

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 24, 2015 #042-15****NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:**William H. Boyer, Pasadena Public Information Officer, City Manager's Office, (626) 744-4755, [wboyer@cityofpasadena.net](mailto:wboyer@cityofpasadena.net)**CITY FILES LAWSUIT SEEKING RECOVERY OF EMBEZZLED FUNDS**

PASADENA, Calif.—The City of Pasadena has filed a civil lawsuit seeking recovery of monies allegedly embezzled from its Underground Utilities Fund, Pasadena City Attorney Michele Beal Bagneris announced today.

The lawsuit was filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court against former City employee Danny Wooten; his wife, Laveta Wooten; Tyrone Collins, Collins Electric; the Southern California Evangelistic Jurisdiction Center; New Covenant Christian Fellowship Center and Melody Jenkins.

A City audit completed in November 2014 documented as many as 296 potentially fraudulent invoices had been submitted to the City for check payments in excess of \$6.4 million. The money came from the Underground Utilities Fund that pays for moving overhead power and communications lines underground. Revenues to the fund come from the Underground Surtax paid by electric customers. The audit is posted on the City's website at [www.cityofpasadena.net/invoiceinvestigation](http://www.cityofpasadena.net/invoiceinvestigation).

"The City Council is determined to seek full recovery of the funds lost and to restore the public's trust that the City is acting in a fully responsible manner," Mayor Terry Tornek said.

The civil lawsuit alleges that the defendants conspired to embezzle the Underground Utilities Fund monies from the City and that they participated in a scheme to submit false claims for payment of invoices.

"The taxpayers are entitled to expect that the City will use all available legal remedies to bring wrongdoers to justice, and to seek recovery of the embezzled funds," City Attorney Bagneris said. Ms. Bagneris is named as a plaintiff in the lawsuit in addition to the City, in her capacity as the City's prosecuting authority under the California False Claims Act.

A City Council Ad Hoc Committee that is overseeing the City's efforts to recover the embezzled funds is also guiding the City in the civil lawsuit. The committee is chaired by Councilmember Steve Madison and includes Councilmembers Victor Gordo, John Kennedy, and Margaret McAustin.

Wooten, Collins and Jenkins are being criminally prosecuted by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office for their alleged roles in the embezzlement.

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