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Developer admits to numerous liaisons

By PAUL McINERNEY

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Gifts for affection, Vellar tells

WOLLONGONG developer Frank Vellar has outed himself as a love rat of breathtaking proportions.

Yesterday, the prominent developer confessed to the ICAC public inquiry that not only had he cheated on his wife, but also Beth Morgan, the Wollongong City Council planner he showered with gifts and cash as she breached the council's planning rules to get approval for his multimillion-dollar projects.

He told the commission that he made five or six cash payments of between \$1000 and \$2000 to Ms Morgan because she had been left destitute and facing financial ruin in the wake of her divorce.

This was at a time when his proposal to build the \$100 million Quattro project was running into opposition with the council.

Other gifts of holidays and other benefits were to show his affection for her, he told the inquiry.

"Were you showing affection to other different women at the time?" counsel assisting the inquiry Noel Hemmings, QC, inquired.

"Yes," Mr Vellar said, "there was a woman."

"Just one?" Mr Hemmings shot back.

Mr Vellar agreed it could have been more when shown a list of names that the commission has suppressed.

Mr Hemmings also wanted to know about gifts given to Ms Morgan in 2005.

Mr Hemmings: "There were handbags?"

Mr Vellar: "Yes, three I recall."

Mr Hemmings: "That must have been expensive."

Mr Vellar: "No, they were copies."

He denied suggestions the gifts were to induce her to favourably assess the project at a time when the council and the NSW Department of Planning appeared opposed to it because height and floor space ratios would exceed planning guidelines and codes.

Mr Vellar said he was aware that by the end of 2003, council and the Department of Planning were firmly opposed to his Quattro proposal, which clearly exceeded height and floor space ratio codes.

He said he had sought help from general manager Rod Oxley and Lord Mayor Alex Darling, who both backed the project.

This was at a time when the council's planning department was in turmoil because of a series of resignations by senior staff, he was asked.

"Yes", Mr Vellar said.

Mr Hemmings: "I suggest you asked Rod Oxley to intervene because you were having trouble."

Mr Vellar: "I can't recall that but I had several discussions with Rod and Alex."

He also agreed that in April or May 2004 he had had a discussion with Mr Oxley about making Beth Morgan take responsibility for the assessment of Quattro.

At that time he said Mr Oxley had remained non-committal and conceded he did not think it proper or appropriate to discuss such a matter but he wanted someone "competent".

He started a sexual relationship with Ms Morgan in April or May 2004.

On August 19, 2005, the day after the development application for Quattro was approved, he took Ms Morgan to Perisher for a skiing holiday.

The day before telephone records furnished to the commission show there were 17 telephone calls between Mr Vellar, Ms Morgan and her planning boss at the council John Gilbert.

Mr Hemmings: "I put it that you were trying to influence Morgan and Gilbert, put the pressure on for approval."

Mr Vellar: "No."

He could not say why he had made so many calls.

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