

APRIL 24, 2017

Brooklyn engineer claims Buildings Dept. tried to 'ruin' his life

By Andrew Keshner



The agency and its commissioner, Rick Chandler, "were determined to permanently ruin (Schnall's) life and his business," Schnall claimed in his Brooklyn federal lawsuit filed Friday.

A Brooklyn engineer says he's the one getting screwed now — all because he was quoted in an article saying the city's Buildings Department is "screwed up."

Scott Schnall, an expediter who helps push building applications through the permit process, argues he's been blackballed by the Buildings Department since his comments in a December 2014 news story.

The agency and its commissioner, Rick Chandler, "were determined to permanently ruin (Schnall's) life and his business," Schnall claimed in his Brooklyn federal lawsuit filed Friday.

In his suit, Schnall said he's gotten thousands of approvals for his clients over his 27-year career, and was never accused of breaking any rules or regulations.

But then he talked to the New York Times for its story about people like Schnall, who help shepherd applications through all the paperwork to get the needed green lights for their projects.

Schnall said the department brought a range of claims against him for negligent conduct and knowingly making a false statement.

An administrative law judge dismissed many of the claims. The judge recommended temporarily revoking Schnall's filing privileges, and allowing for reinstatement after a year.

Schnall said Chandler, the commissioner, took it a step farther and permanently took away Schnall's ability to file any documents with the department.

Schnall argued the February 2016 "Draconian Determination" destroyed his "business and ability to earn a living for his family because all of his business is derived from New York City - where Plaintiff has successfully worked his entire life."

To keep putting the screws to Schnall, he alleged the department wrongly issued almost 300 stop work orders to Schnall's clients — done without a single inspection.

Last month, Schnall and several of his clients sued in Brooklyn state court to fight the stop work orders. They won a temporary halt on the orders, which let the projects resume.

The department defended its actions in a statement to the Daily News — saying it revoked Schnall's filing privilege "after a pattern of false statements to the Department, affecting multiple projects across New York City. Mr. Schnall regularly used his professional filing privileges to try to circumvent the Zoning Resolution and Construction Codes."

The department said it had issued similar large scale stop work orders elsewhere and fired back that

Schnall "abused the Department's programs for limited supervision, which rely on the honesty and integrity of engineers and other registered design professionals."

Schnall's attorney, Brett Theis, said "this was completely motivated by retaliation and Scott really has not done anything wrong here."

Theis noted one part of the suit was an effort to target a part of city code allowing the commissioner to refuse any application from a person found to have "knowingly or negligently made a false statement."

The code's wording was far too broad and gave commissioners too much power to punish Schnall, or any design professional, he said.

