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Pizza Luna told to move out of Clematis Street space owned by city

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Richard Graulich

The exterior of Pizza Luna on Clematis Street in downtown West Palm Beach. (Richard Graulich/The Palm Beach Post)

By [Emily Roach](#)

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WEST PALM BEACH —

Pizza Luna is getting sliced from its decade-long Clematis Street location because the city bought the building for Palm Beach Dramaworks and wants something more upscale.

West Palm Beach through its Community Redevelopment Agency bought the Cuillo Theater at 201 Clematis St. in October 2010 for \$2.85 million. It leased the theater to Palm Beach Dramaworks, but the restaurant space at 205 Clematis has been continuing on as it was.

That ended Dec. 31, when the restaurant's long-term lease under the old owner expired. Despite some discussions between Pizza Luna and the CRA last year that might have allowed the business to continue month-to-month, the city sent a clear message at the end of November.

"Right at the end of the year, right in the middle of the holiday season they hit us with a notice to vacate," said attorney Jeff Harrington, who represents Pizza Luna.

The purchase agreement from more than two years ago emphasizes that Theater Holdings, which sold the building to the city, would continue to hold the lease until the end of 2012 but could not extend it. Email correspondence between Harrington and Barry Lazarus, who manages real estate for the CRA, indicates that as recently as April the CRA was considering a month-to-month extension.

Harrington said that's what he understood to be the plan, so owner Tarhan Telli made no plans to move. It has become a legal issue, and Harrington appealed to the city commission this week. But the city won't accept rent money and wants Pizza Luna out.

Lazarus said Thursday that the city never had a lease with the business and legally would have to advertise notice before it could have a tenant there even on a month-to-month basis. In fact, the city intends to advertise for proposals at some point, Lazarus said.

Pizza, however, is not what the city has in mind. The theater spent millions to upgrade the landmark location and a more upscale eatery or business would seem to be in order.

Downtowns are "like an ecosystem," Downtown Development Authority Executive Director Raphael Clemente said. And the city decided back in the fall it wanted to go in a different direction with the restaurant.

"If you're going to pick and choose who your tenant is, you can do better than pizza," he said.

So why not let the pizza place stay there for a few transitional months, Harrington said. Telli would have time to relocate and the city would get a few more month's rent.

That makes no sense for the city, and Pizza Luna had plenty of time to prepare, city spokesman Elliott Cohen said. "What's there now is ultimately not what we feel would be the best for the space."