

Falmouth Housing Authority

RESIDENT HANDBOOK

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Office Hours: Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Closed Wednesday afternoons 12:00 noon – 4:30 p.m.
Weekend and after hours phone number: 508-548-1977

WELCOME

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and the staff of the Falmouth Housing Authority, welcome to your new home ! Wherever you have come from, we hope you settle in nicely and find good neighbors around you. Our experience shows that the best way to find good neighbors is to be one !

Our job as a housing authority is to insure your individual right to safe, decent, affordable housing at the same time that we comply with the many regulations that govern our administration of properties. We are required to make decisions about tenant selection, rent collection, expenditure of funds, establishment of maintenance programs, and plans for modernization. We use state and federal funds to do this, and we are bound by state and federal regulations. Our obligation is to do this job in such a way that your right to safe, decent, affordable housing is insured.

The expectation is that you will learn the terms of your lease and live by them, thus cooperating with us in creating a good living environment. Enjoyable conditions, including privacy, safety, neighborliness and peace, are greatly dependent on how tenants behave towards each other. We believe that each individual in public housing has an obligation to show consideration and respect toward others. The housing authority cannot allow interference with the right of every individual to an enjoyable living environment.

This handbook offers suggestions and requirements for working together. We hope you will use it as a guide for maintaining pleasant living conditions. Please take the time to read it, and follow its recommendations.

Housing Authority staff members are available to assist you with lease questions, maintenance requests, home services, etc. We welcome your questions and comments.

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As You Move In

Orientation. On the day you sign your lease we will give you information about the lease, the apartment or house, and the complex or neighborhood where you will be living. We will explain your rights and obligations as a tenant and ours as a landlord.

Condition of Premises Form. One of our responsibilities is to be sure your new Apartment is in tip-top condition. It has been thoroughly cleaned, painted, possibly re-carpeted, and all utilities and equipment have been restored to good working order. Under the terms of your lease you are responsible for leaving the apartment in the same condition in which you received it, except for normal wear and tear. Before you move in a "Housing Quality Standard" inspection is performed, with a report filed at the housing office which you may read if you wish. In addition, you will find on page 6 a "Condition of Premises" form. Please note anything we may have missed and return it to us within ten days of moving in. A maintenance worker will then make reasonable repairs.

The lease. *It is your responsibility to read the lease* and any additions to it, and question whatever may be unclear. The lease is legally binding, which means that a violation of any of its provisions may be cause for eviction.

Mail. Individual mailboxes are located in the lobbies of Harborview and Tatakot. You will receive a key to your box when you sign the lease. Mail is delivered to the door at Salt Sea and Choate.

Telephone. Apartments and houses are pre-wired with wall-hung and outlet telephone jacks. Arranging for telephone service is your responsibility. Telephone wires must not run under carpets or over door openings in such a way as to constitute a trip hazard. We ask you to call us with your new phone number as soon as you receive it because it must be on file at the housing authority office, even if unlisted or non-published. It will be used only when a staff member must reach you, and will never be given out.

Cars. If you own a car that will be parked at an apartment complex you will be asked to register it with us. We will provide FHA stickers for your bumpers so that the police can easily see that your car belongs at the complex.

If a guest stays overnight with you, his or her car must show a "Visitor's Parking Permit" on the dashboard, also for security reasons. A yellow permit can be obtained from the housing office or from the tenant leader.

Parking. Parking is available for all resident cars at all five complexes. There is no *assigned* parking. The exception is people with handicap placards or plates who are given a numbered space which is theirs alone. Any resident or guest or care-giver may park in any un-numbered space at any complex.

Unregistered or disabled cars, and cars without FHA bumper stickers or a Visitor Parking Permit, if parked in FHA lots are subject to towing.

After You Move In

Occupants. Your household is restricted to people listed on your lease. Anyone you would like to have living with you must begin the application process at the Housing Authority and receive approval before he or she moves in. Guests unauthorized by the Housing Authority who decide to live with you can cause you to be evicted.

Guests. Family and friends are welcome to visit when you are at home. At State complexes a guest may stay up to 21 days but you must receive permission from the office first. The intent of this policy is to insure fairness and peace in a neighborhood by prohibiting non-tenants from living in the apartment leased to you. The policy does not mean that someone can visit for 21 days, leave for a couple of days, and come back. It does not mean that Guest A leaves after 21 days and then Guest B comes in for 21 days. It does not mean that a guest can be there if you are not there. It does not mean that a guest can come 3 or 4 days every week for 6 months. It does not mean that a guest can be there if you are not there. We have rented the apartment to you and you alone. One of our expectations is that you will respect the guest policy. Rules for tenants also apply to all visitors and guests, and you are responsible for their behavior. Should a guest violate the lease, it is the same as if a household member had done so.

