

'Unleashed' MaryAnn Gilmartin Leaves Forest City To Start New L&L-Backed Firm

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MaryAnn Gilmartin has left her post as Forest City New York CEO in a major shake-up in the city's development community.



Gilmartin is joining up with Robert Lapidus and David Levinson of L&L Holding Co. to form L&L MAG, a new development firm backed by a \$500M investment from L&L and pension fund CalSTRS. Gilmartin will serve as CEO of L&L MAG, in charge of day-to-day operations, while Lapidus and Levinson will be partners who help with strategic decisions and raising capital.

“It was very important to me to be the true CEO and not just a symbolic holder of the post,” Gilmartin said. “I think [Lapidus and Levinson] are interested in just unleashing me.”

Gilmartin cited capital constraints with Forest City as a reason for her decision. Forest City New York, a division of Cleveland-based REIT Forest City Realty Trust, is looking for a way to reduce its debt, including perhaps a liquidation of assets.

“I would say that it is antithetical that a public company undertake large-scale developments in prime cities with high barriers to entry,” Gilmartin said. “My first love has always been ground-up development, and now I can do that with the L&L guys in a private company with access to capital.”

Gilmartin said that in weighing her decision to leave Forest City, “a company that I loved so much,” she looked around for the ideal partners in a new venture. She credited L&L for having the right combination of available capital and trust in her ability.

Part of Forest City's liquidation process now includes a further shrinking of its share in the Pacific Park development in Downtown Brooklyn. Having sold 70% of the project to Greenland Group subsidiary Greenland USA in 2013, Forest City announced Tuesday that it has sold a further 25% to Greenland, bringing its total share in the complex Gilmartin spearheaded to 5%.



Gilmartin will continue in a leadership position with Pacific Park, as L&L MAG will oversee management of the mixed-income, mixed-use project for Greenland. Gilmartin will be the first woman to serve as co-founder and CEO of a commercial real estate developer in New York, according to Levinson.

Gilmartin said that she was unsure if she is the first-ever female co-founder and CEO in the city, but she could not think of anyone else.

“It’s my hope that this is not so much a remarkable achievement for a woman in the future,” Gilmartin said. “I want to show the world that women happen to be well-suited to do large-scale, complex real estate development projects from the ground up.”

The gender gap in holders of executive positions in real estate is persistent and well-documented, but Forest City has been the outlier. According to The Real Deal, it had the highest percentage of women in leadership positions among major New York developers at 50% before Gilmartin left, taking four Forest City colleagues with her.

With that team — Jeffrey Rosen, Susi Yu, Adam Greene and Ashley Cotton — L&L MAG will be starting off with that same 50% ratio. Gilmartin's unique position has caused women across the industry to reach out with messages of encouragement and notes that they are emotionally invested in L&L MAG's success.

“In my mind, I have to recognize that just ‘doing it’ is super-powerful stuff,” Gilmartin said.