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In re:

Dana Hollister,

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SEP 28 2021

CLERK U.S. BANKRUPTCY COURT
Central District of California
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# UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES DIVISION

Case No.: 2:18-bk-12429-NB

Chapter: 11

Debtor

SUPPLEMENTAL MEMORANDUM DECISION RE: MOTION OF BOBS, LLC FOR RELIEF FROM THE AUTOMATIC STAY

<u>Hearing</u>:

Date: September 28, 2021

Time: 1:00 p.m. Place: Courtroom 1545

255 E. Temple Street Los Angeles, CA 90012 (or via Zoom.Gov)

This Memorandum Decision supplements this Court's oral rulings on the Motion of Bobs LLC ["Bobs"] For Relief From The Automatic Stay ("R/S Motion," dkt. 936) at the end of the trial on August 18 and 19, 2021, and at a post-trial hearing on September 9, 2021.<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to this Court's findings of fact and conclusions of law stated orally

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The term "trial" might be more properly applied to adversary proceedings, in contrast to an "evidentiary hearing" in contested matters. But in this Court's experience the courts and parties use the terms interchangeably.

As used in this Memorandum Decision, the "Code" refers to the Bankruptcy Code (11 U.S.C. 101 et seq.); "Section" or "§" refers to a section of the Code; "Rule" refers to the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure; and other terms have the meanings set forth in the Code and the Rules or in the parties' papers.

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27 28 on the record, (a) final rulings establish that Bobs is entitled to some relief, but (b) all rights are reserved for the parties to argue regarding the specific form of relief. See dkt. 1525, 1527, 1529, 1530 (parties' forms or orders, and objections thereto).

#### (1) Background: very limited relief is being granted to Bobs

To summarize this Court's findings and conclusions at the end of trial, Bobs is only entitled to "adequate" protection, not enhanced protection, of its security interest in the Paramour. The Paramour is already being marketed for sale, and the evidence at trial was that anyone who truly wishes to maximize the value of the Paramour would have to engage in a very similar marketing effort. Bobs is only entitled to minor adjustments to the marketing and sale process to provide it with adequate protection.

The basis for those conclusions can be summarized as follows. On the one hand, Bobs presented evidence that (a) the debts secured by senior liens are increasing (real estate taxes and the debt to Specialized); (b) if Bobs has any equity cushion, that cushion is being further threatened by an increase in those senior debts, and in the debts secured by Bobs' own lien(s); (c) the potential value of the Paramour has a very wide range; and (d) the parties opposing the R/S Motion did not establish that, more likely than not, the Paramour's value is so enormous that it provides Bobs with adequate protection despite the increase in secured debts, and without offsetting payments to Bobs or additional collateral. Therefore, some sort of relief is required to provide Bobs with adequate protection of its legitimate interests as the holder of a lien on the Paramour.

Papers related to the R/S Motion include the prior responses of other parties and a joinder therein (dkt. 948-952, 1005), Bobs' prior reply papers (dkt. 958, 959), Bobs' supplement (dkt. 1413), the supplemental response of Dean G. Rallis, Jr., Court Appointed Agent ("Agent") (dkt. 1415), the Agent's evidentiary objections (dkt. 1416), the supplemental joinder of The Bird Nest, LLC ("Bird") and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles and the California Institute of the Sisters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (collectively, "Church") (dkt. 1417), this Court's recent scheduling order (dkt. 1419), the participation request of Church (dkt. 1428) and the Order thereon (dkt. 1467), the participation request of Deanna Stats (dkt. 1429) and the Order thereon (dkt. 1465), Bobs' pretrial brief (dkt. 1476), Church/Bird's pretrial brief (dkt. 1479), the Agent's pretrial brief (dkt. 1482), the parties' joint pretrial stipulation (dkt. 1483), the Transcript of the second day of that trial/evidentiary hearing, on August 19, 2021 (dkt. 1503), Bobs' proposed order (dkt. 1525), the Church/Bird response to that proposed order (dkt. 1527), the Select Portfolio Servicing, Inc. ("Select") response (dkt. 1529), and the Agent's response (dkt. 1530).

