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WINDOW

on rental housing

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2012 PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Student Housing, Tax Credit, Conventional and Senior Properties. No matter the type of community, all residents have questions about the ins and outs of rental housing. Here are some of the most popular questions heard by on-site management and a few answers given by management professionals.

Student Housing Residents

Residents at a student property near UT were asked several questions. Their answers may prove very interesting to anyone leasing to students or young renters.

Did you read the application paperwork and lease contract prior to signing it?


- Yes, though I didn't read the entire leasing contract paperwork.
- Not thoroughly, I relied on the leasing agent to clarify things and explain the entire process.
- Yes, I read the application paperwork and lease contract before I signed them.

Who makes the ultimate decision on where you choose to live...you or your parents?

- My parents, since they fund the majority
- My parents expect that I have done enough searching to know the market, so leave the decision up to me
- I make the ultimate decision on where I lease because, although my parents pay for most of my rent, they trust that I will find an acceptable place every year within their price range.
- I make the ultimate decision on where I live because I am responsible for paying my rent.

Did you agree with the charges that were taken out of your deposit or did you find them somewhat ridiculous?

- I usually agree with the charges that are taken out of my deposit because they're usually things I already expected (paint chipping, scuffs, and other minor damages).



COMMUNICATING EYE TO EYE

RESIDENT FAQs

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• I disputed charges to my account because they were clearly marked on my move-in condition form and I had a record of my e-mail correspondence with the leasing office regarding the existing problems in my apartment.

When the amenities are down or not working, do you blame and get mad at the management company or the other residents that broke them?

- I would be upset that the management was unable to give me the services that they promised upon signing, but I also understand that it's not the management's fault for a resident's irresponsible behavior.
- I am not upset when this situation occurs unless it has become a reoccurring problem or the issue has never been attended to.

• I think it depends on the situation regarding the amenities. If something isn't working simply because it has not been maintained I will blame the management. If someone deliberately breaks something, it's a frustrating situation because there are so many residents that it's hard to blame just one of them. So typically I will contact the management because it is ultimately responsible for making repairs.

What do you think is a reasonable turn around time for a work order to be completed?

- 24-48 hours is reasonable.
- Within 48 hours from the work order being submitted should be ample time for any minor repair. For major repairs, I would say a week is acceptable, as long as it's not an emergency.

• I think 48-72 hours is an acceptable turn-around time for a work order that is not an emergency. For an emergency I think 24 hours is appropriate considering they aren't nearly as common.

What do you think should classify as an emergency in order to get 24-hour maintenance to come out after hours?

- Things like an overflowing toilet, anything that breaks that makes loud noises and prevents sound sleep, etc.
- Major leaks and anything the company is responsible for (e.g. if the electronic locks simply are not working).
- Anything that hinders the resident from entering, or being able to do necessary or day-to-day tasks within their apartment.
- I think a major leak that is causing uncontrollable flooding in an apartment could be considered an emergency. I also think if an air conditioning or heating unit is not working during times of extreme heat or cold it should be considered an emergency.

How important is customer service in the office to you as a renter/resident?

- Very important. The leasing office is responsible for a lot of my personal information, and I want to feel that I can trust them with that information.
- Customer service is very important. A major part of where I lease depends on the environment of the leasing office and the friendliness of the people who manage the property.
- I think customer service in the office is crucial. If I feel as though I am not being respected as a renter I will be less likely to renew my lease out of worry for future disrespect from representatives of the leasing center. I also think that customer service is important because it shows that individuals in the office truly care about the residents, and if I have a problem, they will be more inclined to solve that problem.

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What influences your decision the most on where you live...amenities, price, location, etc.

- The customer service I receive for the year, how quickly maintenance requests were fixed, and definitely the management of the leasing office. If I can see that things are in disarray, or if I try to reach someone and they don't answer my messages, I feel I am being avoided.

- Amenities for the right price. Location is a big amenity to consider in and of itself.

- Location most influences my decision on where to live. The closer to campus, the better.

- Amenities are very important because I think this includes the maintenance of a community. A dirty, smelly, unmaintained property is the least appealing to me as a renter. While price comes in at a very close second, I will always pay more if it means that I will live in a visibly clean and well-maintained community.

What influences your decision to renew or not renew?

- Price is probably the biggest issue for me. I want to live in a place that is within a decent distance of campus or a bus stop,

and that has a nice pool and maintenance service, but if the price is far too high then I'll have to find elsewhere to live. College is very expensive for students like me that go to school on loans, so I'm fine with being further from campus and having less amenities if the price is fair.

- Not having to move if I can keep the same rate gives me no reason to leave.

- The customer service I received during my lease term and the general cleanliness of the property.

- My decision to renew is very highly based on how pleased I feel about the staff in the office, the condition of my apartment upon arrival, and the circumstances surrounding my time as a resident. I am more inclined to renew if there hasn't been any particularly large problem that I've faced that hasn't been immediately addressed by the management.

Would you prefer to tour, lease, submit work orders, etc. online or with an actual person? How much does the in-person experience mean to you?

- I would prefer to submit work orders online, but I would prefer to sign my lease and tour in person, that way any of my questions that I have can be answered. Personal experience is important in the beginning of the leasing process to me because I

feel that I have a relationship with someone in the leasing office who will understand if I have serious maintenance issues or leasing questions.

