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Developer Convictions Overturned

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A year after raising doubts that thousands of homebuyers were criminally gouged by General Development Corp, a federal appeals panel on Tuesday reversed the fraud convictions of four former company executives and dismissed their cases. The stunning decision – which erases guilty verdicts reached by a Miami federal jury in 1992 – means that the men who were out on bail pending appeal will not return to prison. Before the case went to trial, federal prosecutors contended General Development had committed one of Florida’s biggest real estate swindles by deliberately misleading customer about local market values. “You’re talking to the happiest man in America right now,” said Robert Ehrling, once the company president. “After six years, you can imagine how I feel – unbelievable.”

Joel Hirschhorn, who represented Ehrling, said (he) will find it difficult recovering the time and money it took to defend (himself). “It’s tragic the government wasted millions of dollars in taxpayer money,” Hirschhorn said. “Tragically, Mr. Ehrling will never get back the 22 months he served (in prison).”