



Rent Smart

Module B

Checking Out the Rental Property and the Landlord



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Module Notes:

Determining your housing needs.

How to locate rental housing-list resources you may use to find a rental unit.

Major items to inspect prior to making a decision to rent property.

Talking to the landlord/property manager-building a relationship.

Questions to Consider:

- What features will you want/need in your rental unit? How will they affect the way in which you shop for housing?
- What resources can you use to help locate potential rental properties?
- How will you compare rental units?
- How will you prepare for talking to the landlord/property manager about a prospective rental unit?

Remember:

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of dwellings, and in other housing-related transactions based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status (including children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians, pregnant women, people securing custody of children under the age of 18), and handicap (disability).

The Fair Housing Act covers most housing. In some circumstances, the Act exempts owner-occupied building with no more than four units, single-family housing sold or rented without the use of a broker, and housing operated by organizations and private clubs that limit occupancy to members.

References and Resources:

- Pine Tree Legal-<https://ptla.org/>
- Main Housing Search-
<https://www.mainehousingsearch.org/>
- Video walk through on Rent Prep site:
<http://www.rentprep.com/apartment-marketing/youtube-fill-rental-property-vacancies/>
- Sexual Offender Registry Database-
<https://www.nsopw.gov/>

References to websites used in this publication are for your convenience and not an endorsement of one product over other similar products.



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My Housing Needs

Looking for rental property is much easier if you know what is most important to you, before you start looking. This worksheet lists features that may or may not be important to you. Read the list and decide how important each item is to you.

I prefer to live in the following type of housing:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No preference | <input type="checkbox"/> House (single family) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Duplex | <input type="checkbox"/> Boarding home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apartment | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Preferred location (area, zip code, neighborhood, etc.): _____

	Very Important	Moderately Important	Not Important
Neighborhood			
Near bus line			
Near family/friends			
Near work			
Near child care			
Near shopping, school(s)			
Safe			
Children can play outside			
Quiet			
Other			
Building			
Building Condition			
On-site management			
Type of units (apartment, duplex)			
Private entrance			
Off-street parking			
Pets allowed			
Laundry facilities			
Storage space			
Yard			
Other			
Unit			
Affordable rent of \$____			
Utilities included			
Enough bedrooms			
Storage & closets			
Appliances included			
Air conditioned			
Internet Connection			
Other			



Affordable Rental Unit Options & Contact Information

Finding a decent and affordable rental unit can feel overwhelming. Often, affordable housing is not advertised in the same way that more expensive private market housing is advertised. You may need to search out these affordable options. The Maine Rental Housing Guide is a great resource.

Public Housing

There may be housing in the community that may be owned and managed by a local housing authority. These units may be located in apartment complexes or may be single-family housing or duplexes scattered throughout the community. Potential tenants must be income-eligible to apply. To find out about availability and whether you would be eligible, contact the local housing authority.

The Housing Authority staff can explain the application process. Because there is a high demand for these units, you may be placed on a waiting list once you apply. This will vary from community to community. Some housing developments may offer benefits like on-site daycare and community resource centers.

Rental Assistance

The housing authority may also offer rent assistance. With this program, you would rent an apartment at a rental fee that is based on your income. You would be expected to pay about 30 percent of your income for rent. The difference between your payment and the full market rent for the unit would then be paid by the housing authority. You must be income-eligible to apply, and the property owner of the unit, you intend to rent, must be willing to participate in the program.

There are a limited number of rent assistance vouchers or certificates available. There can be waiting lists. You will need to contact the rental assistance program of the local housing authority to learn if you qualify and how to apply.

Private Market Subsidized Units

Some private property owners have received funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or Rural Housing to develop housing. In exchange, these owners agree to offer units at more affordable rent and make them available to families who meet income guidelines.

MaineHousing provides information for subsidized housing in Maine on its website:

<http://mainehousing.org/programs-services/rental/subsidized-housing>

Non-profit Housing Developers

Some communities have non-profit agencies which were created to make affordable housing available to the community they serve. These agencies may either renovate or build homes and make them available for sale or rental. Each agency defines its own mission. Some may offer housing in a broad geographic area, while others are restricted to particular neighborhoods. Contact the municipality or county office that administers these funds to learn which agencies may have rental housing available.



Rental Property Checklist

Once you have completed the search, you will need to visit each rental property to make sure it meets your needs and expectations. Use this form to compare different rentals so you don't forget important features of the different places you visited.