On the other hand, Bobs is not entitled to immediate termination of the automatic stay to foreclose. That would only be useful to someone seeking to chill the bidding in this case and acquire the property through a cheap bid or a credit bid (after which they would turn around and engage in the same lengthy marketing process as is currently underway). Bid chilling is not entitled to adequate protection.

The evidence at trial was overwhelming that, for anyone who truly seeks to maximize the sale price of the Paramour, it would require substantial marketing time and finesse because of its unique characteristics as an "island" property, with historical features, that is most attractive to a very limited market of wealthy "custodian" buyers. Therefore, if the Paramour cannot be timely refinanced or some other alternative to a sale cannot be accomplished, Bobs is entitled to assurances that a sale will happen in roughly the same time frame as if the automatic stay had been modified on August 19, 2021 for Bobs to seek a receivership to sell the Paramour. This Court's oral tentative ruling was that such a time frame would last through the end of the first few months of 2022.

Meanwhile, this Court ruled that Bobs is entitled to some assurances that the existing marketing process will indeed be conducted in such a way that is likely to result in the highest and best offer, without holding out for an unrealistic long-shot offer. That might require compensation for the "Agent" (who is currently marketing the property) so that he does not have an incentive to hold out for an offer high enough to pay his own fees out of excess proceeds.

In sum, Bobs is entitled only to minor adjustments to the existing process of marketing the Paramour for sale. This Court now turns to the parties' proposed forms of order granting such adjustments.

## (2) Deadline for the Agent to sell the Paramour

The parties appear to have misconstrued the deadline contemplated by this Court. By way of background, the "Term Sheet" settlement that this Court has

payment then:

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27 28 approved (by Orders at dkt. 528, 557) provides that if Debtor misses a Term Sheet

The Agent shall have a period of 12 months thereafter [i.e., 12 months after approximately January 26, 2021, per the Agent, dkt. 1415, p.1:15-19] to close a sale of the Paramour. In the event that no sale of the Paramour. has closed by the expiration of this 12-month period, the Agent shall conduct an auction of the Paramour without reserve promptly upon expiration of this 12-month period. (The Judgment Creditors [Church and Bird] in their sole discretion may jointly agree to extend this 12-month period.) [Term Sheet (dkt. 547), p.5, at para. 7.f. (emphasis added).]

The problem for Bobs is that Church and Bird might agree to extend this deadline. They might do so even if there is only a long-shot prospect of a high enough sale price to pay them, because even a long-shot is better than the *certainty* of \$0.00 from accepting a sale price that is insufficient to pay them. (The Agent has the same incentive, as discussed later in connection with carve-outs.)

Therefore, at the hearing on August 19, 2021, this Court's oral ruling was that the principal form of adequate protection for Bobs would be a deadline, that only Bobs could extend, to sell the Paramour. This Court's tentative ruling was that this deadline would be at the end of the first few months of 2022. The following discussion further explains this Court's reasoning.

This Court started with the following goal:

[The Court:] My goal here is that the conditions [for adequate protection to Bobs1 are intended to assure that Bobs will be paid out of the sale of the Paramour in the same approximate time frame as if the automatic stay were terminated today [i.e., on August 19, 2021]. [Tr. 8/19/21 (dkt. 1503), p.63:8-11 (emphasis added).]

The testimony at trial (as summarized by this Court) was that:

a property like the Paramour would have to be exposed to the market for a substantial time, probably in the 12-month range. [Id., p.74:3-6 (emphasis added).1

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Therefore, if Bobs had been granted immediate relief from the automatic stay at the hearing on August 19, 2021, and if Bobs were to seek to maximize the sale price, it would not pursue a nonjudicial foreclosure sale. Instead, it would plan on an additional period for the property to be marketed and sold. As this Court stated:

> Illf Bobs is wearing its hat as a secured creditor that's interested in maximizing the sale price of the property, and not wearing the hat of attempting to undermine the bankruptcy process, as suggested by Mr. Steinberg, then it would not choose a foreclosure. It would choose a receivership, and the receiver would engage in a sale process over 12 months or so, just like the process that's playing out now.

I don't think that Congress intended by the concept of adequate protection, to protect a nefarious scheme to chill the bidding in bankruptcy, and then credit bid at foreclosure and snap up the property on the cheap. I think that what's being protected is the legitimate interest of maximizing the value the property will be sold at, so that Bobs' interest will ... have the maximum chance of being paid in full. [Id., p.77:1-16 (emphasis added).]

