



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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DC Has a Great New Plan to Save Affordable Housing: Let's Put It into Action

By Claire Zippel

A “strike force” assembled by Mayor Bowser just issued a great set of [recommendations](#) on how DC can hold on to the city’s shrinking stock of affordable housing, and it couldn’t come at a better time. With 13,000 low-cost apartments at risk of turning into market-rate buildings, the District has no time to lose. Mayor Bowser and the DC Council should work together to put the Strike Force’s conclusions into action—by providing the needed funding in the upcoming fiscal year (FY) 2018 budget.

Here’s why housing that is now affordable through subsidies doesn’t stay that way forever: Many subsidized housing programs have an expiration date, meaning that landlords can shift to market-rate rents after a specified time period, unless they choose to renew the subsidy or enter a new subsidy program. These days, more and more subsidized buildings are going market-rate or being converted to condos.

By stepping in to work with subsidized buildings that are “on the fence,” DC can preserve the low-cost housing we have left. Here are three key strategies outlined by the Strike Force, along with DCFPI’s take.



- **Establish a public-private affordable housing preservation fund.** The fund would bring together “seed funding” from the DC government with private and philanthropic investments. The fund would help developers or tenants buy properties that they will renovate and preserve as affordable. Using local dollars to bring other sources of funds to the table is a fiscally smart move that gets a good bang for the city’s buck. The Mayor and Council should put money into the preservation fund in the FY 2018 budget.
- **Use the District’s opportunity to purchase affordable buildings.** This tool, known as DOPA, has been in place since 2009, but has never been used. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will issue the draft regulations needed for the city to use this tool in FY 2017, and then the Mayor and Council will need to find the money to start buying buildings—perhaps with the public-private fund.
- **Form a preservation unit within the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).** The unit will track at-risk affordable buildings, and reach out to

owners to discuss options to keep the building affordable. That unit, which DHCD will be setting up this year, will need to work closely with all housing agencies in the city—and with the federal housing department, too.

The Strike Force also recommended creating a [program](#) to preserve small affordable buildings, provide more assistance for tenants using the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act rights, and create programs to help seniors age in place.

The District also can help by making sure that all newly developed affordable housing is designed to be affordable [forever](#). The less time we have to spend keeping affordable housing from being lost, the better.