- I would never lease without going on tour in person, but would like to have online tours to refer to. After signing I would like to be able to pay rent online and submit work orders online.

- I would prefer to tour and lease in person, however it is much more convenient to submit work orders and be able to have my general questions answered online, just because of my busy class and work schedule. The in-person experience is important because it's an indicator of how the customer service will be for your entire lease contract.

- I would prefer to tour and lease in person because of the seriousness of the situation regarding signing a lease and choosing a place to live under a certain contracted period of time. I would prefer to submit work orders and other simple requests online because of the lack of personality in those things. A tour is better to be done in person because of the opportunity to ask questions and receive opinions from the person doing the tour. I also think the lease done in person is better because there are sometimes un-

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Communicating Eye to Eye

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clear parts in a lease that include more legal jargon that the layperson isn't familiar with, and these can always be made clear by a representative of the leasing office.

Now the tables have turned. Residents at a conventional property, a tax credit property and a senior property were given the opportunity to ask the management questions. Read on to see what is on the minds of residents about rental housing and how their managers answer those questions.

Conventional Property Residents

I live in the same floor plan as my neighbor, but he pays less in rent. Why is that?

Every apartment home has its own unique value. That value can be based on the apartments' interior design, exterior surroundings and other factors. The market also changes daily so the price of an apartment one day could be different the next.

Why does it cost so much for me to break my lease, when you are just going to move someone else in immediately anyways?

The cost is solely for the breakage of a legally binding contract before the specified end date. The cost is not associated with rent.

My renewal rate keeps going up each year. I have been a good resident, paid my rent on time, and feel like I am being penalized with increased rent. Why does the rent go up for loyal residents like me?

Each year the market rates will vary. Our objective is to keep each apartment home comparable to the market and this is why you are seeing an increase. We appreciate your loyalty; is there anything we can do for you in your apartment home to spruce it up?

What does the pet fee and pet rent cover? It seems silly to pay these fees for my animal.

The pet fee is the cost for having a pet on the property. The refundable deposit is to cover any damages to the apartment

home caused by the pet. There is required pet rent to cover the costs of pet waste station maintenance and replacement and maintenance of the dog park and other landscaping.

Tax Credit Property Residents

What keeps you so focused on our lives?

What always keeps management focused in residents' lives is taking the time to listen, help or contribute to each resident's concern, question or issue, no matter what the circumstance might be. Sometimes doing the smallest things for others, turns out to be the biggest impact in their lives. Positive changes, providing great feedback and seeking out resident satisfaction make the difference between living in an apartment community and a place residents can call home.

What is fair housing?

Fair Housing is to ensure that we, the Apartment community management, follow all laws, rules and regulations

to ensure that each resident is treated equally and fairly.

Senior Property Residents

Diana Walker, Property Manager at Wildflower Terrace says the most frequently asked question she gets as manager of a Senior Property is, "What happens if I get sick or have to move to a higher level of care?"

"Fortunately," says Diana, "both Capstone and DMA allow management to exercise compassion and don't punish seniors for health issues they have no control over." "I have always accepted a thirty day notice without a penalty."

"Sometimes," Diana says, "some 'smarty pants' comes up with, 'What happens if I just drop dead? There is no 30 day notice then.'" Her response? "Well, we'll pretend that there is someone who is going to miss you, why they may even have a service for you! They will need the thirty days to take care of your business for you."

Political Monitor

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makers are considered by opponents—and sometimes even declared—illegal! In times like this, it is the Austin-based Third Court of Appeals that hears these cases, often referred to as parties "seeking declaratory judgment." This court makes rulings on Texas statutes as well as departmental rules such as the Texas Department of Licensing & Regulation (TXLR), the TABC or the TCEQ.

Speaking of the State Legislature, Texas will soon convene its 83rd Legislative Session. Every two years, for 140 days and starting the first Tuesday in January, Austin plays host to 150 State Representatives, 31 State Senators, thousands of lobby-

ists and the staff that comes with all of them. Many AAA members house lawmakers, staffers or seasonal residents in their communities, which is a wonderful way to show by example how positive and important the multifamily industry is to the lives of so many Texans. Although local associations' leadership and staff tend to focus on local regulatory issues, during these five months out of every 24, eyes turn toward the statehouse. For obvious reasons, AAA members have a close view of what is going on, and in urgent times could be called on for testimony, guidance or participation. During the TAA Capitol Conference, we will coordinate visits to our delegation, and as always would love to know if members

have relationships with elected officials. Through organic connections like shared congregations, children that go to school together, neighbors, friends or familial ties, these relationships can be cultivated in a mutually beneficial way. When lawmakers are being deluged with information, there is often great appreciation to hear from a personally trusted source. If you have a personal relationship like this, please consider contacting AAA staff to discuss how you can get involved on a grassroots level.

In the current issue of "Texas Apartments," David Mintz offers a great overview of the TAA affirmative legislation. These initiatives include efforts to revive submetering owners' rights to shut off utilities for

non payment, and protection for properties who encounter back-to-back annual disputes with appraisal districts. Find more on page 38 of the Fall 2012 issue.

So now the elections are behind us and we know a little bit more of what to expect from the coming months and years, it is time to direct our focus back to the policymaking process. As always, if you have questions, comments, or if you are interested in getting involved with legislative affairs, please contact Rachel Fischer in the AAA office at 512 323 0990 or rachel@austinnaptassoc.com.