

Screening Guidelines

The City Of Fond du Lac and the Fond du Lac Police Department are committed to developing cooperative relationships with landlords. The following is provided by the Fond du Lac Police Department to assist landlords in screening prospective tenants and keeping illegal activity out of their rental units. These are guidelines only, have not been reviewed by an attorney, and do not absolve property owners of responsibility for properly managing their business.

Introduction

- **Set the tone:** Advise prospective tenants of your screening requirements, that you monitor the activity at your property, that you cooperate with the police department and are alerted to police calls to the property, and that you regularly inspect the internal and external condition of the property.

Application

- Require that each adult applicant complete an application and provide two pieces of identification (at least one photo ID). Keep a copy of their ID's on file.
- Ask for all names (such as married or maiden names) that the applicant has used over the past 10 years.
- Be sure to have up-to-date applications forms and ask:
 - Have you ever been convicted for dealing or manufacturing illegal drugs?
 - Are you a registered sex offender?
 - Are you on probation/parole? If so, how can I contact you Probation/Parole agent?
 - Have you ever been evicted?
- Consider providing a copy of your written screening criteria to prospective tenants when you show them the property. This may encourage "self-screening" and also reduces claims of discrimination.
- Consider doing an application "interview" in which you ask the application questions and fill it out yourself. Advantages: You can read the writing, you can gauge the applicant's reactions to questions, and applicants should know the answer to most questions without having to think about it or look it up. For questions that they can't reasonably answer on site, allow them to call you back with that information.
- Criteria to use in denial of applications (including but not limited to):
 - Providing an application with false, incomplete, or omitted information.
 - Convictions for drug activity, violent crimes, sex offenses.
 - Certain civil court judgements, such as evictions and small claims actions.
 - Poor credit check.
 - Poor reference from previous landlord.
 - Excessive nuisance police calls (loud noise, disturbances, etc) to previous residences.\

*****If you use the same screening continuum for all applicants and accept the first qualified applicant, you should have no concern about discrimination charges.*****

Screening/Verifying Information

- Compare the information from the ID's with the information given on the application.
- Review the criminal history:
 - Check the Circuit Courts records in WI: <http://wcca.wicourts.gov/index.xsl>.
 - Check the WI Department of Corrections Sex Offender Registry at <http://offender.doc.state.wi.us/public/> and the National Sex Offender Public website at <http://www.nsopr.gov/>.
- Independently identify landlords and verify ownership of property through tax rolls.
- When calling previous landlords, allow them to provide the information. For example, ask, "What is the address of the property he rents from you?" "What is the monthly rent?" If this is someone posing as a landlord, they may not be able to answer open-ended questions. Ask if the tenant has given proper notice and if they are breaking their lease. Finally, ask, "Would you rent to this person again?"
- Run a credit check after using all of the free or cheaper resources. A credit check will help you verify sources of income/debt and provide past addresses to verify against the application. Social Security numbers can be validated at <http://www.ssnvalidator.com/>.

Other Screening Tips

- Watch out for Friday afternoon applicants willing to pay several months in advance in cash.
- Observe the way the applicant looks at the unit. "Good" applicants will likely be interested in checking out how the storage space is set up, how their furniture will fit, etc.
- Be aware that "fronts" (those posing as a tenant) are used often.
- Consider driving by applicant's current residence.

Lease Agreement

- Emphasize:
 - Subleasing is not permitted and that only those on the agreement may occupy the residence.
 - Guests are to stay no longer than two weeks without written consent from management.
 - To add any additional adult members to the household, that person will need to complete the application, provide ID's, go through the screening, sign the lease, etc.
 - The tenant is responsible for their conduct and the conduct of any guests on the property.
 - The tenants/guests will not unduly disturb the neighbors.

- No criminal activity is tolerated and will result in immediate eviction. Criminal activity includes but is not limited to drug activity, disorderly conduct, criminal damage to property, domestic abuse, etc.
- Consider using month-to-month leases (rather than yearlong)- this allows the landlord more latitude in removing a problem tenant as the tenant can be issued a “28 day termination notice without cause,” simply ending the lease.
- Have a “check-in/check-out” form, signed by management and tenant, indicating the condition of the property before and after the tenant occupies the unit. This helps support disputes regarding the security deposit and if there is actual “criminal damage” to the unit in which the tenant may be cited for.

Ongoing Management

- Keep the property in good condition. This attracts honest renters and may keep dishonest ones away. Also, if there are code violations, an eviction may be more difficult because the tenant can claim that the landlord is retaliating for the tenant reporting these violations.
- Continually monitor the physical condition of your property, including the landscape (such as lawn and sidewalks), trash removal, etc. Regularly do a “drive-by” to visually inspect the exterior.
- Regularly inspect the interior. This can be done by giving the tenant 12 hours of notice. An interior inspection is recommended at least every six months.
- Monitor police calls to your property-obtain the documentation from the police department and take appropriate action. Hold tenants accountable for their behavior and the behavior of their guests.
- Don’t bend the rules. When aware of any lease violations (including late rent), take immediate action.
- Get to know the neighbors, neighborhood associations, etc, for the area in which your property is located. Treat these people as allies and take action on any complaints.