

# Alleged fraudster to plead guilty in huge real-estate scam

BY KEITH FRASER, THE PROVINCE    APRIL 28, 2009

A man accused in what's been described as the biggest legal fraud in Canadian history is expected to plead guilty to the criminal charges laid against him.

Former lawyer Martin Keith Wirick, who was charged with fraud, theft and forgery in connection with a \$30-million real estate scam, is expected to enter a formal guilty plea June 5, a Vancouver judge was told Tuesday.

Wirick, who resigned as a lawyer and was later disbarred, is also expected to be sentenced on that day, lawyers for the Crown and defence told B.C. Supreme Court Associate Chief Justice Patrick Dohm.

During a brief appearance in court, Crown counsel Kevin Gillett told the judge that he and defence lawyer Richard Peck need a month to finalize an agreed statement of facts.

Outside court, Gillett said he will be sending letters to about 70 people who bought homes in the scam.

"The Crown has an obligation to give victims an opportunity to express the impact the crimes have had on them."

Gillett said he would be seeking a jail term against Wirick but declined to be more specific.

Wirick was the solicitor for Vancouver builder Tarsem Gill, once considered a pillar of the Indo-Canadian community.

Beginning in 1999, Wirick began misdirecting money from Gill-related real-estate transactions. Instead of paying off mortgages and liens on properties that unsuspecting people thought they were buying, Wirick funnelled the money to Gill or his numbered companies.

The upshot was that the mortgages were still left on the homes.

In January 2006 the Law Society of B.C. approved \$32.5 million in payments to cover the fraud involving Wirick.

In a letter to the law society, Wirick said he was paid legal fees for the conveyancing work done but did not take any other moneys and had no idea where the money had gone. After the scandal broke in 2002, Wirick declared bankruptcy and was reduced to working as a baker in a gourmet petfood factory, earning \$12 an hour.

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