



# ST. PETERSBURG'S GUIDE FOR RENTERS

*The City of St. Petersburg is committed to helping renters attain safe and secure housing by enforcing housing habitability standards and discouraging evictions through strong tenant protections. This guide helps tenants through the rental process - from finding the right place to finding legal help with eviction, if needed.*





## **PREPARING TO RENT**

### **BUDGETING FOR YOUR RENTAL**

Before looking for the perfect place to rent, start by getting to know your budget and understanding all the costs associated with renting. Generally, renters should use no more than 30% of their gross income for rent.

Common upfront costs:

- Application fee(s)
- First and last month's rent
- Pet deposits
- Renters insurance
- Security deposits

Common recurring costs:

- Amenity fees
- Pet Fees
- Parking fees
- Utilities

### **RESOURCES**

Find resources for the rental process, budgeting, and financial assistance at [stpete.org/renters](https://stpete.org/renters).

### **FINDING A RENTAL UNIT**

Market rate rental units can be searched through several different online resources. Find resources at [stpete.org/renters](https://stpete.org/renters).

### **JAMESTOWN APARTMENTS**

The Jamestown Townhouse and Apartment Complex is a 76-unit residential community designed for low-to-moderate-income residents. This unique housing community is owned and operated by the City of St. Petersburg and is located close to the heart of the City's downtown area. Learn more at [stpete.org/renters](https://stpete.org/renters).

## **BEFORE YOU SIGN THE LEASE**

### **FOUND A UNIT?**

The City of St. Petersburg has tools that you can use to check properties for habitability, code violations or evictions and be sure the unit you are interested in meets minimum housing standards.

### **RENTER'S MAP**

Search our Renter's Map at [stpete.org/RentersMap](https://stpete.org/RentersMap) to check for a history of interior code violations or





## ASK QUESTIONS

- What is the move in/move out process like?
- How long is the lease term?
- What utilities or amenities are included or not included in the rent cost?
- How much is the security deposit?
- When is rent due and how do you pay the rent?
- Is renters' insurance required?
- Is subletting allowed?

## RENTAL AGREEMENT RED FLAGS

- Rental opportunities that sound too good to be true probably are.
- Be aware of vague listing details or being asked to sign a lease without seeing the property.
- Beware of oral rental agreements, they can be subject to misunderstanding and are difficult to prove.
- Be cautious about providing payment via wire transfers or cash apps.

evictions at your desired rental unit. Having difficulties navigating the map? Contact the Codes Compliance Assistance Department at 727-893-7373 to get information about the history at a specific address.

## READY TO SIGN YOUR LEASE?

### PROTECT YOURSELF

- Before you sign the lease, make sure you read and understand terms of the agreement.
- Always make copies of your lease or download a copy of your lease if your landlord uses a portal. It's possible you lose access to your lease if the property management changes or if your account gets locked.
- Most rental agreements are written because oral agreements can be subject to misunderstandings and are difficult to prove.
- Before you move in and prior to moving out, conduct a walk-through with the landlord and document any damage with photographs.







## INTERIOR WALKTHROUGH CHECKLIST

The City has put together a simple checklist to use when doing a walkthrough of a rental unit to ensure it meets minimum standards.

### Bathroom(s)

- Bathroom is supplied with hot and cold water
- Bathroom has an electrical outlet
- Floors prevent penetration of water and are easy to keep clean and sanitary
- Bathroom contains sink, toilet, and tub or shower that are in good repair and in proper working order
- Every bathroom must have a ceiling or bracket light with a wall switch control

### Ceilings

- Ceiling is maintained in sound condition and good repair, free of holes, cracks, loose plaster and flaking paint

### Floors

- All interior floors are free of holes and cracks
- Floors are safe to use and capable of supporting a normal load
- Floors are insect proof, rodent proof, and sanitary

### Electrical

- Electrical wiring is safe and capable of being used and is installed in accordance with the City's electrical code
- All wall outlets have cover plates \*Outlets that don't work or extension cords running from one area to another are red flags

### Habitable Rooms

- At least half of the room has a ceiling height of seven feet or more
- All sleeping areas have at least one openable window or door which allows immediate exit to the outside
- All habitable rooms have at least two separate and remote electric receptacle outlets



## Heat/AC

- ❑ Equipped with permanent heating equipment that allows the occupant to solely control and operate
- ❑ Air Conditioner (if equipped) is in working order and maintained in good repair

## Insect/Pest Extermination

- ❑ Dwellings must be free of insects, rodents, or other pests

## Kitchen

- ❑ Hot and cold water supplied to kitchen
- ❑ Refrigerator is in proper operating order
- ❑ Electric or Gas stove (not portable) is in proper operating order
- ❑ Floors are maintained and prevent penetration of water and are easy to clean and keep sanitary
- ❑ Has ceiling or bracket light with wall switch control
- ❑ Kitchens greater than 50 square feet must have at least three separate receptacle outlets
- ❑ Kitchens less than 50 square feet must have at least two separate receptacle outlets

## Maintenance

- ❑ All parts of structure are maintained in a safe, sound, and sanitary condition and in good working order

## Plumbing

- ❑ Plumbing meets the standards of the City plumbing code and maintained in good repair
- ❑ Plumbing facilities must be connected to a public sewer system or other approved sewage disposal system
- ❑ Every dwelling unit must be supplied with a hot water heater or other central hot water system in good working condition that supplies hot water to the kitchen and bathroom(s)