The emphasized language suggests that Bobs might need an additional 12 months or so after the August 19, 2021 hearing for the marketing and sale of the Paramour. True, the Agent already has been marketing the property, so Bobs legitimately could argue that an additional 12-month period after the August 19, 2021 hearing would be too long. But, for two reasons, Bobs likely would have to take longer than the Term Sheet deadline to arrange the highest and best sale of the Paramour.

First, if Bobs had been granted relief from the automatic stay on August 19, 2021 to seek a receiver to sell the property, that process itself likely would have involved litigation (over everything from the selection of the receiver to the receiver's choice of real estate broker, listing price, and marketing period) which would have taken time. Second, given Bobs' low valuation of the property, Bobs presumably would want a number of months for a receiver to re-market the property with an eye to accepting a lower offer – perhaps, for example, with a new (lower) listing price. See dkt. 1413, pp.6:4-8:15 (Bobs' arguments re valuation).

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Therefore, this Court's contemplation was that Bobs (if it had truly sought to maximize the sale price of the Paramour) would require something (i) longer than the existing deadline under the Term Sheet (approximately January 26, 2022) but (ii) sooner than 12 additional months from the hearing date (August 19, 2022). Balancing the foregoing considerations, this Court's oral tentative ruling, as noted above, was that the deadline for the Agent to sell the Paramour would be at the end of the first few months of 2022 (the "Bobs Deadline"). This Court stated this as condition number one of providing adequate protection to Bobs:

> [Number] [o]ne, a deadline. What I'm contemplating is that the first few months of 2022 would be the deadline for the [A]gent to sell the Paramour. Now, what's different about that in the existing deadline [under the Term Sheet], is that this one [the Bobs' Deadline] could not be extended by agreement of ... Church and Bird. Bobs would have to agree for that deadline [the Bobs Deadline] to be extended. But just like the terms under the existing term sheet, the Paramour would have to be sold to the highest and best offer, or else auctioned. [Tr. (8/19/21) (dkt. 1503), p.64:6-14.]

As shown by the emphasized language above, this Court was contemplating that only Bobs could extent the Bobs Deadline. But this Court's reference to "that" deadline (in the above block quote) apparently was misconstrued by the parties to mean that Bobs would have to agree to extend the Term Sheet deadline. That was not what this Court contemplated. To the contrary, Church and Bird remain free to extend the Term Sheet deadline.

#### (3) Potential modification of the Bobs Deadline

This Court contemplated that it would retain some discretion to extend the Bobs Deadline in exceptional circumstances. For example, if the Agent had found a prospective purchaser, but that purchaser were to need a short time to secure financing, then the Agent could be granted additional time.

This is consistent with this Court's approach of paralleling the relief that Bobs could have obtained had it been granted relief from the automatic stay at the hearing on August 19, 2021 to seek a receivership. A receiver likely would have been granted

additional time in such circumstances, so this Court should grant additional time in similarly exceptional circumstances.

## (4) Form of ordering paragraph implementing the Bobs Deadline

This Court's contemplated implementation of the Bobs Deadline is reflected in the following modified version of the first ordering paragraph of the Agent's proposed order (dkt. 1530, Ex.A, p.3:11-13):

IT IS ORDERED that, notwithstanding any extension by the parties to the Term Sheet approved by this Court (dkt. 528, 547, 557) of the deadline for the Agent to close a sale of the Paramour, the Agent shall have an additional deadline of April 30, 2022 in which to close a sale of the Paramour. That deadline may only be extended (a) by Bobs, in its sole discretion, or (b) by this Court based on exceptional circumstances. In the event that no sale of the Paramour has closed by the expiration of this additional deadline, the Agent shall conduct an auction of the Paramour without reserve promptly upon expiration of this additional deadline. Any sale of the Paramour, whether by auction or otherwise, shall be subject to approval of this Court.

