# Being a good landlord

**Great neighbourhoods start with you.**

THE CITY OF Waterloo
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# How to reach us

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## NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the neighbourhoods website to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

## ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

## GUIDE VERSION

This guide was last updated March 2026.

# About this guide

The oldest tip in the landlord handbook: if you have good tenants, try to keep them! Good tenants, who respect your property, are friendly, and pay their rent on time, make being a landlord easier.

Second oldest tip: to keep good tenants, you must be a good landlord. This guide provides landlords with valuable information and resources to help form positive relationships with tenants and be a good landlord.

### REVIEW YOUR LEASE

In Ontario, there is a basic lease template that landlords of private residential units must use. To obtain a copy of the lease template, visit the Government of Ontario website. Carefully review this document and develop a strong understanding of your rights and responsibilities as a property owner.

In the basic lease template, there are sections that can be customized. For example, you can chose what utilities are covered under the rental fee and what items are the tenant's responsibility to pay. When a new tenant is signing a lease, take time to review the agreement and the details included. Ensuring tenants have a strong understanding of the lease agreement, the rental rules, and their responsibilities, can help prevent future surprises and conflict.

### KNOW THE LAW.

There are laws in Ontario to protect both landlords and tenants. It is important to review these laws and understand how they apply to you as a landlord. Rules surrounding evictions, leases, rent increases, and more can be found at the Government of Ontario website.

In Ontario, the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) resolves disputes between residential landlords and tenants. The LTB also dictates the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants under the *Residential Tenancies Act.*

The LTB provides helpful learning resources for tenants and landlords. Check out this list of informational brochures:

- Information for New Tenants
- Summary Guide to the Residential Tenancies Act
- How a Landlord Can End a Tenancy
- How a Tenant Can End Their Tenancy

## BE MINDFUL OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION.

When selecting tenants, be mindful of fair housing and avoid discrimination. Listen to prospective tenants and do not make quick judgements.

In Ontario, the *Human Rights Code* applies to both tenants and landlords. Under the *Code,* everyone has the right to equal treatment in housing without discrimination and harassment. Landlords are also responsible for making sure housing environments are free from discrimination and harassment. For more information on the policy of human rights and rental housing, visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission website.

## MAINTAIN YOUR PROPERTIES.

The *Residential Tenancies Act (RTA)* and the City's Property Standards Bylaw, outline legal obligations for landlords and the maintenance of their properties. For more information on maintenance requirements outlined in the *RTA,* visit the Landlord and Tenant Board maintenance and repairs brochure. For more information on the Property Standards Bylaw visit the City of Waterloo's Property Standards Bylaw webpage.

According to the City of Waterloo Property Standards Bylaw, property owners, including landlords, are responsible for property maintenance, relating to both the exterior of the property, the exterior of the buildings, and the interior of the buildings.

Tenants are encouraged to contact their landlord first if they have a maintenance concern, prior to reporting their concern to City officials. When a tenant reports an issue landlords should work to perform repairs in a timely manner. To prepare for urgent issues, you are encouraged to develop a business relationship with appropriate contractors, such as plumbers and electricians.

If a maintenance concern is not addressed and is reported to the City, a property standards officer will investigate. If a violation of the bylaw is found, an order to comply (work order) may be issued to the landlord.

## MAINTAIN COMMON AREAS

In multi-unit buildings, maintaining common areas, such as hallways, lobbies, and outdoor spaces, is also important. If these areas are clean and damage-free, residents will be more inclined to maintain their unit. Consider hiring a cleaning service or outdoor maintenance company.

## PERFORM SAFETY INSPECTIONS

To promote the safety and well-being of your tenants and properties, consider performing annual inspections to assess the safety of the property. These inspections should include:

- testing smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors and replacing batteries as necessary
- checking vents and making sure they are free from buildup
- examining internal and external pipes for combustion

## HAVE A VALID RENTAL LICENSE

Rental licences are required for low-rise residential rental units (three storeys or less) in Waterloo. These licences ensure safe living conditions for tenants and guarantee that property owners have insurance, functioning HVAC, safe electrical systems, regular fire inspections, and comply with zoning. These licences must be renewed annually. For more information, visit the City of Waterloo's bylaw webpage.

In addition to rental licences and the property standards bylaw, bylaws relating to adequate heat, and snow and ice removal, apply to property owners. As a landlord, make sure you are familiar with bylaws in Waterloo.

The adequate heat bylaw mandates suitable temperatures in rental units. The minimum temperature is 21°C. If the rental unit is heated at the owner's expense, the owner must provide minimum heat. The main source of heat cannot be a space heater. Failure to comply with this bylaw could result in charges or a work order at the owner's expense. For more information, visit the adequate heat bylaw.

## SNOW AND ICE REMOVAL

According to the City's property standards bylaw, landlords are responsible for snow and ice removal on private property and sidewalks connected to the residence. Snow and ice must be removed within 24 hours of a snowfall.

If a property owner fails to clear their sidewalk within 24 hours, crews contracted by the City may be sent to clear them. The costs associated with this work, including potential administrative fees, will be invoiced to the property owner. If this invoice is not paid, the costs may be added to the tax rolls for the subject property.

