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Game on for David Beckham: City can resume stadium negotiations

Jan 16, 2019, 6:16pm EST Updated: Jan 16, 2019, 6:42pm EST

City officials have determined that soccer star David Beckham and members of his new MLS group are now properly registered to lobby the city, which will allow negotiations for a soccer stadium and commercial development to continue.

Negotiations between city officials and the Beckham group had stalled after Miami attorney David J. Winker filed an ethics complaint in October alleging that Beckham, MasTec Chairman Jorge Mas, and other members of the MLS group violated the city's rules on lobbying. The ethics complaint said Beckham registered to lobby for Miami Beckham United LLC, but the stadium deal was actually with Miami Freedom Park LLC.



MIAMI FREEDOM PARK LLC

The ethics complaint also claimed that the ownership of these LLCs was not disclosed, as per city rules.

On Jan. 16, Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust Executive Director Jose J. Arrojo sent an email to City of Miami Attorney Victoria Mendez informing her that Beckham and his group had fulfilled their lobbyist registration requirements on behalf of both Miami Beckham United and Miami Freedom Park.

That decision clears the way for Beckham's MLS group to resume negotiations with city officials. They need to reach a final lease and development agreement to bring before the City Commission, where four out of five commissioners would have to approve it.

The two LLCs will have essentially the same ownership group, which will include Jorge Mas, Jose Mas, Beckham, SoftBank COO Marcelo Claure, and billionaire Masayoshi "Masa" Son.

Winker's complaint remains pending, as the question remains whether the individuals were properly registered to lobby at the time they first pitched city officials.

"I am glad that the ongoing investigation into my complaint forced the Mas/Beckham team to finally make the disclosures they should have, by law, made before they began lobbying City of Miami officials a year ago," Winker told the *Business Journal*. "It is important to note that the Commission on Ethics

only stated they have filed the paperwork necessary to move forward, their investigation of past behavior continues."

In November, City of Miami voters approved a referendum allowing the city to negotiate a no-bid deal with Miami Freedom Park LLC to lease and develop Melreese Country Club just east of Miami International Airport. The group would lease 73 acres of the 131-acre park and build a soccer stadium, along with hotels, technology offices, retail/restaurants/entertainment, and soccer fields. The remaining land at Melreese could become a free public park.

The developer pledged to fully fund the \$1 billion project, without requesting funding from the city.

The team, Inter Miami, told MLS it would play its first game in a temporary location in 2020, and start play in the new stadium in 2021.

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