Pets. *Before* you take a pet into your apartment you must have permission from the Housing Authority. You will be asked to sign a Pet Rider to be attached to your lease, and become familiar with pet policies, which include scrupulous clean up of animal waste. We will need proof of inoculations and neutering, and the name of a responsible person to take care of the pet in your absence. The pet deposit of \$150 can be paid in a lump sum or in monthly installments. Be sure to call first if you intend to have a pet.

Rent. In compliance with State regulations, your rent is calculated at 30% of your adjusted annual income. "Adjusted" means your gross income from all sources minus medical deductions like insurance, prescriptions, doctor and dentist visits. The regulations are published by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). A change in your income must be reported to us within 30 days. The change may not affect your rent, but you are obligated to report it. Failure to report can be grounds for eviction.

Rent is due on or before the first business day of the month. If rent is not paid by the 5th of the month, the tenant's account is delinquent. Accounts with a pattern of delinquencies will be subject to eviction. Additionally, if the rent is unpaid for more than 30 days, a \$25.00 late fee will be imposed and a private conference may be scheduled. Either payment of the rent or a signed repayment plan will be required. If neither is obtained, the tenant will be presented a "14-Day Notice to Quit" and the eviction process will begin.

If you are facing a financial emergency and need special consideration, please ask for an appointment with the financial manager *before* your rent is overdue.

Application for Continued Occupancy. Every year we enter a process called “recertification” to determine your continuing eligibility and the amount of your rent. Every tenant is required to fill out a packet of forms, with help from a staff member if needed. You will receive your packet in plenty of time to prepare for a designated day when staff members come to your community room to receive your information for the coming year.

Transfers. If the size of your household changes or if you experience a medical problem that your doctor determines would be corrected in a different location, you may ask the Executive Director in writing for a transfer. The cost of rehab of the original apartment and rent during the move are the responsibility of the tenant. Transfers are rare, and are based on availability and proof of need.

Grievance Procedure. If you disagree with a decision made by the Housing Authority, you have the right to appeal. Please present your request in writing.

Resident Social Services. A service coordinator is prepared to offer help and to make referrals in cases of personal care needs, housekeeping, hospital discharge, difficult neighbors, transportation, reasonable accommodations for a disability, etc.

Maintenance Policies

Only FHA maintenance workers may alter or install anything in the apartment.

Repair Requests. If your apartment/home is in need of repair notify the Housing office at 508-548-1977. Be specific about the problem, as all requests are logged and prioritized. Leave your name, phone number, and address, and tell us whether or not we have permission to enter your residence if you are not there.

If your call comes in after normal business hours, it will be received by our answering service. If the call is of an emergency nature, the maintenance person on call will be notified and will respond immediately. If you reach the answering service, please do not use your phone until after the person on call returns your call.

Emergencies. Priority will be given to any call describing such situations as fires of any kind (after you’ve called 911), gas leaks, electric power failure, broken water pipe, water will not shut off, sewer or sink or toilet blockage, no heat or hot water, lock-outs, ice on walkways. Plugged toilets that are clearly due to tenant behavior, grandchildren’s play, for example, may cost the tenant approximately \$65.00. We ask you to call *immediately* if something falls into the toilet accidentally, because sooner or later the item is likely to cause a blockage.

When the emergency is a fire, or you need medical help, or there is a crime in progress, dial **911**. See page 11 for how **911** works.

Tenant Responsibilities –Inside. You are responsible for the basic upkeep of your residence. This means keeping appliances, walls, floors, light fixtures, kitchen vent fans, windows and window coverings clean. The kitchen fan, for example, has a filter which is easily removed and washed in soapy water.

You are also responsible for disposing of trash properly. Covered gray “toters” at most complexes are provided for the deposit of newspapers, magazines, junk mail, flattened cereal boxes, etc. stuffed into bags. Some complexes provide bins for aluminum, plastic and glass. Trash not suitable for recycling must be tied into plastic bags and deposited in dumpsters or left in designated trash rooms.

Changes and additions to the interior of your apartment must be done by staff. Tenants may not change or add locks, re-paint walls, add wall paper or borders, install ceiling fans, or use glue to affix decorative objects to the walls. Reasonable use of picture hooks is permitted.