Residential landlords and tenants may develop separate service agreements for snow and ice removal. These service agreements may assign the responsibility of snow removal to the tenant.

## FIRE AND LIFE SAFETY

To promote the safety and well-being of your tenants, it is important to ensure that smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms are maintained in working order. Landlords should also:

- Provide tenants a copy of the smoke and CO alarm instructions.
- Replace smoke and CO alarms before they expire (check manufacturer instructions).
- Make sure smoke alarms are installed on each storey and outside all sleeping areas.
- Ensure CO alarms are installed next to each sleeping area.
- Make sure CO alarms are installed when a property has a fuel-fired appliance (ex. gas furnace or water heater) or a fireplace.
- Test, inspect, and maintain all fire and life safety systems.

Testing smoke and CO alarms are simple ways to keep your tenants safe. Make sure to check your alarms:

- once a year
- before a new tenant moves in
- after a battery is replaced
- when a change is made to the electrical circuit

## COMMUNICATE

Communicating with your tenants is important for establishing positive tenant-landlord relationships. Here are some general tips to help with communication:

- Establish a process for reporting damages or repairs. Ensure tenants know that you want to be notified immediately of any damages or issues with the properties. Provide the tenants with preferred contact information.
- Remember that tenants are your customers. Make sure all communication is professional, not personal.
- Offer multiple avenues for communication. Provide both a phone number (for calls and/or texts) and an email. Remember some tenants prefer communicating through different means.
- Respond to tenants messages and calls in a timely manner. If you are planning a vacation or are taking time off, notify your tenants that your response may be delayed or provide an alternate contact.
- If a tenant has a concern, listen carefully and do your best to address the issue.

- Check-in with your tenant, especially if they are new to the property. This opens the door for communication and ensures tenants feel comfortable reaching out when there is an issue.

Developing a clear communication process can help promote timely repairs, prevent confusion, and reduce conflict between you and your tenants.

## RESPECT TENANT PRIVACY.

Regular inspections or visits to the property could create anxiety for tenants. Try to keep inspections and property visits to a minimum – once or twice a year is recommended. Respecting the tenant's privacy and not being intrusive contributes towards good tenant-landlord relationships.

Before performing maintenance or visiting the property, you must notify tenant's 24-hours prior to scheduled entry.

## EXERCISE COMPASSION

Treat tenants as you would want to be treated. Being thoughtful and compassionate can help you develop positive relationships with your tenants. Check out some helpful tips below:

- For new tenants, stock the washrooms with some rolls of toilet paper, soap, and paper towels. Leave some affordable snacks and drinks in the kitchen for move-in day. These small little touches can help start the tenant-landlord relationship on a positive note.
- Reward tenants for paying rent on time. Provide small thank-you gifts, like gift certificates to local stores or restaurants.
- When tenant's report an issue, be kind and work to ensure a timely repair.

## DEVELOP A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

Landlords are in a unique position to establish a sense of community. A strong community is a space where residents feel connected, engaged, and safe.

Community is good for business. When residents feel a strong sense of community, they report feeling safer and having better living experiences. Remember the oldest tip in the landlord handbook: if you have good tenants, try to keep them. With a more enjoyable living experience, tenants will want to stay in your unit.

Ways to encourage a sense of community as a landlord:

- Many of your new tenants may be new to the area. Refer them to the New to Waterloo guides for helpful information about their new city. To find these guides, visit the neighbourhoods website.
- Write a welcome letter to greet your tenants and provide important information. Consider including a list of favourite local restaurants, stores, and attractions to add a personal touch.
- Introduce new tenants to each other! If you own multiple units in a building, introducing tenants is a nice gesture that can help instill a sense of community. If tenants are comfortable and give permission, share their contact information with new residents!
- Organize events for your tenants. As a landlord of a multi-unit building, consider hosting a building-wide gathering. This is a great way to promote a sense of community. Too busy to plan an event? Recruit local tenants to organize a building party. Subsidize the food costs as a thank-you to your tenants.
- Get to know the neighbours near your rental property. Introduce new tenants to neighbours and facilitate interactions.
- If possible, provide a space for residents to gather and interact. A patio in the backyard or a common room in the building will help encourage a sense of community.

Consider installing a message board in multi-unit buildings. This tool will help facilitate communication between tenants.

# Resources

- City of Waterloo Bylaw – For concerns surrounding parking, noise, or rental licensing bylaws, contact the City of Waterloo bylaw team.
- Landlord and Tenant Board – For legal concerns, contact the Landlord and Tenant Board.
- Rentals.ca – This helpful article outlines eight traits of a successful landlord.
- Ontario Human Rights Commission – Visit this website to learn more about how to protect human rights throughout the rental process. This resource provides details like how to screen tenants fairly and outlines landlord responsibilities to ensure units are safe and accessible.
- Waterloo Fire Rescue – Visit this website for more information on fire safety and your responsibilities as a landlord or reach out to the Fire Prevention Division at 519-884-2121.
- The City of Waterloo Neighbourhood's Team – The neighbourhood's team provides helpful information and resources to help you develop a sense of community. For more information on supports and funding available, check out the neighbourhoods website. If you have any questions, reach out to neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca.