



MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Miami tells officials not to talk to Beckham team until ethics complaint is resolved

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A day after Miami voters opened the door for the city to negotiate a deal to build a soccer stadium and commercial complex for David Beckham's Major League Soccer team, negotiations have been blocked because of an ethics complaint over improper lobbying by the team's owners.

In a Wednesday morning email with the subject line “URGENT. SOCCER,” City Attorney Victoria Mendez instructed city commissioners and employees not to take any meetings or phone calls from officials from the team, Inter Miami, until the county ethics board resolves a complaint filed last week.

In his complaint filed with the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust last week, attorney David Winker claimed that team owners failed to register as lobbyists before urging commissioners to place their plan on the November ballot.

Winker said principals of the team, including Beckham and brothers Jorge and Jose Mas, failed to register as lobbyists for the business entity that would negotiate a lease with the city, Miami Freedom Park LLC. Beckham and the Mas brothers are registered to lobby for a different company, Miami Beckham United, LLC. The Miami Freedom Park company was the entity named on the ballot question.

The Mas brothers and Beckham met with Mayor Francis Suarez, City Manager Emilio Gonzalez and city commissioners over several weeks during the summer leading up to two public meetings where commissioners weighed putting sending the plan to a referendum.



Rendering of proposed David Beckham soccer stadium and commercial complex at Melreese Golf Course

Mendez referenced the complaint in the email, which also cites an Oct. 23 letter from the ethics commission stating that Jose Mas, CEO of MasTec and part owner of Inter Miami, failed to complete an ethics course required by Miami-Dade County for anyone wishing to lobby elected officials. Mendez specifically tells city workers they cannot be lobbied by Jose Mas, but then she extends the prohibition to the whole soccer lobbying team because of Winker's complaint.

“Since last week an ethics complaint was filed against the whole Soccer lobbying team for unregistered lobbying and Mayor Suarez, Manager Gonzalez and the City Commission received a complaint by attorney David Winker for allegedly, knowingly, allowing unregistered lobbyists to lobby the city on the soccer stadium project on yesterday's ballot, please do not accept any meetings or calls from the soccer team until this is squared away with the Ethics Commission.”

Read the full text of Mendez's email below:

To print the document, click the "Original Document" link to open the original PDF. At this time it is not possible to print the document with annotations.

About 60 percent of voters endorsed the preliminary terms of a deal to lease 73 acres of Melreese golf course, Miami's only city-owned golf course, to Inter Miami's owners to build a 25,000-seat soccer stadium, 1 million square feet of

retail, office and commercial space, 750 hotel rooms and about 20 acres of soccer fields. Team owners would also finance an adjacent 58-acre public park that would remain under city control. Owners are calling the whole project Miami Freedom Park.

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The city needed voter approval to waive competitive bidding requirements to negotiate a full lease for Miami Freedom Park. At an election night celebration party Tuesday, Jorge Mas told reporters he planned to immediately start hammering out lease details.

“We’ll start that tomorrow,” he said.

On Wednesday, Winker told the Miami Herald he attended the results party to see how many people supported the plan. He believes fans are genuinely energized by the thought of an MLS team taking the field in a new stadium, but he believes the rushed process to hold a referendum was flawed because the city should have held a competitive bid.

“You cannot dismiss the enthusiasm. They really want to have a soccer stadium. I want to have a soccer stadium,” he said. “But let’s do it right.”

Jorge Mas did not respond to requests for comment.

Read Winker’s full complaint: