone notified the District Attorney's Office of alleged misappropriation of township funds in October. Investigators said that from at least December 1999 to December 2006, Townsend used township credit cards to pay for local hotel rooms and restaurant meals, airfare, vacation rentals, video and computer equipment and weekly visits to Sam's Club.

Townsend also admitted that he helped himself to petty cash and fraudulently cashed in more than \$4,000 worth of sick time and vacation days.

Zellis said he did not know why Townsend rented so many motel rooms in Bucks and New Jersey. At least 20 stays were charged to township credit cards.

"All I can say is that he wasn't conducting township business in them," he said.

Looking at the floor and taking long, breathy sighs between words, Townsend blamed the thefts on a combination of psychological issues.

He said he suffers from low self-esteem, was unhappy with his \$107,000 a year job and harbored a long-simmering grudge against the Northampton supervisors because they refused to listen to his ideas.

"Part of the actions I took was that I was striking back

at the cause of my unhappiness," Townsend said.

He apologized to the judge and members of the Northampton Board of Supervisors who were in the courtroom.

"I am deeply, deeply sorry for what I put the township through," Townsend said. "It is with the deepest sense of remorse and regret that I acknowledge that I stained the township."

Prosecutors said that while Townsend cooperated with the detectives and admitted taking money, he did not tell investigators how much he took. As a result, the township had to spend more than \$45,000 on attorneys and forensic accountants to trace all the stolen cash.

That money was added to Townsend's restitution. He was also forced to forfeit his pension and investment package, which his attorney estimated to be between \$400,000 and \$500,000.

Townsend came to court Wednesday with a check for \$100,000 to put toward the restitution. He told the judge that he had sold his home and taken out a loan to get the money.

Peter Palestina, chairman of the Northampton supervisors, spoke on behalf of the township. He accused Townsend of lying to the board about the amount of money he stole, then engaging in behind-the-scenes "maneuvering" to salvage his pension.

"After stealing more than \$100,000 from the taxpayers of Northampton Township, Mr. Townsend, again, thinking only of Mr. Townsend, wanted more from the taxpayers," Palestina said.

The chairman pointed out that Townsend was well paid, had great benefits and had the use of a township car, gas and car insurance during his employ. He urged the judge to look past Townsend's pleas that emotional problems caused him to steal.

"Let there be no doubt that it was greed, not need, which was [his] prime motivation," Palestina said.

Townsend's wife, parents and other supporters watched the sentencing. His wife wept frequently during the testimony.

Townsend's attorney, William Goldman Jr., said his client intends to pay back every penny and is looking forward to putting the crime behind him. He said the sentence was fair.

"The judge did send a message with his sentence that public trust and confidence cannot be violated in this way, but he also recognized the potential good in Mr. Townsend and gave him a sentence that will allow him to realize that potential," the attorney said.

People on work release may leave the jail to go to their jobs but must stay in the prison the rest of the time. Townsend told the judge he is unemployed but looking for work.

During Townsend's sentencing hearing, both the prosecutor and defense attorney made reference to Newsome's one- to three-year state prison sentence for stealing from Bristol Township. In that case, a jury convicted Newsome of stealing \$14,000 and lying to a grand jury about it.

Biehn said it was unfair to compare the cases, and that he decided Townsend's sentence solely on the facts.

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