



Finding a Place to Live

Choosing a place to live should not be a rushed job. A tight housing market sometimes makes this impossible, but it is best to be as cautious as possible. There really is no one best way to search for housing. The method you choose will depend upon your needs and budget.

Where to Look

Friends are a great first source to tap. They might know of places available for rent or of people who will be moving. Friends can also give you a general idea of how much to expect to pay for rent, utilities, food, etc.

Other places to look include:

- The housing file in the Office of Residential Services. The file has current listings from landlords renting in the WPI area.
- On the web, use the WPI Apartment Finder System for current listings from landlords renting in the WPI area.
- Newspaper classified ads in the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette* and the *Worcester Magazine* (a free weekly magazine).

Questions to Ask

Before making your final decision, be sure to ask your landlord the following questions:

- Does the rent quoted include all utilities, heat, and hot water?
- Will a security deposit be required? How much?
- Are there any plans to sell, renovate, or raze the building? Does the lease contain a provision to protect your tenancy?
- What is the landlord's policy on picture hanging? Does he or she only permit stick-on type hangers or allow small nails? If you plan to paint or wall paper, get the landlord's permission in writing.
- Where are neighborhood conveniences such as stores, laundromats, and public transportation?

- Are pets allowed?
- Where can you and your guests park your cars?
- Are children allowed? It is discrimination if they are not.
- Are there storm windows and doors?
- Who controls the thermostat for the unit? This is especially important if your landlord pays the heating bills.
- How many units are on the same hot water heater? It is illegal for units to share a heater.
- If there is a fireplace, can you use it?
- Where do you dispose of trash, and how often is it collected?
- Where do you pick up your mail?
- Will the landlord change the lock before occupancy at his or her expense? The last tenant might still have a key to the existing lock.
- How will maintenance be handled? How do you report damages, and who will make repairs?
- Can you add an air conditioner? Is there adequate wiring?
- What is the policy regarding subletting? Can you add a roommate without the rent increasing?

Real Cost of Renting

There will be other cost considerations when looking at housing in addition to the rent. Other considerations include the cost of utilities, travel to work or school, and renter's insurance. Before renting, you should try to estimate the cost of these extras by talking to other tenants and the landlord. You should consider insuring your property from the possibility of theft, fire, or personal injury liability; a landlord's insurance policy seldom provides coverage for these circumstances. A security deposit and last month's rent are also often required.

Roommates

Friends usually are a good choice for roommates since they often have something in common. But even the closest of friends do not necessarily make great roommates. An incompatible or irresponsible roommate can ruin an otherwise enjoyable housing experience. It is often helpful to sit down with your roommate in advance of moving in and discuss mutual concerns together. You can reduce the likelihood of arguing by coming to some basic agreements about your living arrangement.

Issues to Resolve

Before you decide on a potential roommate, it is a good idea to share some of your needs. It is best that roommates have a clear understanding of each other's expectations to avoid arguments. Some, but certainly not all, of the issues you might want to discuss are:

- Study habits
- Socializing and partying habits
- Cleanliness, tidiness, and neatness
- Bill paying
- Borrowing each other's clothes, money, cars, stereos, or other personal belongings
- Hosting friends or overnight guests
- Buying and preparing food collectively or individually
- Alcohol and drugs
- Pets
- Housekeeping responsibilities
- How problems and differences will be resolved

Responsibility

Tenants are jointly and individually bound to the lease. Therefore, after both you and your roommate have signed the lease, if one of you breaks the agreement or fails to pay the rent, the other can be evicted or required to pay the rent in full. It is very important to find a responsible roommate.

Discrimination

Discrimination may exist when a landlord says there are no places available when there are, refuses to rent to you, or gives you an unfair lease that is different from that of other tenants. A landlord may not discriminate against you because of race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, physical or mental handicap, children, sexual orientation, or marital status. A landlord may also not discriminate against you because you receive welfare or other public assistance or because of your military status. If you feel you have been discriminated against in renting, contact:

Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination
1 Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108
+1-617-727-3990

US Department of Housing & Urban Development, Boston Office, +1-617-994-8223
Office of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity, +1-800-669-9777