



# The BULLETIN

Quarterly news about Section 8 in Seattle • DECEMBER 2003 • For landlords and service providers

**1** PorchLight's telephone system upgrade is now complete. Learn about what's new.

**2** Inspectors explain why units fail inspections – and how you can make sure your unit passes.

**3** What happens after you submit a Request for Tenancy Approval? Read all about it!

## Managing the leasing process



Dear housing provider,

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Without 2,593 of you, the 5,772 very low-income families we serve would not have decent, safe and affordable housing. We appreciate your willingness to work with us to provide good homes to people who otherwise likely would be homeless, living in severely overcrowded conditions, or paying an intolerable portion of their incomes for rent.

In this issue we try to give you some tips on how to manage the leasing process smoothly. We tell you about the most common "fail" items in our inspections, so that you can prepare your unit to pass inspection on the first try. And we go over in some detail our new leasing process – what happens from the moment you agree to rent a unit to a family with a voucher, to your first check from the housing authority for the subsidized portion of your rent.

Those of you who have been with the program for awhile will notice some changes. We no longer ask the housing inspectors to determine whether your

asking rent is "reasonable" or not. We make that determination in the office, using rent surveys along with the inspector's evaluation of the physical condition of the unit. You may not agree with our initial determination, but it's usually worth further discussion. We are able to take into account some unit characteristics that may justify a rent above market, such as exceptionally large rooms or beautiful views. We want your business and we don't want to discourage you by underestimating the market value of your unit.

But often, as the article inside notes, the amount of rent is not limited by our determination of "rent reasonableness" (as we call it), but by the tenant's income. SHA's subsidy limits are designed to make it possible for families to pay no more than 30% of their monthly adjusted incomes for rent and utilities, but they can pay a little bit more – up to a maximum of 40% of income.

The fact that so many of our families have precious little "wiggle room" in the amount they can choose to pay above the subsidy limits is a testament to their need for the program, and for your participation in it. Thank you again.

We wish you and the people you love a wonderful holiday season.

KATHY ROSETH  
PORCHLIGHT DIRECTOR



### *Telephone update: transition is complete*

Good news! PorchLight's new telephone tree is complete and fully operational. Thanks to all of you who offered feedback and constructive criticism. We were listening, and we've instituted many of your suggestions to make the new automated system easier to use.

As we wrote in the last issue, our new system is designed to help you get the information you need faster than before. For useful contact numbers, see the back page. Also, keep in mind these tips for getting the most out of the new system:

**SORRY, BUT PRESSING "0" WILL NOT CONNECT YOU TO AN ATTENDANT.** When you call 206-239-1500, you will have to choose one of the options on the recorded menu to speak to an employee.

**YOU CAN STILL SPEAK TO A CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT QUICKLY.** Just choose option 1 (for the Section 8 department) from the main menu, then press 0 for a customer service agent.

**YOU CAN ALWAYS CONTACT STAFF MEMBERS USING THE DIRECTORY.** The automated directory (option 4 from the main menu) allows you to look up telephone numbers by employee name.

# Inspectors corner

UPDATED!

## *Why units fail inspections*

All rental units subsidized by the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) are required to meet federally-mandated Housing Quality Standards (HQS). HQS is a comprehensive program established by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure that the housing it subsidizes remains decent, safe and sanitary. SHA inspects Section 8 units before tenants move in and at least once a year for as long as the unit is subsidized by Section 8.

We are often asked by landlords how to prepare units to pass HQS inspections. That's understandable, because some HQS guidelines are complex and detailed. To help you prepare for inspections, we've compiled a list of common reasons for failure. Please note that we printed this list in a past issue, but we've updated some information since then.

If any of these items apply to your units, be sure to address all problems before your next inspection. Keep in mind that these are not the only criteria for failing an inspection, and that HQS covers many other aspects of a unit. For more in-depth information about HQS guidelines, visit our Web site at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org).

### COMMON REASONS FOR FAILED INSPECTIONS

- Utilities are not turned on at the time of the inspection.
- Gas or oil furnaces are not operating at the time of the initial inspection.
- Appliances are not working properly or have missing parts.
- The only smoke detector on any given level of a unit is located in a kitchen.
- Smoke detectors are not located near sleeping areas, on all levels, or in a common laundry room.
- Smoke detectors are not working properly, for example, they are missing batteries or their batteries are low on power.

