

A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE

HATC version

Having a good place to live is important. Through the Public Housing Authority (PHA), under the Housing Choice Voucher Program you will receive help in renting a good place. You are free to choose any house or apartment you like, as long as it meets certain requirements for housing quality as well as program limitations on how high the gross rent may be based on your family's income and size. Under the Housing Choice Voucher Program, the tenant share of rent cannot cost more than the 40% of the tenant's monthly adjusted income. The PHA will give you other information about the way your part of the rent is determined. This pamphlet is to help you understand what the Housing Quality Standards are and why they are important to you.

Housing Quality Standards

Housing Quality Standards help to insure that your home will be safe, healthy, and comfortable. In the Housing Choice Voucher Program, there are two kinds of housing quality standards:

- Things that a home must have in order to be approved by the PHA;
- Additional things that you should think about for the special needs of your own family. These are items that you can decide.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program

The Housing Choice Voucher Program allows you to choose a house or apartment that you like. It may be where you are living now or somewhere else. The "must-have" standards are very basic items that every house or apartment must have. But a home that has all the "must-have" standards may still not have everything you need or would like. With the help of the Housing Choice Voucher Program, you should be able to afford a good home, so you should think about what you would like your home to have. You may want a big kitchen or a lot of windows or a first floor apartment. Worn wallpaper or paint may bother you. Think of these things as you are looking for a home. Please take the time to read *A Good Place to Live*. If you would like to stay in your present home, use this information to see if you want to move. Use it each time you go look for a new house or apartment, and good luck in finding your good place to live.

After you find a good place to live, you can start the Request For Approval of Tenancy process. You may find a place you like that has some problems with it. Check with your PHA about what to do, since it may be possible to correct the problems.

The Requirements

Every house or apartment must have at least a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. A one-room efficiency apartment with a kitchen area is alright. However, there must be a separate

bathroom for the private use of your family. (Except in the case of shared housing.)

Generally, there must be one living/sleeping room for every two family members.

General Requirements for All Areas

The ceiling must be in good condition. Large cracks or holes that allow drafts are unacceptable. Severe bulging or a large amount of loose or falling surface material is also unacceptable.

The floor must be in good condition. Not acceptable are large cracks or holes, missing or warped floor boards or coverings that could cause someone to trip.

No peeling or chipping paint is allowed on the inside or outside of the unit if you have children under the age of seven and the house or apartment was built before 1978.

All walls need to be in good condition. Not acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging, or leaning, and/or large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.

There must be a permanently attached lock that works on all windows and doors that can be reached from the outside, a common public hallway, a fire escape, porch or other outside place that can be reached from the ground.

Every window must be in good condition. Not acceptable are windows with badly cracked, broken, or missing panes, and windows that do not shut or, when shut, do not keep out the weather.

Kitchen

There needs to be storage space for food. At least one electric outlet and one permanent light fixture must be present. Table and floor lamps, or ceiling lamps plugged into a socket and extension cords, are not counted as they are not permanent.

Not acceptable are broken or frayed wiring, light fixtures hanging from wires with no other firm support (such as a chain), missing cover plates on switches or outlets, and/or badly cracked outlets.

A stove and oven that works must be present. (This can be supplied by the tenant).

There must be an area to prepare food.

If there is a window, it must be in good condition. A window that cannot be opened is acceptable.

There needs to be some place to serve food. A separate dining room or dining area in the living room is all right.

There needs to be a refrigerator that keeps temperatures low enough so that food does not spoil. (This can be supplied by the tenant).

A sink with hot and cold running water is required. A bathroom sink **will not** satisfy this requirement.

You should also think about:

- The size of the kitchen.
- The amount, location, and condition of space to store, prepare, and serve food. Is it adequate for the size of your family?
- The size, condition, and location of the refrigerator. Is it adequate for the size of your family?
- The size, condition, and location of the sink.
- Other appliances you would like provided.
- Extra outlets.

Living Room

There must be at least two electric outlets, or one outlet and one permanent light fixture. Do not count table or floor lamps, ceiling lamps plugged into a socket, or extension cords as they are not permanently attached.

Not acceptable are broken or frayed wiring, light fixtures hanging from wires with no other firm support (such as a chain), missing cover plates on switches or outlets, and/or badly cracked outlets.

You Should Also Think About:

- The types of locks on windows and doors. Are they safe and secure?
- Have windows that you might like to open been nailed shut? Are there small cracks in the window panes?
- The amount of weatherization around the doors and windows. Are there storm windows? Is there weatherproofing? If you pay your own utilities, this may be important.
- The location of the outlets and light fixtures.
- The condition of the paint and wallpaper. Are they worn, faded, or dirty?
- The condition of the floor. Is it scratched and worn?

Bathroom

There must be a window that opens or a working exhaust fan for ventilation purposes.

There needs to be a flush toilet that works.

A tub or shower with hot and cold running water must be present.

There must be at least one permanent overhead or wall light fixture. Not acceptable are broken or frayed wiring, light fixtures hanging from wires with no other firm support (such as a chain), missing cover plates on switches or outlets, and/or badly cracked outlets.

There must be a sink with hot and cold running water. A kitchen sink will not satisfy this requirement.

You should also think about:

- The size of the bathroom and the amount of privacy.
- The appearance of the toilet, sink, and shower or tub.
- The appearance of the grout and seal along the floor and where the tub meets the wall.
- The appearance of the floor and walls.
- The size of the hot water heater.
- A cabinet with a mirror.

Other Rooms

Other rooms that are lived in include: bedrooms, dens, halls, and finished basements or enclosed heated porches. The requirements for other rooms that are lived in are similar to the requirements for the living room and as explained below.