# (5) No termination of automatic stay

Bobs' proposed form of order (dkt. 1525) contemplates termination of the automatic stay, after an (unspecified) deadline. But this Court was not persuaded, after trial and arguments, that Bobs is entitled to any *termination* of the stay. Rather, this Court determined that Bobs is entitled to *modification* of the stay to require additional adequate protection such as imposing the Bobs Deadline and requiring the Agent to *auction* the Paramour if the Agent does not close a sale of the Paramour by the Bobs Deadline.

## (6) Carve-outs

This Court's oral tentative ruling at the hearing on August 19, 2021 was that a second and third condition were required as part of any adequate protection for Bobs.

[The] [s]econd condition [involves] the agent's compensation. It seems to me that to protect Bobs, the compensation structure for the agent has to be changed. Right now, the agent has an incentive to hold out for a high enough bid to pay administrative claims, because he is the holder of an

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administrative claim, and there's a risk of administrative insolvency in this case.

... [S]upposing that that sale price would have to be something in the range of [\$]30 or \$35,000,000, for purposes of illustration, that creates an incentive for the agent to reject offers below that out of self-interest.

So it seems to me that there would have to be a carve-out from Bobs' security interest if the sale price is not enough to go above that security interest, in order to pay the agent for the services in selling the property.

Third, there would need to be an additional amount added to the carveout that's in keeping with the traditional standards for carve-outs, that there needs to be something for other creditors. ... [T]hat [additional carve-out] would include some percentage of administrative expenses that have accrued so far, priority claims and general unsecured claims. [Tr. (8/19/21) (dkt. 1503), pp.64:15-65:18.]

The Agent's proposed form of order correctly presumes that this Court intended that any carve-out for his expenses would be prospective from August 19, 2021. See dkt. 1530, p.4:2-6. But Bobs has expressed an unwillingness to agree even to a prospective carve-out for the Agent (or anyone else).

Bobs objects to any order that ... require[s] it to discount its claim by some sort of carve-out or to pay the Agent for the efforts he previously promised to make on behalf of the estate [sic²] anyway. Bobs will appeal the order should its rights to claim the full amount of interest and costs pursuant to section 506(b) be abridged, except as it may agree. [Hayes Decl. (dkt. 1524), p.2:22-25.]

There are two answers to Bobs' objections.

## (a) No unfairness to Bobs

Any mechanism to pay the Agent is for Bobs' own benefit. This Court's goal was to assure Bobs that the Agent is not incentivized to hold out for any unrealistic offer to purchase the Paramour in an amount high enough to pay his own fees and expenses, but instead to assure that the Agent is incentivized to accept whatever might be the

Contrary to Bobs' reference to a promise by the Agent to make efforts directly "on behalf of the estate," this Court notes that the Agent is designated as Debtor's "attorney-in-fact" to sell the Paramour and/or take other acts to implement a settlement between Debtor, on the one hand, and Church and Bird, on the other. See Term Sheet (dkt. 547), pp.3-5, at para. 6 & 7.f. In fact, that is precisely the problem for Bobs: under the Term Sheet it is solely Church and Bird who get to decide if the Agent's deadline under the Term Sheet should be extended.

highest and best offer that is realistically obtainable, in his and his professionals' reasonable business judgment.

In addition, the tentative ruling is that there is no unfairness to Bobs in requiring a carve-out for the Agent and for administrative expenses and unsecured creditors. Under this Court's tentative rulings, the burdens of such carve-outs appear to be at least offset if not exceeded by the benefits to Bobs: (i) the Bobs Deadline, (ii) the benefits of incentivizing the Agent not to hold out for any unrealistically high offers, and (iii) the other benefits of this bankruptcy case, such as the ability to sell assets free and clear of liens and other interests, thereby maximizing the chances of paying Bobs in full. See 11 U.S.C. § 363(b)&(f).

#### (b) No windfall to Bobs

Bobs essentially seeks a windfall. It is not entitled to benefits similar to (but better than) a receivership without at least (the risk of) paying the associated costs.

In a receivership, if there are not enough funds to cover the receiver's costs then parties to the receivership have to fund the receiver's expenses (typically up front, through receivers' certificates). In this case, the tentative ruling is that Bobs does not have to pay the Agent's expenses up front but, to the extent the proceeds from any sale of the Paramour are insufficient to pay the Agent's expenses of marketing and selling the property, after August 19, 2021, the Agent's expenses must be paid ahead of Bobs through a carve-out from proceeds that otherwise would go to Bobs.

