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# David Beckham, Mas Brothers Cleared of Improper Lobbying Claims

Miami attorney David Winker filed the ethics complaint over lobbying registration while the proposed professional soccer stadium site was changing.

By Lidia Dinkova | March 14, 2019

David Beckham and his soccer stadium partners have been cleared of accusations that they illegally lobbied Miami city officials for the project to replace the public Melreese golf course.

The Miami-Dade County Ethics Commission dismissed the complaint after finding no probable cause for wrongdoing by retired soccer star Beckham, brothers Jorge and Jose Mas, and Sprint executive chairman Marcelo Claure, who lobbied without properly registering with the city clerk.



**David Winker. Photo: J. Albert Diaz/ALM**

Miami attorney David Winker, who has two lawsuits pending against the city over the stadium plan, filed the ethics complaint last October, delaying negotiations between Miami Freedom Park LLC and the city to lease and redevelop the golf course east of Miami International Airport. City voters in a November referendum greenlighted negotiations for a 99-year lease.

The ethics determination Wednesday is good news for the development team with MasTec Inc. executive Jorge Mas touting the economic value of the project and saying in an emailed statement that it would generate 11,000 jobs and \$44 million a year in tax revenue.

He also accused Winker of filing the complaint.

“The Ethics Commission should sanction Mr. Winker for filing this baseless complaint that was fueled by a political agenda, and wasted government time and resources in a failed attempt to derail the will of residents,” Mas said.

Winker questioned whether lobbying registration for Miami Beckham United LLC, the company used when a stadium site in Miami’s Overtown neighborhood was in play, was sufficient, and whether a new registration was required for Miami Freedom Park, the new entity seeking the gold course lease.

An attorney for the project team said one filing was sufficient, but Winker disagreed.

The Ethics Commission sided with the Beckham team and called the two limited liability companies “inextricably connected.”

Any lobbying done before the City Commission voted last July to hold the referendum was done on behalf of Miami Beckham United, according to a Feb. 13 memo from the commission’s attorney, Martha Perez. After the referendum

passed, it's "reasonable to assume" principals should register to lobby for Miami Freedom Park — which Beckham and everyone else named in the complaint did.

An allegation the development team didn't fully disclose all information required to register as lobbyists also was dismissed based on the city's failure to enforce the requirement with others.

Winker claimed a partial victory, saying it was his ethics complaint that forced the project team to register and disclose ownership stakes.

"The complaint was dismissed because they finally did what they were supposed to do," he said. "It also brought out in the open the problems in the current lobbying registration system and how hardly anyone is complying with these laws."

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