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DOWNTOWN Politics Real Estate

Architects of de Blasio's Affordable Housing Plan Leave His Administration

By [Danielle Tcholakian](#)

CIVIC CENTER — Within a week of Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration announcing record-breaking achievements in affordable housing, the top two officials responsible for his housing initiatives are stepping down.

Department of City Planning Director and City Planning Commission Chair Carl Weisbrod is stepping down to chair the Trust for Governors Island, and Department of Housing Preservation and Development Commissioner Vicki Been will return to her previous job teaching at New York University and directing NYU's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

Weisbrod will be replaced by Marisa Lago, currently the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Assistant Secretary for International Markets and Development.

In a statement last week, de Blasio referred to Weisbrod's departure as "a bittersweet moment," and hailed Lago's experience working "side-by-side with Carl helping spur the city's revitalization 25 years ago," as well as her "record of bringing communities together."

Lago, a Brooklyn native, previously worked for Weisbrod as his general counsel when he presided over the city's Economic Development Corporation under Mayor David Dinkins. Her career began with a post in New York City government back in 1983, as an aide to then City Planning Chair Herb Sturz.

Weisbrod's public schedule in the first few years of his tenure working for the de Blasio administration showed occasional meetings with Sturz.

Lago has also worked for New York State government, as the president and CEO of the Empire State Development Corporation and the commissioner of the state Department of Economic Development.



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She also led Boston's planning and economic development efforts as the director of that city's Redevelopment Authority.

"I have spent my entire career finding smart solutions to the tough problems that come with a growing, changing world. We can and we will keep our neighborhoods affordable, our economy competitive, our businesses thriving and our communities strong," Lago said in a statement. "It's a great honor to come home to the city I love and be given the chance to make it ever stronger and more equitable."

Been will be replaced by Economic Development Corporation president and CEO Maria Torres-Springer, de Blasio announced Tuesday.

James Patchett, chief of staff to Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen, will succeed Torres-Springer at EDC, an agency which Glen oversees.

Glen [told POLITICO New York](#) that the decision to promote her closest aides, rather than seeking new talent, was motivated by concerns about how the city's housing plan will fare under President-Elect Donald Trump.

In a statement, Torres-Springer said her experience growing up in Section 8 housing gave her "first-hand" knowledge that HPD's work "is a lifeline to hundreds of thousands of families."

"Vicki leaves big shoes to fill, but I'm honored to have a chance to keep up the record-breaking progress she's achieved," Torres-Springer said.

Been also issued a statement touting her achievements under de Blasio, specifically the financing of 62,506 affordable residences, "including the highest three years of new construction in the City's history."

"We've changed the way we work to ensure that we achieve more affordable housing for every public dollar spent, and that our housing reaches the New Yorkers who need it most," Been said. "As we face the challenges ahead, I look forward to watching as Maria and the amazing HPD team make even further strides to keep New York City a city for all."

At a press conference on Tuesday, de Blasio said that Been had to return to NYU or lose her tenured position there.

"It's a very prized position and one that she made clear from the beginning she intended to go back to at the latest possible moment," de Blasio said, adding that "NYU was very gracious about the timeline."

De Blasio credited Been with the administration's preserving or building 62,000 apartments over the last three years, and their recent claim that 2016 saw more affordable housing financed than any other year in the past 25 years.

"That's enough for between 150,000 and 200,000 New Yorkers who will have affordable housing for decades to come. So I wish she could have stayed," de Blasio said. "She did an amazing job."

De Blasio praised his "deep bench," noting Torres-Springer and Patchett had already been working closely with Been on housing initiatives and giving Torres-Springer credit as "one of the architects over three years of everything we've achieved for affordable housing."

Groups that work with the city on housing issues also released statements on the new appointments.

Carlo Scissura, president of the New York Building Congress, a group whose members include firms involved in the city's construction industry, hailed Torres-Springer as an "ideal candidate" and Lago as "the perfect choice."

Benjamin Dulchin, president of the Association for Neighborhood Housing and Development, noted that the de Blasio administration's housing strategies have "generated some local community tension, and said "the challenge for the new commissioners will be to embrace some key lessons from the first three years."

The personnel changes will take effect in February, City Hall said.