

Village Plaza tenants are without water for 8 hours because the property owner didn't pay his bill. Left high and dry.(B SECTION)

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VENICE -- The city shut off water to a small commercial plaza for eight hours Tuesday because the property owner didn't pay his bill.

The Village Plaza on Tampa Avenue - home to Norma Jean's Bar & Grill, several apartments and businesses - lost water service at about 8 a.m. The city turned it back on shortly before 4 p.m. after the property's co-owner, Michael Vellucci, agreed to pay the \$647.41 bill today.

City officials said Vellucci, who also has been cited for building code violations at the plaza, was out of town Tuesday. They gave him until 9 a.m. today to come in and pay the bill.

Vellucci could not be reached for comment.

The water service disruption forced Norma Jean's, a popular island destination, to close shop for the day. A sign on the front door stated: "Closed. Water allowed to be turned off. Sorry for the inconvenience."

Another business owner refused to allow the water shutoff to silence his clippers and razors.

James Curry, who runs the Venice Barber Shop, said, "I'm trying to earn a living. I've got bills to pay."

The service interruption is the latest problem between Vellucci and the city.

Earlier, the city notified Vellucci of several building code violations, according to city Building Official Hans Behrens.

In a March 7 letter to Vellucci, Behrens deemed the building unsafe. He cited the following infractions: balcony guardrails removed without a permit; an air conditioning unit moved from the ground to the roof without a permit; exposed wires on the building's exterior; a non-secured electrical conduit; and the removal of stop-work orders.

"They were removed pretty quickly," Behrens said about the posted signs.

Vellucci, the co-owner of Villa Ucci Properties Inc., which purchased Village Plaza in August, hasn't received a permit for the work yet, Behrens said.

City officials said if Vellucci does not address the building code violations raised in three stop-work orders, the city could order the building vacated until the work is completed.

According to Behrens' letter, Vellucci has until the end of next week for a licensed building contractor to obtain necessary permits and complete the work.

If he doesn't comply, he will need to appear before the city Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals, which will determine guilt or innocence, Behrens said.

In January, Vellucci had a run-in with Venice police after a fracas in the plaza's parking lot.

According to a Venice Police report, Vellucci had blocked off the driveway to the plaza Jan. 15 while he worked on the building - work for which the city has cited him.

Kent Lackey, 32, drove behind and around the plaza to get to the front entrance of Norma Jean's, at which point Vellucci began to yell at him.

Lackey told officers he had turned his car around and was headed out the rear driveway when Vellucci

reached through the car window and punched him in the face several times.

Police charged Vellucci with battery and resisting arrest after he pulled away from an officer who tried to handcuff him. He was released from the Sarasota County jail on \$1,500 bail. A pretrial hearing in the case is set for next month.

Staff writer Rodney Crouther contributed to this report.

CAPTION(S):

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The disruption forced Norma Jean's Bar & Grill to close for the day.

Elory Widrick waits to have his hair cut by James Curry, owner of Venice Barber Shop, Tuesday afternoon. Curry refused to allow the water shut-off to silence his clippers.