

# Miami Herald

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## Businessman settles ethics complaint in connection with Miami Beach Convention Center

By Joey Flechas  
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Ethics investigators have found probable cause that a principal in one of the development teams that sought the deal to redo the Miami Beach Convention Center last year violated the city's lobbying law.

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust announced Wednesday that Atlanta businessman John "Jack" Portman settled an ethics charge against him by agreeing to pay the commission \$2,000 — half as a fine and the other half to cover investigation costs. Portman met with several Miami Beach commissioners from January 2013 to July 2013 to talk about the convention center project, but he didn't register as a lobbyist until July.

Lucia Dougherty, Portman's attorney, wrote in a July 28 letter to the Ethics Commission that Portman did not intentionally violate the city's lobbyist-registration law because, as the company's owner and principal, he didn't know he had to register.

"Having never previously been requested or instructed to register as a lobbyist, Mr. Portman assumed that registration was required only of paid lobbyists," she wrote, adding that Portman had hired several lobbyists who had registered properly.

Portman was part of a group of architects and developers, Portman CMC, who were in the hard-fought race for the convention center deal last summer. They were taken out of the picture last July when the group was edged out by South Beach ACE. That group saw its plan [scrapped earlier this year](#) when a newly-elected City Commission chose to go in another direction and scale back plans for the multimillion-dollar project.

The Ethics Commission started looking into Portman's meetings after Commissioner Jonah Wolfson asked for an investigation in the middle of the competition last summer. Wolfson also accused a member of another development team, Robert Wennett, of violating the Beach's lobbying rules. An [independent probe cleared Wennett in February](#).

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