

Alleged mafia boss had close ties to Toronto-area real estate developers, wire taps reveal

Police suspect real estate was used to launder crime money, while Angelo Figliomeni's lawyers say wiretapped conversations have been misrepresented.

Toronto Star, Nov. 22, 2024

Alleged mafia leader Angelo Figliomeni's conversations with developers were among thousands of calls wiretapped by police as they probed what investigators alleged was a powerful and dangerous Canadian faction of Italy's 'Ndrangheta mafia.

Toronto Star illustration using

By Brian Fitzpatrick and Jared Ferrie, OCCRP, [Robert Cribb](#) Staff Reporter

There was an important real estate deal simmering. But it wasn't going as planned.

Alleged mob boss [Angelo Figliomeni](#) and a Toronto-area developer were wrestling with how to handle investors who appeared to be backing out of a \$30-million development deal, according to a police summary of the wiretapped July 2019 phone conversation.

They appeared to have a plan on how to handle the situation.

According to investigators' synopsis of the call, the developer told Figliomeni, "You know we have a way we can f*** them."

"I'll wait even until we get the \$2 million ... Then I'll say f*** you."

Figliomeni made no objection, saying: "This is for me and you to know right?"

Figliomeni's strategizing with the developer was among thousands of calls wiretapped by police as they probed what investigators alleged was a powerful and dangerous Canadian faction of Italy's ['Ndrangheta mafia](#), involved in illegal gambling and loan sharking in and around Toronto.

Figliomeni did not respond to requests for comment sent via his lawyers.

Reporters traced phone numbers to GTA developers

When police announced the arrests of Figliomeni and his associates in 2019, they alleged the group had laundered more than \$70 million Canadian through casinos "in only a few short years."

The charges against Figliomeni and eight associates were stayed. Legal documents that reporters obtained from the case show that police also suspected the group was laundering money through [real estate](#) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

The July 2019 call, made just two weeks before Figliomeni was arrested, was marked in police records as involving the "proceeds of crime." However, the person he was speaking to was not identified. Two additional conversations between Figliomeni and other unnamed real estate developers also appeared in the police files.

But the Star/OCCRP identified the developers caught in the wiretaps through the phone numbers listed in police files. They include a homebuilder with extensive projects across the Greater Toronto Area and another heavily involved in local land, residential, and commercial development.

While reporting on Figliomeni's dealings, reporters also learned that he intervened in a business dispute between one of his developer friends and a Canadian plastics industry pioneer. All the while, he was also amassing an impressive property portfolio of his own.

Alleged mafia leader has stockpiled GTA properties

Property records show that Figliomeni — whose day job is selling paninis and delivering baked goods through businesses he owns in Vaughan, according to police — is listed as the owner of eight houses across the Greater Toronto Area. Companies he directed have owned at least another seven properties, though some were sold after he came under police scrutiny.

Lawyers for Figliomeni did not respond to multiple requests for comment. In court files, lawyers for Figliomeni argued that police had misrepresented innocuous conversations caught on wiretaps to suit their own ends.

The criminal case against Figliomeni and his associates, known as Project Sindacato, collapsed in early 2021 after defence lawyers argued that police had inappropriately listened to phone calls between the accused and their lawyers — an argument that persuaded the Crown attorney to [drop the case](#).

None of the developers who spoke to Figliomeni on wiretap was charged with a crime.

Figliomeni continued to stockpile properties even after the charges were stayed. In November 2021, just 10 months after the Sindacato case collapsed, Figliomeni bought a \$2.2-million home in Kleinburg. No mortgage is currently listed against it, property records show. The following year, he bought a \$1.3-million home in Vaughan.

Figliomeni has at least four mortgages on houses in his name from two major Canadian banks, OCCRP and the Star reported [earlier this week](#).

All four mortgages were maintained even after the allegations against Figliomeni were made public following his arrest.

Developer's office searched by police

Figliomeni moved to Canada in the early 2000s from Calabria, in Italy's far south, where the 'Ndrangheta grew from a kidnapping gang into a major global criminal organization involved in drug trafficking, extortion and murder.

He had been convicted on weapons charges at home, and still faces charges in Italy, where court documents show he was wanted for "mafia association." In the GTA, police have alleged that he and his associates have engaged in illegal gambling, loan sharking and instigating gang violence.

