

Sandy Annabi: I'm in 'complete shock'

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A month after her conviction on public corruption charges, former [Yonkers](#) City Councilwoman Sandy [Annabi](#) is still stunned by the jury's verdict, she said in an exclusive interview with Newsday Westchester.

"It's a complete shock because I am not guilty," she said. "Not guilty of any counts."

Annabi, 41, a [Democrat](#), was convicted by a federal jury in Manhattan on March 29 of conspiring with the head of the [Republican Party](#) in Yonkers, Zehy Jereis, 40, to sell her council

vote on development projects in the city, including the controversial \$600 million [Ridge Hill](#) project -- a plan that ignited a fierce debate in Yonkers with Annabi lining up against it until June 2006. That's when she switched sides at the behest of Jereis, who was cashing in on nearly \$200,000 in bribes he paid Annabi, federal prosecutors contend.

During an hourlong interview recently in her parents' Yonkers home, Annabi wore a black pantsuit and spoke in a calm, clear voice, sitting with her legs neatly crossed and her hands folded in her lap. She maintained her innocence, despite the jury's verdict that has her facing up to 15 years in prison. Her sentencing is set for Sept. 20.

"People who know me cannot believe this," she said of the verdict.

Annabi declined to discuss the details of her case, noting that she intends to ask U.S. District Judge [Colleen McMahon](#) to set aside the verdict.

"I've always been outspoken," she said. "Not to be able to tell my side, my feelings, my thoughts is very difficult."

Annabi, who has taken a leave of absence from her job as a facility manager at a Yonkers dialysis center, sat in her parents' nearly all-white living room flecked with mementos from her time as a



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rising star in Westchester politics. A framed photograph of a smiling Annabi with former President [Bill Clinton](#) was perched next to another picture of her with the president and third with his wife, [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#), formerly [New York's](#) junior senator and now U.S. secretary of state. There's also a black-and-white photo of Annabi being greeted by [Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein](#), the King of [Jordan](#). Her parents are from Jordan.

Annabi was first elected to the city council in 2002, then re-elected twice, rising to the position of Democratic majority leader. She continued to set her sights higher -- even after it became public knowledge in 2007 that she was being investigated by the [FBI](#) and federal prosecutors in this case.

In 2009, with her final council term ending, she ran unsuccessfully for a seat on the Westchester County [Board of Legislators](#).

Two months after the November 2009 election, she was indicted, along with Jereis and politically connected Westchester lawyer Anthony Mangone. She and Jereis were accused of betraying the public by selling her Ridge Hill project vote. The trio also were accused of extorting another developer to secure her support for a smaller project.

Mangone, 38, pleaded guilty in November 2010 and signed a cooperation agreement with federal prosecutors. He testified against Annabi and Jereis at their trial.

Jereis took the stand, too, saying his gifts and cash payments to Annabi were tokens of love, a bid to win her heart -- not control her vote. Federal prosecutors scoffed at those claims by Jereis, who is married. Assistant U.S. Attorney Perry Carbone told jurors that the only love shared by Annabi and Jereis -- who are distant cousins -- was a love of money.

Annabi, who has never been married and lives alone in her Yonkers home, declined to comment on Jereis' testimony or whether she regrets not taking the witness stand.

Her new lawyer, Manhattan attorney Edward V. Sapone said he has begun to work on a post-verdict motion which is due by June 18.

"We are confident that justice will be done," he said. "Ms. Annabi's investigation and prosecution have been a nightmare for her family."

As Annabi spoke, her parents took turns checking to make sure she was OK. They chatted in Arabic.

Earlier, Annabi's mother, May, waved off questions about her daughter's case as she stood in the front yard of the family's home.

"We're all going out of our minds with worrying," her mother said.

Annabi wouldn't discuss whether she fears going to prison, saying that she still has the support of city residents despite her conviction.

"They say to me, 'Please come back,'" she said.

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