- Outlet or light switch cover plates are broken or missing.
- Junction boxes or electrical panels are open, exposing wires and wire connections.
- Hot water tanks do not have a pressure/temperature relief valve and discharge line.
- Plumbing fixtures leak or drains are plugged.
- Window panes are broken or windows do not have locks.
- All the windows in any bedroom have non-releasing type security bars installed.
- Stairs with four or more steps do not have a railing. (This rule applies to both the interior and exterior of the unit.)
- Exterior doors have double-keyed deadbolts.
- Deteriorated paint is present on any surface of the interior or exterior of buildings, fences, concrete surfaces or other structures on the property. (This rule applies to buildings built before 1978 and occupied by children under the age of 6 or a pregnant tenant.)

### WHAT HAPPENS IF A UNIT FAILS INSPECTION?

If SHA inspects a unit and the unit "fails" the inspection, that means that items must be fixed before the unit can pass. Again, units must pass the HQS inspection to qualify for Section 8 subsidy. In most cases, owners will be given at least 30 days to make all necessary repairs.

Once all required items have been fixed, SHA arranges for a re-inspection of the unit. If the unit passes the re-inspection, the Inspection Team notifies the New Move In Team, and the approval process moves forward.

If the unit fails its re-inspection, however, the landlord will have to submit a new Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA) before the unit can be inspected again. (See "Working together" on page 3.)

## *Did you know?*

### Voucher holders can afford different rents

Landlords often ask why one Section-assisted tenant can afford to pay more – or less – for rent than another tenant even though SHA's subsidy limits (or "voucher payment standards") depend on bedroom size. The answer is that while subsidy limits are tied to bedroom size, the actual amount of rent a tenant can afford depends on another variable: tenant income.

Section 8 voucher holders are required to pay at least 30%, but not more than 40%, of their monthly adjusted income for rent and utilities each month.\* (SHA pays a

portion of rent to the owner that is large enough to allow tenants to afford both their share of the rent and tenant-paid utilities.) Because tenants contribute between 30% and 40% of their monthly adjusted income, their income partly determines how much rent they can afford to pay.

When tenants are issued vouchers, they are given a worksheet showing the maximum rent they can afford. You may want to ask if the rent you are proposing is at or below that limit when screening tenants.

\* Tenants can pay more than 40% after the first year.



## *News you can use*

# Important events for Section 8 landlords

### **SHA LANDLORD TRAINING – Third Tuesday of every month, 11 a.m. to noon, at SHA's PorchLight Housing Center.**

Join Seattle Housing Authority staff members for a free and informative workshop about how to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Topics covered will include: how to complete the Request for Tenancy Approval form; how utility allowances are calculated; how we decide if rents are reasonable; how we decide if rents are affordable; how long it takes to get an inspection; and general information about leases and contracts. The trainings will be held on the third Tuesday of each month. December's session is full, but call 206-239-1674 to reserve a place in January's training.



### **TRENDS CONFERENCE – December 9, Washington State Convention and Trade Center, downtown Seattle.**

Looking for a good place to network with other landlords, learn about local housing programs, and advertise your services? You may want to consider attending this year's Trends conference, which organizers say is the largest rental housing management conference and trade show in the Northwest. The 19th annual conference will feature a trade show, nationally recognized speakers, workshops and even an after-party. Organizers expect about 1,800 attendees and 190 booths at the event. Call 425-869-1444 for information or to register. Booth spaces are available.

A regular column about cooperation among owners, renters and SHA

## *Working together*

### What happens after you submit a Request for Tenancy Approval?

If you've submitted a Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA) lately, you know that there are several steps that must occur before a unit is approved and payments can begin. Because the process can seem confusing, we'd like to take this opportunity to explain how we process your RTA, and how you can help make the process as quick and easy as possible.

If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to call the New Move In Team at 206-239-1674. If you've already submitted an RTA and would like to know its status, please call 206-239-1635.