Damages to your residence, common areas, lawns, appliances, walls, windows, doors, screens, or equipment *caused* by you or your guests will be repaired at your expense. For example, transferring pots directly from stove to counter top causes scorch marks. If the FHA has to make such repairs, you will be billed for material and labor costs. Most repairs are due to normal wear and tear and you will not be charged.

Tenant Responsibilities – Outside. Pleasant surroundings have a positive impact on fellow tenants and neighbors. Outdoor areas need to be kept neat and orderly. Outdoor furniture, toys, hoses (drained for winter), gardening equipment, etc. need to be stored properly. Lawns need to be cared for and mowed when appropriate. Tenants who own pets must clean up after them. The rules developed by gardening committees must be respected. Trees must not be planted next to housing units. No outside feeding of animals, wild or domestic, is allowed. Unregistered or disabled vehicles must be removed.

Storage space is limited to your apartment. The basement is for the Falmouth Housing Authority equipment, heating and hot water, telephone and electric.

Appliances. The Housing Authority provides a stove and refrigerator in each unit. It is the tenant’s responsibility to keep these appliances clean. Should you have questions or problems about their care or maintenance, call the office. Please note that no alterations may be made or additional major appliances installed without permission.

Coin-operated washers and dryers for the use of tenants (only) are located in each complex. Personal washers and dryers are not permitted. Very heavy items such as comforters and rugs must be taken to a commercial laundry. Health care workers are given first access to the machines.

Inspections. Every year a Public Housing Inspector will check the condition of your residence. He or she will look at rooms, appliances, basements, smoke detectors, outside areas, and general housekeeping. A written report will be submitted to the Housing Authority, the State, or HUD. The FHA then makes repairs, and may schedule follow-up inspections in cases of poor housekeeping or fire hazard.

Utility Costs. With the recent skyrocketing price of heating fuels, FHA asks for full cooperation in helping to contain costs. Windows and doors cannot be left open for long periods in winter. Air conditioners cannot be run on winter days. Lights should be turned off when not in use. When the Housing Authority becomes aware that these guidelines are not being followed, rent adjustments may be necessary.

Keys and Locks. The tenant is given one key. All locks are keyed to a master system. Tenants are not permitted to change locks under any circumstances. A door lock destroyed by tenant action will be replaced at a cost of \$150.00 to the tenant. If emergency entry results in damage because of an unauthorized lock, the tenant will be charged for repairs.

Lock Outs. From 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday, there is a \$35.00 charge for opening the door to your residence, as long as we have positive identification from the person requesting this service -- the tenant or someone listed on the Occupancy Form filed at the Office. Outside of these hours, and on Sundays and holidays, there will be a charge of \$65.00. Please tell the receptionist or answering service where the maintenance person can find you when he or she answers the call.

Amenities. FHA provides window shades. Residents supply their own curtains, curtain rods, and (required) shower curtains. Tenants may use picture hooks with reasonable discretion. Tenants supply their own light bulbs except in ceiling fixtures.

Cable service is provided to Housing Authority apartments for a monthly charge of \$25.00, which is added to the rent bill. Additional service is the responsibility of the tenant at his or her expense.

Gardens: Attractive grounds are a delight to everyone at a complex, and residents are encouraged to keep gardens. Certain guidelines apply: Flowers can be planted against the front or back of the unit in gardens up to two feet wide. Fencing, rocks, bricks, edging, etc. cannot be used because of interference with mowing. Gardening equipment cannot accumulate in an unsightly way on porches or walkways during the growing season, and needs to be stored indoors in the fall -- along with flower pots, window boxes, decorative objects, and summer furniture. Plants or shrubs outside the two-foot limit will be removed by the maintenance staff. Vegetables can be grown only in a community garden plot.

Cost of Maintenance Services. There is no charge for repairs due to normal wear & tear. Damages caused by residents or their guests that are *not* the result of normal wear and tear will be charged to the tenant. Plugged toilets reported outside of normal business hours cost \$65.00. Also see emergencies, page 8.

Installation of an air conditioner costs the tenant \$35.00. Removal for the winter for storage within the unit costs \$15.00.

The removal of discarded cars, furniture or other items left on the property will be charged to the tenant.

Health and Safety

Personal emergency. Occasionally the Housing Authority gets a worried call from family or neighbors or police that a tenant has not been seen or heard for some time. If there is no response to your telephone or front door, we will consider the situation a possible emergency and enter your apartment unannounced.

The pull cords in bathrooms and kitchens of apartments summon neighbors by an alarm audible near your unit. With them you can decide whether to call **911**.