Even if there were any unfairness to Bobs (which this Court is not persuaded that there is), this Court has some discretion to require a carve-out in balancing fairness to all parties in interest. See, e.g., § 363(k) (credit bidding authorized, "unless the court for cause orders otherwise"); § 506(c) (estate may recover, out of property value, "the reasonable, necessary costs and expenses of preserving, or disposing of, such property to the extent of any benefit" to the holder of the secured claim); § 552(b)(2) (security interest in postpetition traceable proceeds and profits from property continues "except to

any extent that the court, after notice and a hearing and based on the equities of the case, orders otherwise").

## (c) Conclusion as to Bobs' objection to carve-outs

Bobs' apparent unwillingness to accept the burdens that go along with these benefits only reinforces this Court's doubts about Bobs' motives. As argued by other parties at the conclusion of the trial, Bobs' inclusion of confidential bids in its public papers, and alternatively the lack of credibility of its principal Mr. Shy in explaining Bobs' actions, suggests that Bobs intended to chill the bidding and thereby force a foreclosure sale, at which it could credit bid and acquire the Paramour for far less than its true value. See, e.g., Tr. (8/19/21) (dkt. 1503), pp. 76:25-77:1.

In any event, with or without taking into consideration Bobs' motives, if it is unwilling to accept the burdens that go along with the benefits that this Court is tentatively prepared to order, it is free to propose an equivalent or lesser alternative. Alternatively, Bobs can waive or forfeit those benefits.

## (d) Church and Bird's objection to carve-outs

Church and Bird object that they already agreed to a carve-out of \$1 million, as part of their Term Sheet with Debtor, so it would be unfair to impose any additional carve-out on them now. But the Term Sheet was just a settlement with Debtor, not some sort of guaranty that the Paramour would be sold for enough to pay Church and Bird in full, or that no additional carve-out would be imposed if necessary to avoid abandonment of the Paramour (or other outcomes that Church and Bird have opposed).<sup>3</sup>

To put the Term Sheet in context, this Court understands that in the early days of this case, when Church and Bird were negotiating the Term Sheet, both they and Debtor could have been disadvantaged by a valuation of the Paramour that was either too high or too low – for example, a low valuation could save Church and Bird from potential exposure to avoidance of their judgment lien as a preference, but might have left them out of the money. The settlement embodied in the Term Sheet resolved this dilemma by having Debtor agree to reduced claims but allowing those claims as secured claims. This Court approved that settlement, but this Court had no power to predict, let alone mandate, that the Paramour actually would sell for enough money to pay Church and Bird's reduced claims in full. In any event, whatever the parties' motives for entering into the Term Sheet, this Court did not insulate Church and Bird from any further carve-out.

More generally, Church and Bird appear to object to any carve-outs, either from Bobs or from themselves, arguing that any carve-out for administrative expenses or unsecured creditors "is the antithesis of adequate protection since it requires [holders of secured claims] to reduce [their] claim amount[s]." Church/Bird Response (dkt. 1527), p. 2:13-18. This Court disagrees.

As noted above with respect to Bobs, holders of secured claims obtain additional benefits in bankruptcy, and carve-outs are the standard burden that they must bear. Benefits include the automatic stay, which protects assets of the estate and protects creditors from one another – e.g., Church and Bird have been protected from immediate foreclosure of the Paramour by Bobs or other creditors. See § 362(a). Another benefit is the power to sell assets in bankruptcy free and clear of liens and other interests, which maximizes sale proceeds thereby increasing Church and Bird's chances of being paid. See § 363(b)&(f). Bankruptcy provides other benefits such as transparency and investigative tools. See, e.g., Rules 1017, 2004.

A carve-out arguably does no more than offset these increased rights and benefits to the holders of secured claims in bankruptcy cases. Alternatively, even if there is not any net burden to such creditors, this Court has some discretion to require a carve-out in balancing fairness to all parties in interest. See, e.g., § 363(k); § 506(c).

This Court does not construe the requirement to provide "adequate" protection of interests in property to take away the flexibility that Congress provided in other portions of the Code to require carve-outs. Interests in property are often analogized to a bundle of rights, and if some of those rights are trimmed by some provisions of the Code it would be odd for Congress to require that they *not* be trimmed under the rubric of "adequate" protection of such rights.

