

Previous TOPO/COPO work to date

Affordable Homeownership Study

Council allocated funding to contract with a consultant to explore options the City could take to support affordable homeownership. In 2023, the study was initiated. The City contracted Paul Knox and Sam Green (who was at the time a Co-Executive Director of NWCDC). The study examined options and provided recommendations regarding potential policy approaches for a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Ordinance (TOPO).

The City's consultants provided sample policies from other jurisdictions, including a recommended policy from Takoma Park, Maryland, which is a small city with a population of approximately 18,000 that adopted their Tenant Opportunity to Purchase law in 1986. The City's consultants also recommended that the City initially pursue adoption of a tenant opportunity to purchase policy for rental properties with ten or more units. The City's consultants provided information on TOPO considerations as well as a model conversion project in the attached Homeownership Project Final Brief (see pages 5 and 9-14). The model conversion provides estimated costs for a 40-unit property and financing strategies.

February 2026 Land Use & Environment Committee presentation

Staff presented research on policies enacted in other jurisdictions and included a summary of recommendations based on lessons learned through implementation. This research includes jurisdictions like Washington, D.C. (which has had TOPO in place for over 40 years) and jurisdictions with policies implemented more recently.

Based on review of policies enacted in other jurisdictions, it is likely that financial support for acquisition and technical assistance will be needed for tenants to effectively purchase a property cooperatively. The literature also recommends that financing is nimble, both fast and flexible, to successfully support conversion to tenant ownership. When effectively implemented, TOPO can preserve affordable housing and create long-term affordability, prevent displacement, and improve household stability.

Staff recommended that if the City pursues a TOPO, that staff ensure there are funding sources available to enable these transactions. This funding could include RHC Opportunity Funds, as well as other third-party sources. Staff also recommended that the City support nonprofit capacity-building, if needed, to provide technical assistance for tenants who wish to explore cooperative purchase of their property. As a potential next step, staff suggested outreach to Northwest Cooperative Development Center (NWCDC)/ROC/NW to assess capacity and potential funding sources for predevelopment, acquisition, and permanent financing. This research will help determine if there are financing gaps or other support needed to effectively implement a local TOPO.