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DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

CORRUPTION CHARGES Another case falls apart

Judge dismisses charges in Miami-Dade housing scandal

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Another of the Miami-Dade state attorney's corruption cases has fallen apart, this time with the dismissal of charges against Delant Construction and its president, who were both embroiled in the county's housing agency scandal.

Circuit Judge Dennis Murphy granted a defense motion to dismiss fraud and grand theft charges Thursday against the Medley company and Juan Delgado, who was accused of submitting fake invoices to rack up expenses and defraud taxpayers. Delgado is a former head of the Latin Builders Association and was previously a director of the Cuban American National Foundation.

He was one of several developers involved in the Hometown Station project, which received \$5 million in county funds to build a \$25 million South Miami office building for the Miami-Dade County Housing Authority.

The county canceled the project and auditors accused developers of

mispending \$3.2 million, including \$150,000 spent on a watermelon statue. Delgado and his company were charged in 2009.

Delgado was represented by Miami criminal defense attorney Mark Seiden, and Delant was defended by Gustavo Lage with Sanchez Medina Gonzalez Quesada Lage Crespo Gomez & Machado or Coral Gables. Both Delgado and his company were represented by Holland & Knight partner Rodolfo Sorondo Jr., a former 3rd District Court of Appeal judge.

In a statement Friday, Seiden said the names of Delgado and his construction firm have been cleared.

"Both Mr. Delgado and Delant Construction are exonerated of any wrongdoing and look forward to continuing their long and honorable history of quality construction in both public and private sectors," he said. "These charges were vindictive and never should have been brought against Mr. Delgado or Delant Construction in the first place."

The state attorney's office said Friday

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MARK SEIDEN
DEFENSE ATTORNEY

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HOUSING: Prosecutors confident on eve of Masvidal trial

that it would appeal Murphy's ruling.

Delgado was accused of creating seven or more false invoices worth \$185,000 for sham work. In a separate case, he was accused of striking secret deals with then-Miami City Commissioner Angel Gonzalez. The commissioner lost his post when he admitted using his position of power to help his daughter, Elizabeth, get on Delant's payroll.

Prosecutors said she didn't work a single day for the \$47,000 she received, and the former commissioner pleaded guilty to a second-degree misdemeanor and promised to never run again.

WATERMELONS AND GRAFT

The failed Hometown Station project

was one of many highlighted in a Miami Herald investigation of the county's housing agency, which revealed insider deals funneled taxpayer money to developers and away from the poor.

State investigations were launched, and the federal government temporarily took over the agency in 2007, citing "a pattern of financial irresponsibility and mismanagement" in the county's public housing programs.

Among the most memorable and outlandish charges lobbed at developers was an accusation against influential banker and developer Raul Masvidal. Prosecutors claimed he rerouted public money meant for Hometown Station project to buy the watermelon sculpture

for his home.

Masvidal faces felony charges of organized fraud and grand theft for allegedly stealing close to \$1 million, and his trial could be set at a hearing later this month.

When asked about Masvidal's prosecution, Miami-Dade state attorney's spokesman Ed Griffith said, "We are confident in our ability to prevail in that case."

His Miami defense lawyer, David Rothman, did not respond to calls for comment by deadline.

In the successful motion to dismiss, Delgado's attorneys argued the five-year statute of limitations for charges against their client had expired. They noted

Delgado was accused of submitting fraudulent invoices as late as September 2004, and he was arrested in November 2009.

The defense team also argued Delgado and his company were free to use funds as they pleased.

"Once Mr. Delgado received the money, it was his money. Once the money was earned, they could do whatever he wanted with it," Seiden said. "The county was an investor in this. They weren't the lender. Sometimes investments go well, sometimes they don't. Any investment has an element of risk."

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