#### **WHAT IS A REQUEST FOR TENANCY APPROVAL?**

A Request for Tenancy Approval, or RTA, is the form that landlords submit after they've decided to rent to a Section 8-assisted tenant. If a tenant is interested in a landlord's unit, the tenant will give the RTA form to the landlord to fill out. (The tenant receives the form when he or she is given a voucher.) The Seattle Housing Authority must receive this form before the rest of the leasing process can occur.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

After SHA receives the RTA form from the landlord, the New Move In Team (1) checks that the form is completely filled out, (2) calls the landlord to verify all the information and (3) ensures that the unit's proposed rent is both reasonable (comparable to similar units in the same area) and af-

fordable (does not require the tenant to pay more than 40% of monthly adjusted income for rent and utilities). If the unit's rent does not meet one or both of these tests, the New Move In Team will call the landlord to negotiate a lower rent.

Please keep in mind that landlords are never required to lower a unit's rent, but a unit cannot be approved for the program if its rent is not both reasonable and affordable for the tenant.

Once the New Move In Team has completed its review of the RTA, it is sent to the Inspection Team. The Inspection Team then contacts the landlord to schedule a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection. The HQS inspection ensures that the unit meets federal standards of safety and cleanliness.

If the unit passes inspection, the Inspection Team will send the RTA back to the New Move In Team, and the New Move In Team will send the landlord a contract and a lease within 10 days of the successful inspection. After the landlord completes and returns the contract and the lease to the New Move In Team, the unit is approved and payments to the owner can begin.

If the unit does not pass inspection, the landlord is given an opportunity to repair deficiencies and the unit is re-inspected. If the unit passes the re-inspection, the RTA will be passed back to the New Move In Team, and the leasing process will continue as explained above. If the unit fails again, the RTA for the unit will be cancelled. Having an RTA cancelled does not mean your unit can never participate in the program; however, a new RTA will have to be submitted if a unit fails two inspections.

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Section 8-related issue or concern:  
 1) Call 206-239-1500.  
 2) Select option 1 from the main menu.  
 3) Select option 0 from the Section 8 menu.

### OCCUPANCY MANAGER

Barbara Strayer 206-239-1620

### OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

Special/agency-based: 206-239-1636  
 Mod. rehab./project-based: 206-239-1649  
 All other programs: 206-239-1619

### NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals: 206-239-1635  
 Report ownership changes: 206-239-1655  
 Fax: 206-239-1760

### ISSUANCE TEAM

206-239-1592

### OWNER LIAISON

Sven Koehler 206-239-1672

To list a unit with Section 8: 206-239-1663

Initial/annual inspections: 206-239-1645

Re-inspections: 206-239-1576

### INSPECTION SUPERVISOR

Deborah McCaslin 206-239-1621

### INSPECTORS

Bruce Brines 206-239-1689  
 Bill Francis 206-239-1631  
 Paul Gimmi 206-239-1632  
 Nancy Jones 206-239-1616  
 Sue Nigg 206-239-1639  
 Nancy Shutes 206-239-1646  
 Jeff Small 206-239-1669  
 Lora Wait-Hoy 206-239-1650  
 Mike Yost 206-239-1654

PorchLight telephone: 206-239-1500 | PorchLight fax: 206-239-1770 | PorchLight e-mail: porchlight.info@sea-pha.org

Did you know... that SHAs Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint services? Impact Property Services offers affordable, efficient service for your deteriorated paint problems. We have a high level of expertise from years of experience and respond quickly to service requests. We can provide both EPA certified lead-based paint risk assessors and EPA certified lead-safe workers, including painters and carpenters. Call us today at 206-932-4685 or 206-932-4243. ...that you can find support for owners on our Web site? Visit us at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org) today and browse the helpful resources under "Housing" and "PorchLight." ...that the City of Seattle provides free information about property owner rights and city ordinances? Call 206-684-7979 for more information.



Community services of the Seattle Housing Authority  
 907 N.W. Ballard Way, Suite 200  
 Seattle, WA 98107-4637

*Inside:*   
*New telephone numbers  
 for PorchLight*

What is PorchLight?  
 The PorchLight Housing Center is a division of the Seattle Housing Authority, the city's largest provider of low-income and affordable housing. PorchLight manages the Section 8 program and applications for public housing.

A focus on service  
 Located in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood, PorchLight is a place where people seeking housing assistance can learn about and apply for opportunities at a convenient one-stop location. We provide the highest quality customer service to clients, participating owners and all of our partners in Seattle's affordable housing continuum.

Want to learn more?  
 Call 206-239-1500 or visit us at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org) (click on "PorchLight"). We look forward to working with you!

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