## Repairs

- ❑ Repairs and/or alterations must be performed in a workmanlike manner

## Smoke Detector

- ❑ Unit is equipped with at least one smoke detector that is in good repair and works properly

## Stairs

- ❑ Stairs are in sound condition and good repair, safe to use and capable of supporting a normal load

## Walls

- ❑ All interior walls are free of holes, cracks, loose plaster and flaking paint
- ❑ Walls have protective coating such as paint or paneling
- ❑ Walls are capable of supporting a normal load

## Windows

- ❑ Windows are in good repair and are capable of being secured in an open position and locked in a closed position
- ❑ Windows are water-tight, weather-tight, rodent-proof, and insect-proof
- ❑ Window screens are in good repair to protect against insects and pests for each window







## RENTERS' RIGHTS

### HABITATION REQUIREMENTS

All rental units must be fit for habitation and maintained to minimum property maintenance standards, including but not limited to:

- Doors/windows that function and lock; walls, ceilings, floors, and interior finishes maintained in good repair
- Electric and plumbing maintained in good repair with hot water supplied to kitchen(s) and bathroom(s).
- Permanent heating source must be provided, and all provided appliances must function as intended.

If there is an issue with your unit for which you have not assumed responsibility under your lease, contact your landlord as set forth in your lease. If your landlord does not address the needed issue within a reasonable timeframe, issues can be reported to the Codes Compliance Assistance Department at 727-893-7373.

### WITHHOLDING RENT

You may be able to withhold your rent if your landlord fails to do what the law or rental agreement requires. **Note, failure to follow proper procedures to withhold rent may lead to eviction.** Visit [stpete.org/RenterRights](http://stpete.org/RenterRights) for more information.

Florida Law does not allow a landlord to force a tenant out by:

- Shutting off the utilities or interrupting service, even if that service is under the control of the landlord.
- Changing the locks or using a device that denies the tenant access.
- Removing the tenant's personal property from the dwelling unless the action is taken after the surrender, abandonment, or recovery of possession of the rental unit due to lawful eviction or the death of the last remaining tenant



## RETALIATION AND DISCRIMINATION ARE ILLEGAL

A landlord may not raise your rent or threaten to evict you because you reported a health or safety violation or filed a fair housing complaint. A landlord cannot treat you differently because of your race, nationality, disability, or sexual orientation, among other criteria. If you feel you have been discriminated against or retaliated against, contact the Pinellas County Office of Human Rights at 727-464-4880.

## EVICTION RESOURCES

Seek help as soon as you know you will not be able to pay rent. Find Legal help before you receive a notice from your landlord. If you do get a “3-day notice” or any written notice that you have to pay or leave, reach out to legal aid the same day you get that notice. Your possible solutions depend on how soon you get legal assistance.

The eviction process moves fast. As soon as you are aware an eviction has been filed against you, seek legal assistance.

- Be on the lookout for your summons. This will tell you how much time you have, to respond to the eviction complaint and deposit any past due rent into the registry.
- If you receive your summons and you’re not sure when your deadline is, call the Pinellas County Clerk’s Office at 727-464-7000.
- You can call legal aid for assistance with your answer or use the Jacksonville Area Legal Aid Defense Form Builder to make it yourself.
- You can file your answer, deposit your rent, and file any additional relevant evidence (photos, receipts, proof of payments) at the Downtown St. Petersburg Courthouse at 545 1st Ave. N.
- If you are using the drop boxes in front of the courthouse, make sure your documents have your name and case number. Do not include cash payments.
- You are still responsible for your rent payments as they become due. You can be evicted if you fail to continue to pay rent into the registry.

- If there are maintenance issues at the unit, do not hesitate to call the Codes Compliance Assistance Department for an inspection and request a copy of your violation notice.

## FIND ASSISTANCE

The following agencies are available to provide assistance to renters facing eviction.

### 211 Tampa Bay Cares

211 or text your zip code to 898211

[211tampabay.org](http://211tampabay.org)

Free referral service for housing, food, health insurance, and more

### Community Law Program

727-582-7480

[lawprogram.org](http://lawprogram.org)

Free legal assistance for low-income residents

### Bay Area Legal

800-625-2257

[bals.org](http://bals.org)

Free legal assistance for low-income residents, seniors and veterans

### Gulfcoast Legal Services

727-821-0726

[gulfcoastlegal.org](http://gulfcoastlegal.org)

Free legal assistance for low-income residents

### Self Help Center

[mypinellasclerk.org/Self-Help](http://mypinellasclerk.org/Self-Help)

727-582-7941

Procedural assistance for court-approved forms and procedures; only available for those not already represented by an attorney

### Defense Form Builder

[jala-docassemble.org](http://jala-docassemble.org)

A questionnaire that will assist tenants in creating their response to the court when facing eviction

### Florida Senior Legal Helpline

888-895-7873

### Florida Veterans Legal Helpline

866-486-6161

### Lawyer Referral Service

727-461-4880

Low-cost attorneys for hire, open Monday-Thursday 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

### City of St. Petersburg Utility Customer Service Call Center

727-893-7341

Residents that are having trouble paying their utility bill can call to make payment arrangements, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday





This initiative supports Mayor Welch's Pillars for Progress: Housing Opportunities For All. Learn more about Mayor Welch's five Pillars for Progress and six Principles for Accountable and Responsive Government at: [stpete.org/vision](http://stpete.org/vision)

More about the Housing Opportunities For All Plan and the progress made so far can be found at: [stpete.org/AffordableHousing](http://stpete.org/AffordableHousing)



Codes Compliance Assistance  
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727-893-7373