As this Court stated at the hearing on August 19, 2021:

Now, what I'm contemplating here is nothing different from what I see negotiated on a regular basis in a Chapter 7 case, except that this is a somewhat more complicated scenario. ... Typically, if a ... Chapter 7 trustee takes over the case, and believes that there is a substantial risk

that the assets that are available will not be sold for a price that exceeds the liens, the first thing the trustee will do is negotiate with the secured creditor[s] for a carve-out. And unless the trustee in that situation provides something for [unsecured] creditors, the typical bankruptcy court will say, no, you should just abandon the property and let the secured creditor do what it can, proceed with its non-bankruptcy remedies. [Tr. (8/19/21) (dkt. 1503), pp. 65:19-66:14.]

Of course, this Court could convert this case to chapter 7 right now, and force the parties to negotiate with a chapter 7 trustee, resulting either in abandonment of the Paramour or carve-outs. But there are numerous disadvantages to that process. *See* Tr. (8/19/21) (dkt. 1503), p. 67:1-16.

The last point as to Church and Bird is to note that their opposition to carve-outs is not absolute. They state that they

will consider a small additional discount on their claim if concessions are made by the other lienholders provided doing so is not deemed to prejudice the Judgment Creditors' rights under the Term Sheet and Order approving it. The Judgment Creditors do not believe that resolution of this issue should delay entry of the Order on the Motion. [Church/Bird Response (dkt. 1527), p. 3:24-27.]

#### (e) Conclusion as to carve-outs

This Court's contemplated implementation of the carve-out requirement is reflected in the following draft ordering paragraphs:

IT IS ORDERED that, to the extent the net proceeds of any sale of the Paramour, whether by agreement or auction, are insufficient (a) to pay in full the secured claims of Bobs LLC ("Bobs"), and also (b) to pay the fees and expenses of the Agent and his professionals (retained by order of the Court), incurred on and after August 19, 2021 with respect to marketing and sale of the Property (the "Agent Expenses"), the Agent Expenses shall be paid out of the proceeds that otherwise would be paid to Bobs.

Notwithstanding the immediately preceding paragraph, once 50% or more of the Agent Expenses are paid, as provided above, then to the extent that there are any net proceeds above what is paid to Bobs that would, in the absence of any payment of the Agent Expenses, be paid to Church and Bird, then any remaining Agent Expenses shall be allocated 50% to proceeds that otherwise would be paid to Bobs and 50% to proceeds that otherwise would be paid to Church and Bird.

Likewise, notwithstanding the immediately preceding two paragraphs, once 75% or more of the Agent Expenses are paid, as provided above, then to the extent that there are any net proceeds above what is paid to Church and Bird that would, in the absence of any payment of the Agent Expenses, be paid to Ms. Staats, then any remaining Agent Expenses shall be allocated 50% to proceeds that otherwise would be paid to Church and Bird and 50% to proceeds that otherwise would be paid to Ms. Staats.

#### (6) Credit bidding and any sale free and clear

The tentative ruling is to adopt the following ordering paragraph, substantially in the form in the Agent's proposed form of order:

> **ORDERED** that if the Agent sells the Property by public auction, Bobs, DeeAnna Staats ("Staats"), the Roman Catholic Archbishop Of Los Angeles, a Corporation Sole, and the California Institute of the Sisters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (collectively, the "Church"), and The Bird Nest, LLC ("Bird Nest") shall be entitled to participate in the auction by submitting a credit bid in an amount to be later determined by this Court.

Some language in the proposed orders provides that any junior liens would be extinguished. That would be the normal effect of any sale free and clear of liens (as further explained in the Procedures of Judge Bason, posted at www.cacb.uscourts.gov, in the section summarizing prior rulings regarding sales free and clear). But until any sale motion is presented, the tentative ruling is that it would be premature to rule on that issue at this time.

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# (7) Conclusion

Except as provided above, and subject to this Court's discretion as always in determining the final language of any order, the tentative ruling is to overrule other objections to the Agent's proposed form of order.

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Date: September 28, 2021

Neil W. Bason

United States Bankruptcy Judge