

Considering Tenants With Pets? by Thomas Miller

In a competitive rental market, sometimes you have to change your strategy in order to make a profit. This article was written to help property managers decide and/or prepare for allowing tenants to have pets. It should also illustrate the need of property managers to do some research before changing any policies regarding tenant selection.

Some property managers look to expand into renter markets that are often ignored or considered too high risk in order to fill a vacancy or even fill a building. It may be in your best interest to consider changing your pet policy, rent to low income tenants, change the term of your lease or adjust some other criteria for selecting tenants. The changes you make can frequently result in filling vacancies and/or allow you to charge a premium amount for rent. The additional rent is likely justified by supply and demand of comparable apartments, by increased risks or by additional costs involved in turning over an apartment more than once a year.

With any change in policy you have to anticipate problems and adjust your strategy to reduce risk and expense. An excellent source of information is your local Apartment Owners Association, but you have to ask appropriate questions to get helpful answers. You need to ask questions that aid you:

- In your screening process
- In helping you to develop the appropriate addendums
- Identifying problems in their early stages

Many property managers love to share their war stories about problems with pets, but what you want to learn is if they observed any warning signs of trouble and what circumstances might have contributed to the problem. Ask them what they would do to screen renters or add to their addendums to protect their investments and avoid problems. The following information is meant to help you to decide to accept or reject renters with pets. It should also aid in developing a strategy to reduce risk and expenses.

1. **The process starts with screening prospective tenants.** References are the best indication as to whether or not a tenant will take proper care of both the pet and the property. I prefer to have at least two references from previous property managers indicating the tenant had a pet and took proper care of the pet and the apartment.
2. **Property managers have to make sure the tenant has enough available time for the proper care of a pet.** Tenants that work full time or go to school full time and have a social life usually are not good care givers for pets. Typical pets such as cats and dogs need more than just a few hours a week to properly care for them. I have found that young people who truly love animals will often listen and consider the best interests of the animal when you point out that the animal need more time for proper care.

The best care givers are usually retired people, disabled people or couples that have one or the other person around the apartment most of the time.

3. **The number of units you have to manage in a building should greatly influence your decision when considering allowing a pet.** Allowing one tenant to have a pet sends a signal to the other tenants that you are now allowing pets. You probably don't want pets in larger complexes due to the unavoidable chain reaction of tenants getting pets without your permission when they see another tenant with a pet. To help avoid problems, you have to inform the other tenants of your policy change and what criteria they have to meet in order to get a pet themselves.
4. **You must be informed as to the specific problems associated with each type of pet and decide what your policy is going to be regarding that type of animal.** First contact your insurance agent to get a list of any animal that would increase your insurance costs or expose you to risks that are not covered. They should have additional information regarding risk factors that companies look for in specific breeds and types of animals.

Some examples of problems and solutions to consider for common pets are as follows:

DOGS:

Problems: Scratching doors, barking, biting, digging holes in yard, fleas infesting the carpet, damaging carpet.

Suggestions: The tenant with a dog has to cut the lawn and pick up the excrement, require extra amount for security deposit, pet justifies landlord requiring carpet to be professionally cleaned due to "above normal wear and tear", tenant must restrain or remove dog for showings.

CATS:

Problems: Male cats spray to mark territory, can scratch walls, doors or trim, infest carpet with fleas.

Suggestions: Require additional security deposit, pet justifies landlord requiring carpet to be professional cleaned, restrict tenants to female cats.

Remember that bad experiences can sometimes be due to your lack of knowledge rather than it is to expanding your policy to include pets. Responsible pet owners are out there, you just needed to learn to recognize them when they apply and be able to protect your interests when you rent to them.

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