

Co-op Coalition Survey: Converting from Gas-fired Steam Heat

It appears that there still are a few older gas-fired systems still operating in some older buildings, but only a couple of co-ops reported their co-ops had converted to some other system. Following is the original question and the table of responses.

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In a message dated 5/11/2016 12:36:16 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time, CooperativesDC@aol.com writes:

A Coalition member faces a major problem that some of you may be able to help address: **Switching from an old gas-fired steam heat system**. Has your building undergone such a change or are you still maintaining a nearly 100 year old system? Please let us know and we will pass on the contact information to the requesting co-op. The request follows, below. Thanks for any help you may be able to provide by helping another Coalition co-op member. Working together, we all benefit! Please respond by Friday, May 20, 5pm)

Thanks!

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You are receiving this blind-copied to protect your privacy.

We currently have a gas-fired steam heat system that has been in operation since 1926. We've had an engineering survey that told us we need to replace it. Over the last two heating seasons, we've had the floors in three apartments warp beyond repair due to steam leaks. So it's a problem.

Our MEP/architectural design team has prepared specs for a VRF replacement system that would heat and cool (it's electrically powered.) However, our initial costs estimates have come in pretty high, so some of our shareholders want us to explore a gas-fired heat only system. Still others want to hang on to the steam as long as possible.

What have other buildings (especially of our approximate vintage, 1926) done with steam heat? Have any converted to VRF? Have any converted to hot water heat-only or hot water/cold water? Are any still hanging on to 90 year old steam?

<25 units	Our building is the same vintage, and we are still using the original two-pipe steam heat system. Some 20-30 years ago we did switch from oil to natural gas. We have no plans to make any further changes. It might be useful for the questioner to spell out what "VFR" stands for... presumably some sort of forced air duct system.
<25 units	Have them contact Strohl, ideally the dad. They know our system (1911) well. They are old school.
<25 units	Ours is a 1926 vintage 20 apartment coop. Seven or eight years ago we replaced our boiler with one functionally the same as the original boiler (it was not the first time it had been replaced). We are happy enough with the original radiators and have not had significant steam leakage problems. We

	have put thermostatic valves on some radiators and are using a non-outdoor temperature reset boiler controller.
<25 units	We are still using the steam heat. I hope they find someone with lessons learned.
26 – 49 units	We still have steam radiators.
26 – 49 units	We still have steam heat in our 1926 building. We have not converted it and have not considered a conversion. Our gas-fired boiler works well and we have not had any building damage traced to steam leaks.
26 – 49 units	Our building was built in 1922 or thereabouts and we have a gas fired steam heating system, which is fragile. Would be very interested in the name of the engineering firm they used and to learn just how they would convert
50 – 74 units	<p>[Our] Cooperative was constructed in 1911. My hunch is that the building initially used steam heat. This was changed some time during the 1940s, 1950s or 1960s. We now have an HVAC system that runs hot water in the winter and cold water in the summer. Each apartment contains 1 or 2 “fan coil units.” These are heat exchange units whereby the hot (or cold) water runs through exposed coiled pipes. Air from the apartment is drawn across the pipes with a fan and then the heated (or chilled) air is returned to the apartment through ducts. Our gas fired boiler will be replaced soon with a high-efficiency model. We will replace our chiller as well.</p> <p>Plaza West has hired Tim Stearns from Commons Energy (a Vermont Energy Conservation Company that has an agreement with the DC Sustainable Energy Utility, DCSEU) to manage this project. Savings in monthly utility bills will be used to help pay for the financing of this improvement and thereby avoid any increases in monthly coop fees or any special assessment.</p>
50 – 74 units	Still hanging on, in spite of rather uneven heating throughout the building (which leads some units to open their windows in the winter). No appetite in the building to undertake the massive, expensive work that would be needed to switch right now.
75 – 99 units	[Our co-op] is still hanging on to our 99-year-old steam heat system. We are very interested in hearing more about the experiences of other cooperatives that have gone through or are thinking about transitioning to different systems.
100+ units	I have no experience with this.
100+ units	[NOTE: This is from a large co-op but the manager had experience with a smaller complex.] A small property in NW had steam/radiators. Too much heat – windows opened – high utility bills. We disabled the system and installed baseboard heaters. Had to upgrade the electric panels to accommodate, but it worked and we ended up being able to have each resident pay their own utilities (electric).