

Developer Mike Balaban crosses over to architecture to lead Alexandria firm



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Veteran commercial real estate developer Mike Balaban has stepped into a leadership post at Alexandria-based Winstanley Architects & Planners, a transition the suburban Maryland resident said isn't so far afield as it might seem going from one part of the industry to another.

Balaban, a development officer for J Street Cos. until earlier this year, was recently appointed managing director of the firm's Washington design workshop at Winstanley. He will be overseeing the nuts and bolts of the business. His role will free up Winstanley staffers to focus on clients and building up other parts of the business, including a new office the firm opened in Miami. Winstanley had been seeking the right fit for the post for about two years now, and Balaban emerged as the best candidate given his experience at Lowe Enterprises and Washington Real Estate Investment Trust, said Principal and Founder Michael Winstanley.



Mike Balaban has been appointed managing director of the Washington design group at Alexandria's Winstanley Architects & Planners.

"I just threw it out there to him, 'Would you ever consider coming back into the profession,' because I knew he had been working on a series of projects," said Winstanley, who has worked with Balaban on other projects including scrapped plans to convert the Latham Hotel in Georgetown into micro-units. "Mike responded quite well. We were both on the same page of what Mike would do, which was really to provide a backbone for the business."

Balaban stepped into the new post about two months ago with a background in architecture, having earned his master's degree in 1975 from Harvard University's graduate design school, before shifting to acquisitions officer at WashREIT in 1988. He moved on to Lowe in 1994, overseeing more than \$1.5 billion in projects before transitioning in 2013 to other posts including co-founder of SB-Urban and development officer for J Street. While he is better known for his role as a developer, Balaban said his career over the past three decades has dealt heavily on architecture and design, areas he never lost the feeling going back to graduate school.

"From almost the very beginning of my career on the investment, development side, I have at least from time to time referred to myself as a recovering architect, because once you get it into your blood, there are certain things that never really leave you," Balaban said. The notion of crossing back over from the development and investment side into the design side, first of all, in terms of what I do for a living, it's a lot of the same tasks and roles and functions and perspectives," Balaban said.

Winstanley's own portfolio has grown over the past few years to include projects like Redbrick LMD's St. Elizabeths East redevelopment, a mixed-use project with multifamily and retail units in Old Town Alexandria, and a role helping to establish a Global War on Terror Memorial on the National Mall. Winstanley is the firm's sole owner, though he is joined at the leadership helm by two other principals, and he reached the point where he felt too thinly spread juggling multiple roles at the firm.

"It grew over the last few years larger than I realized, and I found myself working a lot of hours doing the management side, and the design side, and the finding new work side," he said. "My love, of course, is designing, and I think I'm best at that, and I'm O.K. if Mike could handle the side of contract negotiation, internal structuring, the billing, the running of the office."