Electricity requirements are the same for bedrooms as that of living rooms.

In all other rooms used for living, there are no specific standards for electricity; but there must be either natural illumination (a window) or an electric light fixture or outlet.

There must be at least one window which must be openable if it was designed to be opened, in every room used for sleeping. Every window must be in good condition.

Other rooms that are not lived in may be an utility room for washer and dryer, basement, or porch. These rooms must be checked for security and electrical hazards and other possible dangers (such as walls or ceilings in danger of falling), since these items are important for the safety of your entire apartment. You should also look for other possible dangers such as large holes in the walls, floors, or ceilings, and unsafe

stairways. Make sure to look for these things in all other rooms not lived in.

You Should Also Think About:

- What you would like to do with the other rooms. Can you use them the way you want to?
- The types of locks on windows and doors. Are they safe and secure? Have windows that you might like to open been nailed shut?
- The condition of the windows. Are there small cracks in the panes?
- The amount of weatherization around doors and windows. Are there storm windows? Is there weatherstripping? If you pay your own utilities, this may be important.
- The location of electric outlets and light fixtures.
- The condition of the paint and wallpaper. Are they worn, faded or dirty?
- The condition of the floors. Are they scratched and worn?

Building Exterior, Plumbing, and Heating

The roof must be in good condition and cannot leak. If there are gutters and downspouts present, they must be in good condition and securely attached to building.

Evidence of leaks can usually be seen from stains on the ceiling inside the building.

There must be secure handrails on any extended length of stairs (e.g. generally four or more steps) and any porches, balconies, or decks which are 30 inches or more above the ground.

Exterior walls must be in good condition, with no large holes or cracks that would let a great amount of air get inside. The foundation must be in good condition and have no serious leaks.

There must be a plumbing system that is served by an approvable public or private water supply system. Ask the owner or manager what type of system the unit has.

There must be a plumbing system that is connected to an approvable public or private sewage disposal system. Ask the manager or owner what type of sewage system the unit has.

There can be no serious leaning or defects (such as big cracks or any missing bricks) in any chimneys.

There must be some windows that open, or some working ventilation or cooling equipment that can provide air circulation during warm months.

The plumbing pipes must be in good condition, with no leaks, and no serious rust that causes the water to be discolored.

The water heater must be located, equipped, and installed in a safe manner. Ask the manager or owner where the hot water heater is located and whether it has a discharge line and a safety release valve.

There must be enough heating equipment so that the unit can be made comfortably warm during cold months.

Not acceptable are space heaters (or room heaters) that burn oil or gas and are not vented to a chimney. Space heaters that are vented may be acceptable if they can provide enough heat.

You Should Also Think About:

- How well maintained the exterior of the house or apartment is.
- The type of heating equipment. Will it be able to supply enough heat for you in the winter, to all rooms used for living?
- The amount and type of weatherization and its effect on utility costs. Is there insulation? Are there storm windows? Is there weatherstripping around the windows and doors?
- Air circulation or type of cooling equipment (if any). Will the unit be cool enough for you in the summer?

Health and Safety

The building must provide an alternate means of exit in case of fire (such as fire stairs or exit through windows, with the use of a ladder if windows are above the second floor).

Make sure the elevators are safe and work properly. There must be an entrance from the outside or from a public hall, so that it is not necessary to go through anyone else's private apartment to get into the unit.

There can be no dangerous places, spaces, or things in the neighborhood such as: nearby buildings that are falling down, unprotected cliffs, or quarries, fire hazards, or evidence of flooding.

There can be no large piles of garbage and trash inside or outside the unit, or in common areas such as hallways. There must be a space to store garbage (until pickup) that is covered tightly so that rats and other animals cannot get into it. Trash should be picked up regularly.

The lights must work in all common hallways and interior stairs.

Interior stairs with railings and common hallways need to be safe and in good condition.

There should be no serious air pollution, such as exhaust fumes or sewer gas.

There should be no sign of rats or large numbers of mice or vermin (like roaches).

There must be at least one smoke detector on every level of the unit including one placed in the hallway where the sleeping rooms are located.

You Should Also Think About:

- The type of fire exit. Is it suitable for your family?
- How safe is the house or apartment for your family?
- The presence of screens and storm windows.
- Services in the neighborhood. Are there stores nearby? Are there schools nearby? Are there hospitals nearby? Is there transportation nearby?

In order for a house or apartment to be a good place to live, it must meet two kinds of housing quality standards:

1. Things it must have in order to be approved for the Housing Choice Voucher Program;
2. Additional things that you should think about for the special needs of your family:

You know that these standards apply in six areas of a house or apartment:

1. Living Room
2. Kitchen
3. Bathroom
4. Other Rooms
5. Building Exterior, Plumbing, and Heating
6. Health and Safety

You know that when a house or apartment meets the housing Quality Standards, it will be safe, healthy, and comfortable home for your family. It will be a good place to live.

After you find a good place to live, you can begin the Request for Approval of Tenancy process. When both you and the owner have signed the Request for Approval of Tenancy and the PHA has received it, an official inspection will take place. The PHA will inform both you and the owner of the inspection results.

If the house or apartment passes, a lease can be signed. There may be some items that you or the PHA would like improved. If so, you and your PHA may be able to bargain for the improvements when you sign the lease. If the owner is not willing to do the work, perhaps you can get him or her to pay for the materials and do it yourself.

If the apartment or house fails, you and/or your PHA may try to convince the owner to make the repairs so it will pass. The likelihood of the owner making the repairs may depend on how serious or costly they are.

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