

# Screening Guidelines

The police departments in the Town of Menasha and the cities of Neenah and Menasha are committed to developing cooperative relationships with landlords. The following is provided to assist landlords in screening prospective tenants and keeping illegal activity out of their rental units. These are guidelines only 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.
- ❖ Be sure to have up-to-date application forms and ask, "Have you ever been convicted for dealing or manufacturing illegal drugs?" and "Have you ever been evicted?"
- ❖ Consider the 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 (such as their date of birth, current address, employer, etc.). For the questions that they reasonably can't answer on site, allow them to call you back with the additional information.
- ❖ Deny the application for
  - Providing false, incomplete, or omitting information on the application
  - Convictions for drug activity
  - Some types of court judgments
  - Poor credit check
  - Poor reference from previous landlord

\*\* 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 criminal history:
  - Check CCAP for Circuit Court records in WI: <http://wcca.wicourts.gov/index.xsl>.
- ❖ Independently identify previous landlords. Verify ownership of property through tax rolls. For Winnebago County: <http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/tax/searchall.htm>
- ❖ When calling previous landlords, allow them to provide the information. For example, ask "How are you familiar with Joe Brown?" "What is the address of the property he rents from you?" If this is their friend 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?"
- ❖ Because there are costs involved, run a credit check after using all of the free or cheaper resources. Running a credit check will help you verify sources of income/debt and also provide past addresses, which should be checked against the application.

## ***Other Screening Tips***

- ❖ Watch out for Friday afternoon applicants willing to pay several months in advance with 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 the applicant’s current residence.

## ***Lease Agreement***

- ❖ Emphasize:
  - Subleasing is not permitted and that only those on the agreement may occupy the residence.
  - Guests (define “guest”) are to stay no longer than two weeks without the written consent of 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, criminal damage to property, domestic abuse, etc. (Remember the lease is a civil agreement and you need only a civil level of proof, not criminal.)
- ❖ Consider using month-to-month leases (rather than a year long lease) – this allows the landlord much more latitude in removing a problem tenant as the tenant can be issued a “28 day termination notice without cause,” simply ending the lease.

## ***Ongoing management***

- ❖ Continually monitor the physical condition of your property and any police calls to your property.
- ❖ Don’t bend the rules.
- ❖ Take action if neighbors call to complain, if you get notices from the police department, etc.
- ❖ Regularly drive by to do a quick visual inspection from the outside.
- ❖ 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.

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.