



de Blasio appoints leadership at major housing agencies; Olatoye appointed NYCHA chair, House to serve as NYCHA general manager

February 24, 2014 - Front Section

Mayor Bill de Blasio unveiled four key appointments to his administration, pledging to expand access to affordable housing and upgrade the city's aging public housing stock. The mayor laid out a range of strategies to reach those goals, including launching inclusive housing programs that serve both low-income New Yorkers and the middle class, developing innovative strategies to leverage new capital to spur housing production and preservation, and working across city agencies to maximize every opportunity to address the affordability issues facing New Yorkers.

de Blasio named Shola Olatoye as chair of the New York City Housing Authority, with Cecil House serving as the authority's general manager. de Blasio also appointed Vicki Been as the commissioner of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and Gary Rodney as president of the Housing Development Corp.

The administration is working toward a goal of building and preserving 200,000 units of affordable housing over the next decade and addressing longstanding health and safety repair issues affecting the city's more than 400,000 housing authority tenants.

"We are going to take a new approach to this crisis that holds nothing back. From doing more to protect tenants in troubled buildings, to innovating new partnerships with the private sector, to forging a new relationship with our NYCHA communities, every decision we make will focus on maximizing the affordability of our neighborhoods. These agencies are going to work together as a collective to lift up families and make this one city-where everyone rises together," said de Blasio.

de Blasio has committed to fundamentally changing the city's relationship with its public housing tenants. NYCHA is the nation's largest public housing authority, and its aging buildings are in dire need of health and safety repairs, and upgrades to make them more resilient.

Leading those efforts will be Shola Olatoye, an experienced coalition builder with an extensive background leading community-based development across the five boroughs. Olatoye will focus on strategic goals like expanding employment opportunities for NYCHA residents, developing plans to retrofit buildings, and more fully supporting tenants-including the 40% of residents over the age of 62.

Olatoye will be joined by Cecil House, who will continue to serve as the New York City Housing Authority's general manager, a position he has held for the past 18 months. House will focus on continuing to reduce repair wait times and improving the resiliency of buildings to severe weather.

"I am honored to be asked by the mayor to run New York City's Housing Authority. Everything we do will be focused on improving the quality of life for our tenants, especially protecting their safety. This is an enormous opportunity. Public housing helped people in my family. I want it to do the same in the future for others," said incoming NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye.

"I cannot wait to work with Shola and this administration to make New Yorkers proud of their public housing again. We've never had a leadership this committed to making that happen, and to treating our NYCHA tenants with the same respect as every other tenant in this city. We are ready to roll up our sleeves, get to work, and change the way we do business," said NYCHA General Manager Cecil House.

As commissioner of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, Vicki Been will be charged with protecting tenants, rehabilitating troubled buildings, and finding new opportunities to create affordable apartments. Been is the Director of NYU's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, and is a national leader on land use, urban policy and affordable housing. Most recently, she has worked extensively assessing the impact of Superstorm Sandy on housing and neighborhoods.

"We're going to take a much more aggressive approach to protecting and building affordable apartments that responds to the crisis we're in. From apartments approaching the end of their subsidy to homes lost to Superstorm Sandy, we need faster and more innovative strategies that seize every opportunity to keep apartments affordable and accelerate the pace of bringing new ones online," said incoming HPD Commissioner Vicki Been.

As president of the Housing Development Corporation-the city's housing finance arm-Gary D. Rodney will play a critical role in the preservation and creation of affordable apartments. Rodney is currently Executive Vice President for Development of Omni New York LLC, where he financed community-based affordable housing projects that rehabilitated some of the most distressed buildings across the five boroughs.

"This work is truly a collaborative effort that includes housing advocates, community groups, developers, lenders, and an administration committed to long lasting affordable housing. We are going to continue to foster existing partnerships and aggressively seek out new ones to put more shovels in the ground, rehabilitate more distressed buildings, and really push the mayor's affordable housing plan. Most importantly, we will continue to find creative ways to finance the best quality housing that will be affordable to all New Yorkers," said incoming HDC president Gary Rodney.