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## Linking Landmarks to de Blasio's Agenda

Real-Estate Industry Hopes to Build Alliance with New Mayor on Jobs, Affordable Housing; Preservationists Vow Fight

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The real-estate industry has been waging war on what it sees as an overzealous push by preservationists to landmark large swaths of the city.

Now, landlords are hopeful they will find a new ally in new Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Mr. de Blasio, a Park Slope liberal with a populist touch, is perhaps an unlikely figure to pull back on protecting the brownstones and quaint churches that dot neighborhoods throughout the city.

But real-estate lobbyists and developers are hoping they can win Mr. de Blasio's support by linking landmarks to his core issues. They argue that preservation is undermining the creation of affordable housing and jobs, key campaign promises.

"What I am concerned about is that we're taking out of development and redevelopment a very large portion of the city. You've got a big chunk of the city that's just off limits," said Richard Anderson, president of the New York Building Congress, which would like to see a freeze on the creation of new historic districts while the process is re-examined.

Preservationists are equally prepared for a fight, saying that with the 50th anniversary of the city's 1965 law approaching, they will ensure it isn't weakened. The industry "is trying to weaken the law, they're trying to weaken the landmarks process, and we're counting on the new mayor and the new commission to hold the line," said Peg Breen, president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

Mr. de Blasio cares about both preservation and development, a spokesman said.

"Mayor de Blasio is committed to not only protecting the character of our neighborhoods, but also securing the ability of New Yorkers who built those neighborhoods to remain in them. That's why we have developed such an ambitious affordable housing plan," the spokesman said.

Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg presided over an unprecedented preservation push—during his tenure the number of historic districts or extensions rose 50%, from 86 to at least 129. As a result, the once low-profile Landmarks Preservation



Landmarking is a sore point with developers, who think too many structures—even shabby ones—have the special designation. Buildings in Manhattan's Tin Pan Alley, along West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, are on preservationists' wish list. Some don't look worth saving, above and bottom left. Others, such as 52 W. 28th St., bottom right, have that old-city air, especially wedged between towers.



to people in the landmark field not directly involved in the final selection process. Ms. Wist would bring significant government experience, having worked for both the Landmarks Preservation Commission and Department of City Planning. She declined to comment.

Also in the running, according to those people, is Carol Clark, who also has a long history in government, having worked as assistant commissioner for Local Legislative Affairs and as president of the Brooklyn Historical Society.

Chris Collins, who has held positions as counsel to the City Council's land-use committee and the Board of Standards and Appeals, has also been floated as a strong choice. Neither responded to requests for comment.

Some also speculate that Robert Tierney, the current chair, might stay on for a while. Given that Mr. de Blasio has yet to make appointments to major departments, changes might not take place at the commission until later this year.

The names being floated are considered relatively uncontroversial. Both sides will be watching more carefully how the new

chair responds to pressure to change the direction of the Commission or stay the course.

Mr. de Blasio has said little about his position on preservation, which is a relatively low priority for him. He made few tough decisions about landmarking during his tenure as a City Council member representing Park Slope, which predated a recent push by community groups to carve out more historic districts in the neighborhood.

The Real Estate Board of New York is now trying to frame the debate in terms of an issue that is also dear to the new mayor's heart—the creation of more affordable housing in the city.

A study released in September, the month that Mr. de Blasio won the Democratic primary, showed that just five affordable-housing units were built in landmarked properties in Manhattan since 2003.

Members of the real-estate community said they have met with the new mayor and he seemed receptive to their arguments.

Preservation groups reported a similarly warm reception when they met with Mr. de Blasio after he became public advocate in 2010.

Preservationists noted that landmarking an area can help ensure that older affordable housing is protected and pointed out that a relatively small portion of the city is landmarked, making it off-limits for new development. They added that it is hypocritical for the real-estate board to trumpet affordable housing when its most prominent members are wealthy developers of market-rate housing.

"They're just desperately trying to latch onto the issues that de Blasio has put forward by saying that if you let developers have their way with the city it will suddenly become an affordable paradise," said Andrew Berman, executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

But Steven Spinola, president of the Real Estate Board of New York, said his organization is concerned about the city's economic health, not just the interests of its members. "We are watching silently as we see opportunities for the creation of new jobs, new housing, new affordable housing and new tax revenues" are lost, he said.

Commission has played an increasingly vital role both in shaping the city and the lives of owners of apartments, brownstones and office buildings who must seek its approval before altering their buildings.

Mr. de Blasio's choice as commission chair will have to deal with increasing pressure from the real-estate community to pull back on creating more historic districts. He or she also will be faced with the growing

bureaucratic challenge of ensuring that people in existing historic districts get speedy permits.

Leading candidates include Ronda Wist, who works at the Municipal Art Society, according

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