How 911 works. Pressing or dialing 911 on your telephone summons Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's), the Fire Department, or the Police. Your name and address appear on the 911 screen as soon as you make the call, and help comes, even if you are unable to speak or if you hang up. The 911 operator will ask whether you need police, fire, or medical personnel. Someone is on the way even before your call is completed.

If you wish, medical information about yourself to be displayed also, so that the EMT's can arrive better prepared to address your particular conditions or disabilities, you can fill out an "enhanced 911" form available at the Housing Office.

Security. Tenants are urged to take such common-sense precautions as using outside lights at night, admitting only known people to the apartment or building, using workers from accredited agencies for in-home help, and reporting suspicious persons or activity immediately to the police, 508-457-2527 or **911**.

Alarm Systems. The smoke alarm outside the bedroom door will sound if there is excessive smoke in the unit. Because it covers the whole apartment, it is important to keep your bedroom door open while you're asleep.

The heat detector (fire alarm) over the stove signals the Falmouth Fire Department directly when there is a sudden rise in temperature, from flames, for instance. Residents should immediately vacate their building when this happens and watch for help to arrive.

Fire Safety. Every tenant chooses an emergency “buddy”, someone who lives nearby, to look out for in the event of a fire or other emergency. The two are responsible for each other when the alarm sounds, and may also decide to check in by phone on a daily basis, especially when there is illness or extreme age.

Be sure you have a clear plan for getting out of the building safely in the event of smoke or fire. Choose the closest, quickest route to the outside. If your unit has two exits, keep both of them clear of furniture or possessions.

Whenever the fire alarm sounds, go to your meeting place away from fire-fighters and equipment, and sign in so you can be accounted for.

Choate Lane	center of grassy courtyard visible from front door
Rose Morin	grassy or paved areas outside living room doors
Salt Sea	the flag pole

Surprise drills are conducted occasionally. Tenants who are unable to leave their apartments unaided display a white towel or cloth which, along with reflective stickers on their doors, signals to the emergency workers that they need help.

The Housing Authority does not recommend fire extinguishers. We recommend leaving the apartment immediately, pulling the fire alarm box on your way out or calling 911 from a safe place.

Keep small appliances unplugged when not in use, including those designed to turn themselves off. Be extra careful of coffee makers, irons, potpourri burners, slow cookers, and candles. Outdoor gas grills must be 10 feet from the building when in use.

Extension cords. For safety reasons the Housing Authority discourages the use of extension cords. Outdoor unattended use of extension cords out of windows or doors is not permitted, except for no-heat holiday lights from the first Saturday in December to the first Saturday in January.

Insects and Pests. The Housing Authority will arrange for extermination services, if necessary. We require proper housekeeping habits of tenants to minimize the chance of trouble in the apartment or adjoining apartments. The accumulation of trash, garbage or soiled laundry that can attract vermin is not permitted.

No outdoor feeding of birds or animals is permitted, with the one exception of feeders for songbirds. Leftover food may not be tossed outdoors because of the scavenger birds and animals that it attracts.

Storms. Our maintenance crew works around the clock when a severe snow storm comes, according to a pre-set list of priorities, to clear walkways and driveways at the five complexes. All sidewalks, parking areas and streets are plowed after a snow storm with notice to tenants about moving cars so this job can be done thoroughly. If you have a special situation, such as a medical appointment the morning after a snow storm, please call. If we are threatened with a hurricane, special instructions will be given for complexes likely to be affected.

If You Move Out

Thirty Day Notice. You are asked to notify the Housing Authority in writing 30 days before you plan to move out, as outlined in the lease.

Moving Day. Please be considerate of your neighbors and do not work very early in the morning or very late at night. Be sure you do not obstruct hallways or walkways in apartment buildings, or use more than one elevator. Damage to hallways, doors, light fixtures, etc. may result in charges to you. For security reasons, do not allow anyone to prop doors open when unattended.

Personal Property. It is your responsibility to move *all* belongings in your residence by the move-out date. If you leave items behind you may be charged for their removal.

Keys. Please do not leave keys inside the apartment. Return your keys in person directly to the Housing Office. At this time you will settle your account with the financial manager. Any pet deposit will be mailed after the apartment has been inspected.

Forwarding Address. Please include the Housing Authority on your list of agencies to notify of your move, so we can forward your mail.

Farewell. Your opportunity to return to a Falmouth Housing Authority apartment at some time in the future would depend on your record as a tenant. We wish you well in your new location.