	Rental A	Rental B	Rental C
Address/Name of unit			
Terms & Conditions			
Date available			
Monthly Rent			
Date Rent Is Due			
Deposit			
Pets allowed			
Pet rules/deposit			
Late payment charges			
Length of lease			
Frequency of rent increases			
Subletting/breaking a lease			
Utilities included (water/sewer/heat/garbage/recycling)			
Other			
Dwelling			
Square footage			
Number of bedrooms			
Number of bathrooms			
Dishwasher/garbage disposal/microwave included			
Available storage			
Air conditioning			
Fireplace			
Amenities (pool, gym)			
Number of outlets per room			
Blinds/curtains			
Cable TV connection in each room			
Number of phone jacks			
High speed internet			
Decorating allowed			
Outdoor space			
Locks/security			
Noise level			
Neighborhood			
Safe walking outside after dark			
Safe for children to play outside			
Crime rate in neighborhood			
Issues with unsupervised children			
Neighbors loitering			
Noise level of neighborhood			
Near bus line			
Near work			



Don't Rent Trouble

It is recommended that you bring the following items for the first unit inspection and use them to check for problems.

- Flashlight
- Light bulb
- Hair dryer
- Pen/pencil and paper – to take notes of the property

Electrical

- Turn on each switch to see if it works. If there is no light bulb in the socket, use the one you brought.
- Check every outlet by plugging in your hair dryer and turning it on. There are problems, if a fuse blows out or the dryer won't turn on.
- If outlets or sockets don't work, there could be dangerous defects in the electrical system that could cause a fire.

Plumbing

- Turn on the sink and bathtub faucets to see if they work or leak.
- How long does it take to get hot water?
- Flush the toilet to see if it operates properly or leaks.
- Do drains operate properly?
- Are ceilings and/or walls stained or cracked? These may indicate a leaking roof, defective rain gutters, or defective plumbing upstairs. Water damage could cause the ceiling or walls to collapse.
- Look at the water heater to see if it is leaking.

Safety

- Does the rental unit have smoke detectors?
- Does the rental unit have carbon monoxide detectors?
- Are there deadbolt locks on the rental unit doors and building's exterior doors?

Windows

- Are there storm windows and screens?
- Very gently push on the windows to see if they are secure or loose in the frame.
- Do windows open and close?

Rodents and Other Pests

- Open cabinets and immediately shine in flashlight to detect roaches. Look for roaches.
- Look for rat and mouse holes and droppings in the back of cabinets and closets.

Heating and Cooling

- Even in summer, push the thermostat up to see if the furnace works.
- Even in the winter, turn on the air conditioner to make sure it works.



Interviewing Landlords/Property Managers

Here is a list of things to ask regarding the landlord/property manager and current tenants.

1. General Information

- How long have you been a landlord/property manager?
- What are you looking for in a prospective tenant?
- How soon are you looking to fill the unit?
- What payment methods do you accept for rent?
- Is crime an issue in this neighborhood? Has this property experienced any break-ins, thefts or assaults?

2. Rules and Policies

Rental agreement Applications

- Must prospective tenants submit an application for a rental agreement?
- Is a fee required with my application? If so, what happens to that money?
- Does the act of giving you an application commit me to signing a rental agreement?

Security Deposits

- How much is the security deposit? When must it be paid? When is it returned? What must I do to have my security deposit returned in full?
- Which financial institution will hold my security deposit?

Rental Agreement

- Will the rental agreement be written or oral? What rules and regulations must I follow upon signing the rental agreement? How much notice is needed to renew or terminate the rental agreement?
- What is the rental agreement duration?

Rental agreement Termination

- Is notice required to terminate or renew the rental agreement, or will it automatically renew for another year? When must notice be given and in what form? If the rental agreement automatically ends (terminates), will I have the first right to renew it?
- Is it possible to end, terminate the rental agreement before the stated date? What fee, if any, is charged for early termination? How much notice is required for early termination? In what form?
- If the rental premises are destroyed, does the rental agreement affirm my right to move elsewhere and cease paying rent?

3. Neighborhood

- Is the landlord/property manager familiar with the neighborhood?
- Does the landlord/property manager mention membership in any neighborhood group concerned about crime prevention or neighborhood improvement?



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4. Property Management On-Site

- Is there property management on-site?
- What is the process for dealing with emergencies or maintenance issues?
- Are there regular inspections?
- What is the policy for maintenance personnel entering the rental unit? Your landlord should follow a procedure for notifying you about entering the rental unit.
- How much notice is given prior to entering a property?

5. Unit Inspection

- Is the unit clean and in good repair?
- Does the landlord/property manager agree to make repairs? Does he/she sound sincere?
- Does the landlord/property manager listen to what you say?
- Does the landlord/property manager speak respectfully to and about other tenants?
- Does the landlord/property manager try to rush you into a decision?