OCCRP and the Star reported in April that a York Regional Police investigation alleged the group was using insiders at major Canadian banks to launder money, although charges were never proven in court.

The developer Figliomeni was strategizing with on the July 2019 call was identified in police files only as "Danny LNU." Reporters traced his phone number to Danny Di Meo, owner of Vaughan-based Caliber Homes, which describes its housing projects as places where "luxury meets convenience."

At one point in the call summarized by police, Figliomeni says that would-be buyers want to purchase land in Brampton, but may only buy a second plot in Richmond Hill at a later date. Referring to an unknown third party, the police synopsis quotes "Danny LNU" as telling Figliomeni: "You gotta make sure he buys Richmond Hill too ... that was the deal, both deals \$30 million, it was both."

In an email, John Chapman, a lawyer representing Di Meo, said it's "not possible to determine the accuracy" of the police's synopsis of the conversation, but said it relates to "an ordinary course conversation on a real estate transaction."

A group of investors had paid a deposit to purchase some real estate but had breached the agreement, Chapman said. Di Meo knew Figliomeni was an acquaintance of one of the investors, and "the discussion related to the vendor exercising its legal right to forfeit that deposit."

It's unclear exactly which developments the pair are discussing or who the investors are.

According to the police synopsis, Danny LNU mentioned a company referred to by police as "Cal-Queen." Di Meo is the director of Cal-Queen West Developments Inc., and the firm has sought zoning applications in Brampton.

The court files obtained by reporters show that Caliber Homes' office was searched by police during the Sindacato investigation, although neither he nor any employees were charged.

"In July 2019, the Caliber Homes' corporate office was one of dozens of business locations in the (Greater Toronto Area) that was searched as part of a broad, inter-agency investigation," Di Meo said in a statement provided by his lawyer. "Neither Caliber Homes nor any of our employees were targets of this investigation and Caliber Homes cooperated fully in ensuring authorities received all records that were sought."

"Caliber Homes remains committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and transparency in all our business dealings. We have

rigorous compliance measures in place to ensure that all our operations adhere to ethical business practices.”

A source close to the case said Di Meo was questioned on why a numbered company directed by Figliomeni and one of his co-accused, Vito Sili, allegedly sent \$460,000 to Cal-Queen West Developments Inc. in October 2016. Separately, a numbered company owned by Figliomeni allegedly paid \$230,000 to Di Meo’s Cal-Wood Developments Inc. in late 2013, and another \$100,000 in April 2014.

The Star/OCCRP confirmed the numbered companies referenced by the source each list Figliomeni as a director.

Property records show Figliomeni and two others arrested as part of Project Sindacato — Sili and a former Royal Bank of Canada employee, Nicola Martino — bought and sold homes developed by Cal-Wood, each making a profit on their initial investment.

Martino declined to comment through his lawyer. Sili did not respond to requests for comment. Di Meo did not respond to a question about the money police believed was sent to Cal-Queen West and Cal-Wood.

Real estate used for ‘both making money and hiding money’

Under Canada’s anti-money laundering legislation, real estate companies are obligated to run background checks on their clients and report any suspicious transactions, including when they had reason to suspect investments might be proceeds of illicit activity.

According to experts, weak enforcement of such legislation in the real estate sector is just one of several factors that has made Toronto’s property market a magnet for dirty money in recent years. The opportunity to hide behind anonymous ownership structures is another.

“If you’ve got \$1 million cash, you don’t have a lot of options. [Real estate is] a place where you can live, [and] you can easily hide ownership through beneficial owners,” said Stephen Schneider, a criminology professor at St. Mary’s University in Nova Scotia and author of *Iced: The Story of Organized Crime in Canada*.

“You can co-mingle the proceeds of crime as a rental revenue,” he added. “It’s multipurpose for both making money and hiding money.”

‘You’re never busy for your banker. You know that, eh?’ How Italy’s ‘Ndrangheta mafia allegedly infiltrated Canadian banks

The effects of mixing illegal money into the market are also pernicious for ordinary buyers. Money launderers often have incentives to overpay or overstate property values, which can raise costs for those already struggling to find affordable housing in cities like Toronto.

“A low-income couple or dual-income family is unable to rent in Toronto,” said Sasha Caldera of Publish What You Pay, which advocates for corporate transparency. “So it’s extremely dangerous for any economy to be hosting, or acting as a conduit, for this kind of money.”

