



Soil Contamination Could Bend David Beckham's Miami Soccer Plan (1)

By Chris Marr | July 19, 2018

David Beckham's latest proposal to build a pro soccer stadium in Miami might hinge on the cost to clean up soil contamination from the city's long-shuttered trash incinerators.

The soccer superstar is partnering with Miami businessman Jorge Mas to pitch a \$1 billion plan for converting a city-owned golf course into a Major League Soccer stadium, public park, and mixed-use real estate development. But first, they will have to figure out whether the plan is worth the cost of remediating soil that is expected to contain pollution from heavy metals.

"Quietly, this is the potential dealbreaker of the project," Miami City Commissioner Ken Russell told Bloomberg Environment July 17.

Once the developers begin testing the soil, he said, "they'll know pretty quickly whether it's within their budget."

The proposed stadium site meets environmental requirements for its current use as a golf course, Russell said.

The ash has been covered by a permeable cap. But converting the site to a different use could mean digging up the ash and moving it to a lined

landfill. A similar cleanup on small water park adjacent to the golf course cost the city about \$9 million, he said.

Variable Cleanup Costs

The city and developers July 18 agreed to a tentative [term sheet](#) that requires Beckham's group to cover the full cost of the project, including environmental remediation. The project would require remediation—possibly including removal of contaminated soil—on about 130 acres of land.

The developers told the city they expect the remediation to cost between \$30 million and \$50 million, Russell said, but there are “so many variables” that it is hard to be confident in the estimates.

The development group didn't immediately respond to Bloomberg Environment's requests for comment July 18. The proposal is Beckham's latest plan to bring a Major League Soccer team to Miami, where the commission voted in 2014 in favor of efforts to work with Beckham on bringing a team.

The project faces other hurdles including public opposition from Miamians who feel burned by previous sports stadium deals. Miami Mayor Francis Suarez is advocating the project, but the commission is split over whether and how to move forward.

The city commission voted 3-2 on July 18 to send a ballot referendum to local voters in November that would authorize the city to skip its competitive bid process and negotiate directly with Beckham's group. One of the project's opponents sued just before the meeting, accusing the commission of flouting the city's own bid process and rushing the project without adequate public input.

Ash Contamination History, Lawsuit

If the city green-lights the project to move forward, it will become the latest chapter in Miami's story of incinerator ash contamination.

The site of the proposed stadium project now holds a golf course—the Miami International Links, also known as the Melreese Country Club—that was built in the 1960s using the city’s trash incinerator ash as fill dirt, Russell said. The incinerators were shut down in the 1960s and 1970s amid environmental concerns, lawsuits, and court orders.

The city used the ash as fill in many of its public parks, according to Russell and Louise Caro, a lawyer and partner at Napoli Shkolnik PLLC in Miami. Caro is representing Miami residents in a proposed [class action](#) against the city that claims incinerator ash contamination in the West Grove area has caused health problems including heart and respiratory disease, cancer, and miscarriages.

Incinerator ash is known to contain pollutants such as arsenic, lead, mercury, dioxins, and polychlorinated biphenyls, according to Caro’s lawsuit.

Having a high-profile athlete and celebrity such as Beckham involved should help ensure the remediation is done properly, unlike how the city has handled contamination at many of its other parks, Caro told Bloomberg Environment July 18.

“If they’re going to do anything, I’m glad it’s under the spotlight, because that’s where it should be,” she said.

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