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Adams-era agency head to take over affordable housing nonprofit

By Kathryn Brenzel

After leaving the Mamdani administration earlier this year, the former head of the Department of Social Services is taking the helm at an affordable housing nonprofit.

Molly Wasow Park is the new CEO of the NYC Housing Partnership, a nonprofit that has helped build and preserve more than 100,000 low and moderate-income housing units in the city over its four-decade plus history.

In an interview, Park said that she plans to focus on creating a “real win-win for both the buildings and the living people there,” noting that landlord and tenant interests often get pitted against each other.

“Buildings are struggling,” she said. “Tenants are struggling, and the trick is going to be to look for tools where we are respecting both the needs of the landlords in the buildings, but also looking out for the residents that depend on that housing.”

Ron Moelis, chair of the Housing Partnership and co-founder of development firm L+M Development Partners, said he met Park when she was deputy commissioner for development at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development; he called her a “top notch manager.” He said the nonprofit plans to partner with the Mamdani administration to help stabilize distressed multifamily buildings.

The Housing Partnership has approximately 300 affordable buildings in its portfolio, where it serves as the not-for-profit partner on Housing Development Fund Corporation cooperatives, known as HDFCs. Such co-ops are eligible the Article XI tax exemption. The nonprofit is a nominal owner in these arrangements, which allows the properties access to public funding. As part of his [housing plan](#), Mayor Zohran Mamdani has prioritized ramping up the city’s intervention at severely distressed properties and providing more financing options for nonprofits and HDFCs to preserve housing.

“There’s a real need for an asset-based approach, to helping both for-profits and nonprofits that are having difficulty,” Moelis said. “The city doesn’t have that capacity, and I think they welcome the role an outside, independent nonprofit can play.”

The nonprofit has been working to get “back in the game,” to work alongside city and state agencies to ramp up its preservation work, Moelis said. In March, the Housing Partnership

launched an asset management and housing stability unit and created a new chief asset management officer role to lead it.

Park will take over for Jamie Smarr, who became CEO and president of the organization in 2022. Smarr plans to stay on as president through the end of the year to aid in the transition.

In a statement, Smarr said he was proud of his role building “upon the organization’s 43-year history of delivering safe, affordable housing opportunities for middle-class New Yorkers.”

He said in an email that when he joined the Housing Partnership, he planned to stay on as CEO for at least five years. He said it was time for him to move on, while continuing a focus on housing and economic development.

Smarr added that the Housing Partnership is most effective when it aligns with city and state housing plans.

“We all believe that Molly can continue to bring this crucial alignment to reality fully,” he said. The organization was founded in the 1980s as a housing affiliate of the Partnership for New York City, and it partnered with the Koch administration to renovate and build affordable housing. Kathy Wylde served as its founding CEO, before she headed to its economic development counterpart.

The heads of HPD and the Housing Development Corporation expressed an eagerness to work with Park in her new role, in statements provided to *Crain’s* by the Housing Partnership. HPD Commissioner Dina Levy called her “a dedicated public servant and fierce housing advocate.”

Park, who was appointed by then-Mayor Eric Adams in 2023, [resigned](#) as DSS commissioner in February after it became clear that the new administration was not going to keep her on longterm. News of the departure came as the city was [grappling](#) with the deaths of 18 people who were killed during a harsh cold front, which Park [said at the time](#) didn’t influence her decision to leave, according to the *New York Times*.

“Every new mayor wants their own commissioners,” she told *Crain’s* on Thursday. “It’s highly unusual for commissioners to be kept on from one administration to another. So, you know, I knew, going into the election, even, that it was highly likely that my tenure in government would be coming to an end.”

She said that since leaving, she has wanted to get back into affordable housing.

“I believe very firmly that it is fundamental,” she said. “It’s very hard for anyone to be successful at educational growth, at stabilizing health, at raising a family, if you don’t have a safe and stable, affordable place to live.”