



The BULLETIN

Quarterly news about Section 8 in Seattle DECEMBER 2007 For landlords and service providers

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2 What we need, and what we look at, before approving a rent increase

3 Let the prospective tenant decide whether an apartment is suitable

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Section 8 update

Overdue federal budget still up in the air



Dear housing provider,

AS WE PREPARED this issue of the *Bulletin* for printing, we got word that the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives have agreed on a compromise bill to fund the Department of Housing and Urban Development for fiscal year 2008—the fiscal year that began Oct. 1.

The Transportation-Housing appropriations conference committee agreed on a spending package on November 8. The conference bill was then taken up by the U.S. House of Representatives, which approved it by a vote of 270 to 147. The Senate is expected to pass the conference bill after returning from its Thanksgiving break.

The next step is for the bill to be sent to the president for his signature. However, the president has threatened to veto any appropriations bill that exceeds his proposed 2008 budget. The HUD bill is for a total of \$38.66 billion, an amount that exceeds the president's proposed 2008 budget by \$3.81 billion and 2007 spending levels by \$2.45 billion.

Details of the compromise bill have not yet been released, but according to one summary of funding levels, the bill provides \$16.4 billion for Section 8 tenant-based vouchers—some \$516 million above 2007 and \$436 million above the president's request. This figure was a compromise between House and Senate funding levels.

As noted, the federal fiscal year began October 1; SHA's fiscal year begins January 1. But budget-

ing and planning for SHA's next fiscal year are well underway. Shelly Yapp, SHA's chief financial officer, recently addressed the difficulty of budgeting in the face of an overdue budget and a promised presidential veto.

"SHA relies on HUD funding for about 75 percent of our operating expenses," Yapp noted. "Delays at the federal level in passing appropriations bills put us at risk of estimating our revenues to be too high or too low. If we overestimate HUD funding, we are in the position of having to cut back midyear to meet the funding level finally decided. If we underestimate HUD funding, we've lost the opportunity to increase or improve our housing services.

"All in all," Yapp continued, "we can't plan as effectively for our programs and services when HUD's funding is up in the air."

We will keep you posted on Section 8 funding as we learn more.

WE HAD A VERY GOOD RESPONSE to the daylong seminar on protecting investments and preventing crime we conducted jointly with Seattle Neighborhood Group here at PorchLight in July, and we're looking to host a similar seminar next year. If you have particular concerns you'd like to see addressed in such a training, or dealt with in our regular Landlord Workshops or here in the pages of the *Bulletin*, please don't hesitate to let me know.

I SPEAK for all of Seattle Housing Authority in thanking you once again for your participation in the Section 8 program. It is key to the program's success.

LISA CIPOLLONE-WOLTERS
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING ADVOCACY
AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
206-239-1523

On rent increases

Providing information is key; so is staying on top of tenant compliance

THE SEATTLE RENTAL MARKET has been hot for the past year or more, and many landlords are requesting rent increases from their tenants.

When an owner applies for an increase in a subsidized tenant's rent, SHA is obligated to determine whether the proposed new rent is reasonable. We ask what rent the landlord is charging for comparable, unassisted apartments at the same location. If this information isn't applicable, we look at market data from Dupre + Scott Apartment Advisors, Inc.

The factors that we look at are defined in the Code of Federal Regulations (24CFR982.507), which states, "The PHA must determine whether the rent to owner is a reasonable rent in comparison to rent for other comparable unassisted units. To make this determination, the PHA must consider: (1) The location, quality, size, unit type, and age of the contract unit; and (2) Any amenities, housing services, maintenance and utilities to be provided by the owner in accordance with the lease."

In order to consider a rent increase, we rely on information from our Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspectors. Although the inspectors are trained to evaluate units for rent reasonableness, and in the past used to do so, in 2003 SHA created the Owner Liaison position to consolidate this function. The Owner Liaison routinely reviews inspection reports before approving a rent increase.

If a rental unit has failed its most recent inspection, SHA's consideration of an increase is suspended until the unit is brought into compliance with the HQS.

In reporting that a given apartment is in below-average condition, SHA's inspector is attesting that maintenance has not kept pace with the age of the property, or that lease violations are not being dealt with, or both.