Millions spent on houses since arrests

With the collapse of Project Sindacato, police had to return \$35 million worth of assets to Figliomeni and his associates, including Ferraris, Rolex watches, and other luxury items.

Investigators also released 27 homes that had been “restrained” during the investigation, meaning they could not be sold because police believed they were the proceeds of crime.

Since then, Figliomeni and some of his associates have continued to buy up high-priced assets. Over the past three years, Figliomeni has purchased two homes in York Region worth a combined \$3.5 million.

Figliomeni's close associate, Sili, has also spent millions on property in recent years.

In the Sindacato investigation, police alleged Sili played "a significant role in the handling of money for the Figliomeni organization." Sili was charged with committing an offence for a criminal group, laundering the proceeds of crime, and conspiracy to launder the proceeds of crime. The charges were stayed, and never tried in court.

In May 2024, Sili bought a house in Vaughan for \$2 million.

A few years earlier, in August 2021, Sili had co-purchased a \$400,000 condo unit in Etobicoke. His partner in the purchase was another developer: Steven Persichetti, director of Northhaven Developments Inc.

Persichetti told reporters Sili was his relative and they had previously worked together in the building trade. He said they bought the apartment as an investment, and it was now being rented out.

After a 'heated' meeting, a call with Figliomeni

Aside from buying homes, police wiretaps show Figliomeni intervening in a dispute between developers.

One October 2018 call was a conversation between Figliomeni and Joseph Sgro, a developer in Vaughan, according to a police summary. Sgro is a business partner of Vic De Zen, the Canadian plastics industry mogul behind the Zzen group of companies, which also works in real estate development.

Police summaries of calls show Figliomeni and Sgro discussing issues involving one particular development. Outlining to Figliomeni how he had met with a man named “Tony,” Sgro tells Figliomeni that “the meeting got heated.” Figliomeni signs off with: “Say hi to Vic.”

Sgro said in an emailed response that Figliomeni had called him about a dispute that Zzen Group and De Zen were having with Tony De Cicco, a Vaughan developer. They had neighbouring properties fronting Highway 27 in Vaughan, and they disagreed over the path of access to the thoroughfare, Sgro said.

Sgro said he did not know Figliomeni well. He said in an email that he had no idea what kind of relationship Figliomeni had with De Cicco, or why Figliomeni would intervene on De Cicco’s behalf.

“Mr. Figliomeni basically signalled a willingness for the adjacent owner (De Cicco) to resolve the issue with us,” Sgro wrote to reporters, saying Figliomeni “asked nothing from us and was paid nothing by us for his intervention.”

An alleged mafia leader has been accused of laundering crime money. Why are these banks still doing business with him?

“Mr. De Zen and I have no idea whether Mr. Figliomeni was paid anything for his intervention or precisely what his relationship is or was with the adjacent property owner,” Sgro added.

De Zen also said he had no connections with Figliomeni.

“I do not recall ever meeting Mr. Figliomeni, speaking to him on the phone, or being introduced to him,” De Zen said. “I do not have a personal or business relationship or familiarity with Mr. Figliomeni. Nor did I have such a relationship with him earlier.”

De Cicco did not respond to a request for comment sent to him via a lawyer.

'I'm going to give more money'

Two months prior to his intervention with Sgro, Figliomeni had been busy setting up deals with another property developer.

In August of 2018, police recorded a call between Figliomeni and a person described in the documents only as "UM" or "unidentified male." The phone number listed by police on calls between Figliomeni and UM matches that of Canvas Developments.

In response to an email asking about business the firm has conducted with Figliomeni, CEO Albert Vitullo responded, "This is not true." However, he did not answer questions about the nature of the call between Figliomeni and a person on the Canvas Developments phone line who discussed a real estate deal with him.

Canvas, a residential and commercial builder, boasts on its website of developments in Vaughan. Real estate websites show the company has worked on some of the same housing developments as Caliber.

On a call between Figliomeni and UM, the pair discuss what police described as the two men "closing a deal imminently." In a summary of the call, police say UM is indicating he "needs more money" from Figliomeni to seal the deal, "or he will have to push it back."

"I'm going to come and see you tomorrow, we deal with it," Figliomeni replies.

"I don't want to put pressure on you Angelo," UM responds.

Figliomeni's promise underscores the close attention he paid to his real estate deals.

"I'm going to give more money," says Figliomeni. "You tell me what you need. I'll see if I can come up with that."

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