



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on April 10, 2019

Man Claims NYC Officials Are Abetting Neighbor's Theft of His Property

A man's home is supposed to be his castle. But this is no longer the case in New York City, according to a Brooklyn man who says that Big Apple officials are aiding and abetting a next-door neighbor's attempt to steal his property.

It has been a long ordeal for John Hockenjos, 62, and his wife Irina, one whose twists and turns include a false arrest by the NYPD. The problems started in 2009, they say, when the couple Argo and Elen Paumere "purchased the home next to them with plans for an ambitious overhaul. According to the Hockenjos, red flags flew fast when they were approached to sign documents turning over a two-foot easement to their new neighbor," as *Bklyner* [reported](#) in 2013.



I spoke to the Hockenjos recently on the phone, and Irina told me their suspicions were borne out. After refusing to sign the documents, the Hockenjos say that Argo Paumere "went and created a fraudulent land survey that marked a chunk of the driveway as theirs," as *Bklyner* put it. The kicker?

The city's Department of Buildings (DOB) approved it, the Hockenjos report — and they've been battling the Paumeres and City Hall ever since.

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It's a battle that has cost the Hockenjos their jobs, their health and more than \$150,000 in legal fees, they say. But the real shock came in February 2012 when John, a former Metropolitan Transit Authority engineer, was falsely arrested by 61st Precinct police.

That dark day was February 5 of that year. The police arrived at the Hockenjos' property, in Brooklyn's Sheepshead Bay section, after being called by Paumere, [according](#) to NY's *Daily News*. The incident culminated in John's arrest and felony charges being brought after he was accused of driving at a "high rate of speed," causing an officer "to jump out of the way," the *News* reports. But the police had a problem.

No such thing ever happened.

John had video surveillance footage [to prove it](#), too, which showed "the Brooklyn man slowly pulling into his driveway and the cop not even flinching," to quote the *News* again.

In fact, so egregious was the police frame-up that Officer Diego Palacios, who was involved in the arrest, resigned from the NYPD and was indicted by a grand jury "on five kinds of illegal lying, one of them a felony," [reported](#) *The New York Times* in 2012.



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Palacios pled guilty in exchange for a sentence of just [four days in prison](#) — just one day longer than John spent in jail after his arrest — but ended up serving [only one night](#). Call it [Kim Foxx justice](#).

Oh, had Palacios' frame-up been successful, John would have faced *seven years* behind bars.

As for the land dispute, the Hockenjos told me they know of other NYC residents in their shoes, people who face what's essentially the theft of their property due to DOB corruption or incompetence. If this sounds fanciful, consider the comments of former Queens-based state senator Tony Avella, who was a staunch critic of the DOB.

"It's something that's a bottom line issue with the DOB where an applicant just presents an application and they never really check it to see if the size of the property is correct, or whether they own the property or not," he [told Sheepshead Bites](#) (now part of *Bklyner*) in 2013."

"The builder says they own part of the property that's actually the neighbor's, and the DOB approves it," he continued. "It's a very serious issue. Anyone can submit a false application, fraudulent documents and fraudulent land surveys, and no one checks it."

And once this happens — well, go fight City Hall. As *Bklyner* also tells us, "According to both Avella and the Hockenjos, the DOB's *modus operandi* when they receive complaints about fraudulent documents is to wash its hands of the problem and declare it a property dispute to be handled in civil court."

"That comes with its own set of problems," *Bklyner* further informs. "The Hockenjos have gone through lawyer after lawyer, some of which [sic] they say took their money and never did any work. Others have refused to take the case because it appears to exist in a sort of legal no-man's-land."

"They're saying I'm not going to take this case because it's not a real estate case, it's not a property dispute case, it's a criminal case," Irina told *Bklyner* (this echoes what she related to me). "And we go to criminal attorneys and they tell us we need to go to prosecutors. And the prosecutors say it's a civil case."

The bottom line is that the Hockenjos have spent a good part of the last decade in court, all due to a neighbor who, they say, is quite a malevolent character. In fact, Irina told me that shortly after the Paumeres moved in, Argo Paumere said bluntly, "I'm going to take your property from you." After being informed that it wasn't for sale, he made known that this didn't matter, Irina states.

And aside from the false arrest, the Hockenjos say that the Paumeres have continually made false charges against them, resulting in actions by city inspectors that the couple has had to fight. The stress has been overwhelming, they state.

The Hockenjos also believe that more than just garden-variety bureaucratic incompetence is at work: They suspect that Argo Paumere has connections with city officials. The false arrest certainly lends this theory credence, of course. Whatever the case, it's a very strange story — and one many Americans wouldn't expect to hear in these United States.

It's a continuing story, too, as the Hockenjos fight on. Hopefully, they'll get the help they deserve, somewhere, and justice will finally be done.

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