Housing Search Tips

TYPES OF LEASES

- An **individual lease** is when a tenant signs for a single room, meaning s/he is individually responsible for paying rent and any damages to the room. However, this may also mean the landlord can place any tenant in remaining rooms in the apartment or townhome. Be sure to ask about this before signing your lease.
- A **joint lease** is a lease signed by all tenants, making the entire group responsible for damages and paying the full rent. This places the choice of filling empty bedrooms in the apartment or home on the tenants themselves.

STEPS TO FINDING A PROPERTY AND ROOMMATES

**Identify what your needs and expectations are for a property and roommates.**

- Consider: Budget, Number of Roommates, Location, Building structure, Condition, Amenities, etc.
- A Self Quiz is available from Off Campus Student Services to assist you in identifying your needs.

**Look for roommates, if needed.**

- Word of mouth is the most popular way roommates locate one another.
- Roommate profiles are available for review on Offcampus.housing.vcu.edu
- Meet and discuss:
  - Expectations of one another. Similar expectations will lead to successful living arrangements.
  - Expectations range from looking to share unit/costs to looking for their new best friend.
  - Costs: What are your budgets? What is most important to each of you in a unit/location?
  - Habits: What are your habits like? Neat or messy? Early riser or night owl?

**Locate properties that meet your needs:**

- Listings available at offcampus.housing.vcu.edu
- Various other search engines: Rent.com, Craigslist, Zillow, etc.
- VCU Facebook Groups- Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Housing, Sublets & Roommates, the Housing page within the VCU group.
- Printed materials-Brochures, Apartment Navigators
- Walk through areas in which you are interested. Many landlords simply post signs in the windows or yards for vacancies in properties in high traffic areas.
- Word of mouth is the most common way that rooms/units are passed down to one another.

**Narrow your list of properties to 3 - 5 properties**

- See if there have been past complaints about the landlord, company, or property. Make sure you talk to past tenants.
- Call and set up tours
  - Complexes may have model units and will be able to assist you quickly.
  - Private landlords and property management companies will need to give their tenants notice prior to allowing you to enter their unit. This can take a few days to arrange.

**Touring properties.**

- Bring:
  - List of needs/wants
  - Potential roommates
  - Parents/Guarantors/Co-Signers
  - Phone/Camera
  - List of Previous Residencies
  - ID and Check

- Discuss:
  - Type of lease
  - Average utility expenses/are utilities included?
  - Maintenance procedures
  - Roommate matching process

- Note what you:
  - SEE- Damages, leaks, cracks in windows, etc.? Why haven’t these been fixed?
  - SMELL- Does a neighbor smoke and you can smell it? Are you living above a restaurant? Etc.
  - HEAR- Is there a bar nearby that you can hear late at night? Is there a train nearby? Etc.

Submit a completed application for properties you are most interested in
Application fees are normally around $40
Applications are not binding
Applications allow for the landlord to run a background and credit check on you

Secure a co-signer
A co-signer will need to meet the financial obligations required by the property. Usually they will need to be a US citizen, make 3x the monthly rent, and have good credit.

Review and sign the lease
Note:
- Start/End dates
- Costs (rent, deposit, utilities)
- Rent (due dates, fees, how to pay)
- Roommates listed on lease
Make sure the co-signer and roommates are present
Have security deposit and first month’s rent with you
If you need help interpreting or reviewing your lease, bring it to OCSS.

Set up utilities and pay deposits
Obtain Renter’s Insurance
Check if you’re covered by your parents’ Homeowner’s insurance before getting Renter’s Insurance.
A good policy will protect your property, and save you from unexpected costs.
Most policies are affordable (less than $20 a month), and a great investment, but you should always compare prices before deciding on a policy.

Move-in
Arrange to buy/rent furnishing if unit is not furnished
Pick up your keys, complete move-in inspection (note any damages, and submit them to your landlord in written form via certified mail).
Fill out a Roommate Agreement signed by all tenants to establish expectations and responsibilities of each party.

SAFETY TIPS
Research
- When touring units, note all security measures available to you - dead bolts, gates, security guards, etc.
- Sign up for VCU alerts
- Richmond Police provides a list of incidences for public review at: Crime Incident Info or RAIDS

Payments and requests
- Always get a receipt for rent payments
- Written terms will always reign over oral promises made by the landlord
- Put all requests for maintenance, or any other remedy, in writing and send it via certified mail
- When you move out, create another damage report to send to the landlord so you don’t get charged for damages you are not responsible for.

Secure your property
- Always lock your doors
- Keep windows closed and locked as well as any sliding glass doors
- Utilize blinds or shades, especially at night
- Keep any valuables out of sight when your vehicle is parked.

Out and about
- Stay with friends
- Do not walk alone
- Use well-lit routes
- Know the hosts of any party you attend
- Have a way to get home safe

Host a safe party
- Register your party at prtysmrt.com
- Always know who’s in your home
- Be aware of occupancy limits of your apartment and overcrowding any decks/balconies
- Report suspicious behavior and call the police if uninvited guests refuse to leave
- Have a sober host present at all time