Damage caused by age (normal wear and tear), or by tenant non-compliance, or by weather, will reduce the value of a property and may affect the value of surrounding properties.

If issues of tenant non-compliance contribute to failed inspections at your property, please be sure to document them properly, and hold your tenants accountable for damage they cause.

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Seattle Housing Authority's policy is that tenants must comply with their lease. If a tenant is not doing so, we ask you to notify the tenant of the non-compliance and send a copy of that notice to this office. That way, SHA personnel know what's happening. From our point of view, in holding irresponsible tenants accountable for their behavior, you show that you care about your property.

In short, evicting tenants who are in clear violation of the terms of the lease helps maintain the value of your investment.

IF YOU EVER HAVE A CONCERN about an inspection that impacts a rent increase, please contact Mike Jung, Owner Liaison. We can try to work out a plan to get the results you're aiming for. The staff at SHA is committed to success—yours and the tenants' we subsidize. Mike's telephone number is **206-239-1672**,

and his e-mail address is **mjung@seattlehousing.org**.

Landlord

Tuesday workshops

Every third Tuesday
February through November
from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m.

Check our website for information about the workshops, which resume in February 2008. Go to **www.seattlehousing.org** and click on "Section 8 landlords" under "Housing"

Questions? Ideas for workshops?

Contact Mike Jung, Owner Liaison, at **mjung@seattlehousing.org** or 206-239-1672

Keeping clear of Fair Housing issues

Applicants should be shown any apartments they wish to view...

Applicant McArthur, who uses a walker, wants to view an available second-floor rental in a building with no elevator. Resident manager Rhonda insists that he rent an apartment on the ground floor. Is this lawful?

Although Rhonda may have a well-meaning concern for McArthur's comfort or safety in case of an emergency, these are not valid reasons to deny housing (or a choice of housing) to someone with a disability. It is up to Mr. McArthur to decide about his own mobility or safety. It might even be the case that his doctor told him to exercise by using the stairs.

Telling an applicant that he must rent on a particular floor or in a certain building because of his disability is "steering," and is illegal. If McArthur had requested to view only ground-floor accessible apartments, that's one thing. However, he wishes to see a second-floor apartment. If Rhonda steers him away from it, she would deny him an opportunity to live in the apartment of his choice.

Applicants should be shown any available apartments they wish to view, and should be permitted to decide where they would like to live within the community.

Russ manages a small apartment complex. Recently, the owner told him not to rent to people who are Muslim. Is this legal?

No. Even if Russ personally has no discriminatory intent, he would violate Fair Housing laws if he took this action at the direction of the owner. By asking Russ to act as a discriminatory agent, the owner is violating Fair Housing and fair employment laws. If the owner insists or subjects Russ to negative actions because he refuses to follow this directive, Russ could file a discrimination complaint with a civil rights agency.

Mrs. Stratton has owned and run her apartment building for 20 years. She trusts her instincts about choosing residents, so she runs credit checks on any applicants who seem questionable to her. Is this discriminatory?

While Mrs. Stratton has probably fine-tuned her instincts over the years, if she only runs credit checks on some applicants and not all of them, she is running the risk of discriminating based on protected class. Many people have unconscious biases, so Stratton might choose to treat some more stringently than others. Some people who may prove to be poor tenants may "look" okay initially, but she may

not know that until well after they've signed the rental agreement. Stratton will have more consistent results and fewer discrimination complaints if she establishes a fair and equal process for all applicants. It would be best if she ran a credit check on every prospective resident.

Applicants should be shown any available apartments they wish to view, and should be permitted to decide where they would like to live within the community.

Julie wants to rent a house from David, who, because he is concerned about maintenance, asks if Julie has a man around to assist her with yard upkeep and repairs. Is this discriminatory?

The Fair Housing prohibitions on advertising based on protected class apply to all written notices or oral statements by a person who rents a dwelling. It is illegal to express any preference for or limitation because of the sex of an applicant or tenant.

It would be OK for David to notify all applicants that the rental requires a tenant to perform certain specified repairs and to do yard maintenance. However, David should not act on an assumption that Julie can't manage the upkeep by herself because she is female.

Manager June requires that applicants show her a photo ID before viewing an apartment. Is this discriminatory?

Some housing providers have established a policy of requesting identification from prospective applicants, either for safety reasons or to verify identity. Fair Housing laws allow such a practice as long as it is applied consistently to all applicants. The practice becomes illegal when used because of an applicant's protected class. For example, if June required ID only from males of one race or national origin, that would be discriminatory.

Keep in mind that requiring a specific form of photo ID—such as a driver's license—may have a disproportionately adverse effect on members of a protected class. For example, some people with disabilities and people recently arrived from other countries may not have a driver's license. For an online list of documents that can help confirm or determine an immigrant applicant's identity, past rental history, credit history or ability to pay rent, see

www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/AppB.pdf

—Courtesy King County Office of Civil Rights

Inspector's corner

Winter brings a chorelist all its own

As winter approaches, the days grow shorter but the list of things to do grows longer. Here are a few things you may wish to add to your to-do list.

- ✓ Gutters, downspouts, storm and driveway drains need to be kept clear of leaves and other debris; and if gutters and downspouts leak, repair them.
- ✓ Leaves need to be raked and disposed of.
- ✓ Mold needs to be removed from slippery steps and walkways.
- ✓ Exterior lights should be checked to make sure they're working.
- ✓ If your rental has a fireplace or a wood-burning stove, this is a good time to have the chimney cleaned and the fireplace or wood-burning stove certified as safe.

- ✓ If necessary, remove screen doors and windows and replace them with storm doors and windows.
- ✓ Check the insulation of pipes in attics, basements and crawl spaces, and reinsulate if necessary.
- ✓ Check and clean the clothes dryer and kitchen exhaust systems, and clean the clothes dryer duct.
- ✓ Check the attic for proper ventilation (important for proper operation of a furnace).
- ✓ Check all the water hoses that connect to appliances to make sure there are no cracks or air bubbles; repair if necessary.
- ✓ Make sure the address is visible from the street. This helps both emergency responders and our inspectors.

—Paul Gimmi, Inspector



GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Section 8-related issue or concern, call 206-239-1728 and press '0'

TO LIST AVAILABLE UNITS

Call 206-239-1663 or go to www.seattlehousing.org and click on "Section 8 Landlords" under the "Housing" menu

TO CHANGE OWNER INFORMATION

NOTE: Changes must be submitted in writing
Fax 206-239-1770, attention Mike Jung
Questions? call Mike at 206-239-1672

SECTION 8 MANAGER

Barbara Strayer 206-239-1620

Phone: 206-239-1500 | Fax: 206-239-1770

E-mail: porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org | website: www.seattlehousing.org

OWNER LIAISON

Mike Jung 206-239-1672

OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

Tenant-based—
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1636
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1619
Mod. Rehab. & Project-based 206-239-1649

NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals—
contracts and leases
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635
New move-ins fax number 206-239-1760
New move-in team supervisor 206-239-1621

INSPECTIONS

Annual inspections & reinspections 206-239-1645
To reschedule inspections 206-239-1576
New move-in inspections—
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635
Judy Huertas, HQS supervisor 206-239-1621

HQS INSPECTORS

Bill Francis 206-721-1457, ext. 10
Paul Gimmi 206-239-1632
Sue Nigg 206-239-1639
Jonathan Shibuya 206-239-1616
Jason Shirley 206-239-1646
Nancy Shutes 206-770-6880
Laura Wait-Hoy 206-721-1457, ext. 11

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 it. We are committed to high-quality customer service to clients, participating landlords and our partners in Seattle's affordable housing continuum.

Want to learn more?

Call **206-239-1672** or visit us at www.seattlehousing.org (click on "Housing," then "PorchLight"), or come to our PorchLight landlord workshops every third Tuesday of the month, February through November, at 5:30 pm. (See p. 2.)

Did you know...

...that SHA's Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint abatement services? Impact Property Services offers affordable, efficient service to help solve your deteriorated paint problems. We have a good deal of expertise and years of experience, and we 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 Impact Property Services today at **206-716-1310**, extension 13.

...that you can find support for owners on our website? Visit us at www.seattlehousing.org today and click on "Section 8 landlords" for helpful information and resources.

...that the City of Seattle provides free information about property owners' rights and city ordinances? Call **206-684-7979** for more information.