

# Information Packet

## The Washingtons

### An Affordable Housing Opportunity Melrose MA

This packet contains specific information on the affordable housing program and application process for the affordable rental units being offered at The Washingtons in Melrose, MA.

All households first need to complete a Waiting List Application and get on the Waiting List.

**This packet is for households who have high enough positions on the Waiting List to move forward in the process of leasing an affordable apartment.**

Please hold on to this packet until you have leased a unit as it will be a useful guide throughout the entire process.

#### **The Washingtons**

For Affordable Unit Information call (617) 782-6900

Information Packet created by:

SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham, MA 02494



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## GENERAL OVERVIEW AND RENTS

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**The Washingtons** is a 182 unit rental apartment community located in Melrose. Residents will enjoy a rooftop deck, fire pits, grilling stations, courtyards, a state-of-the-art fitness center, and much more. There are 17 affordable apartments at this community that will be rented to households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income. The unit mix of the affordable units is as follows:

# of Units	# of Bedrooms
9	1
7	2
1	3

*\* RENTS DO NOT CHANGE BASED ON INCOME AND DO NOT INCLUDE UTILITIES. This is not subsidized housing. Tenants are responsible for paying the full amount of rent each month unless they have a Section 8 voucher already (or similar). The rents are set annually using a calculation that determines the "affordable" rent, which is based on the Area Median Incomes for the Boston MSA.*

The Washingtons does not discriminate in the selection of applicants on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, ancestry, children, familial status, genetic information, marital status, public assistance reciprocity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran/military status, or any other basis prohibited by law. Persons with disabilities are entitled to request a reasonable accommodation in rules, policies, practices, or services, or to request a reasonable modification in the housing, when such accommodations or modifications may be necessary to afford persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the housing.

### **Q: How long will the designated apartments remain affordable?**

A: As a **current resident only**, you are considered income eligible for an affordable unit as long as your household earns an income that does not exceed 140% of the current applicable income limit for a household of your size (*see Yearly Eligibility and Rent Review*). Additionally, the rents may change yearly based on changes in Area Median Income and Local Utility Allowances. If the Area Median Income decreases or the total utility allowance increases, rents may drop. If the AMI increases or the utility allowances decrease, the rent may increase a few percentage points as allowed in the Regulatory Agreement.

# APPLICATION PROCESS

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**Q: What are the steps in leasing an Affordable apartment?**

***Step 1: Fill out a Waiting List Application at the Leasing Office***

Every household not entered into the original lottery needs to complete the Waiting List Application so they can be properly placed on the Waiting Lists for the units they are interested in. Please contact the Leasing Office for the Waiting List Application. Once units are available, the Leasing Office will contact the top households on the waiting list who qualify for the unit type and size available.

***Step 2: Fill out a Lease Application at the Leasing Office***

The top households on the waiting list will need to go to the Leasing Office and complete a ***Lease Application***. During the Lease Application, criteria such as credit scores, references, and current employment income will be reviewed. If lease eligible, applicants may reserve an available unit and will be given a move-in date by the leasing office.

***Step 3: Fill out the Affordable Housing Program Application***

Households must complete the ***Program Application*** (which includes submitting all required documentation) in entirety prior to their move-in date. Failure to complete the Program Application (which includes submitting all required income, asset and tax documentation) by the given date, or being found program ineligible, will result in the loss of the reservation.

***Step 4: Notification of Affordable Housing Program Approval***

If the applicant is found eligible for an Affordable apartment according to program guidelines, they will be notified by phone and/or by email and/or by postal mail. The applicant will then need to go to the Leasing Office, fill out a Lease Agreement and an Affordable Lease Addendum, and move into their affordable apartment by the scheduled move-in date.

## APPLICATION TIMELINE

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**Q:** What is the schedule for applications and the selection of renters for the affordable apartments at The Washingtons?

**A:** This process can be as short as 2 weeks or longer than 2 months.

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**Step 1: Now** The applicant completes a Waiting List Application. They will remain on the Waiting List until appropriate units are available.

**Step 2:** **Contacted by Leasing Office to complete Lease Application** at The Washingtons.

**Step 3: +2 weeks:** The applicant fills out the Affordable Housing Program Application and gathers all required documentation listed on the checklist and sends it to SEB.

**+0-2 weeks:** Based on information in the application, SEB requests that the applicant mail in additional documentation that was missing from their application. *(This step happens with approximately 90% of all applications. If you want to expedite the time it takes to process your application, send in ALL documentation up-front. Do not wait for SEB or Monitoring Agent to request a piece of documentation you probably knew was missing).*

**+1 week:** SEB processes the completed application. If an applicant is deemed ineligible, this process is over. If they are deemed eligible, SEB contacts the applicant and notifies them that they may now proceed to the Leasing Office to fill out a Lease Agreement.

**Step 4: 0-90 days:** Applicants must move into their affordable unit by the date determined when they reserved their unit in Step 2 above.

**Q: How is the Affordable Housing Program Application different from a Lease Application?**

A: The Lease Application uses criteria including employment history, credit score or reports, former lease history etc and determines if applicants have ENOUGH INCOME to *afford* the Affordable rent and have enough income remaining for other costs of living. The Affordable Housing Program Application is used to determine if applicants make less than the maximum income allowed to be eligible for an Affordable apartment.

**Q: What happens if I don't submit all necessary documentation or fail to correctly complete my Affordable Housing Program Application?**

A: Households that submit incomplete documentation will be mailed a notice detailing the additional documentation that is needed to make their application complete. If the household submits all additional documentation their application will be processed in the order the application was completed. If a household fails to submit all required documentation, their application will remain in an "Incomplete Application Pool" and will only begin being processed once all requested materials have been received. Households who fail to complete the Affordable Application by the move-in date will lose their chance to lease an apartment.

**Q: What information is required when an application is submitted?**

A: For an application to be considered complete it must be filled out in entirety, signed and dated. **In addition, all required income, asset and tax documentation (and if applicable, disability documentation) must be submitted.** If any documentation is missing the application will not be processed but a notice will be sent stating what documentation is missing. If you are following the application closely, it should guide you through everything you need to include.

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

**Q: Who is eligible to apply for the affordable units in The Washingtons?**

**A:** In order to qualify for an affordable unit, households must meet each of the following criteria:

- 1.) Households must have income and assets that qualify within the parameters as highlighted in this section.
- 2.) Household priority will be given based on household composition. For questions on household size and composition, please read **“Household Size and Composition”**.
- 3.) Households cannot own a home, including in a trust, upon move-in. All homes must be sold before leasing a unit.
- 4.) Households, or their families, cannot have a financial interest in the development and a household member cannot be considered a Related Party.

Additionally, some of the units may be disabled-accessible (DA). All households may apply for the DA units but households in need of an accessible unit will get top priority, regardless if the unit is designated as local preference or not. For questions on priority by need of a DA unit, please read **“Disabled-Accessible Unit Information”**.

**Q: Can I apply if I currently own a home or am losing a home through foreclosure or divorce?**

**A:** You may reserve a unit but SEB cannot deem you Program eligible until the home is no longer in your name. Therefore, the home must be sold or your name must be removed from the deed prior to your move-in date. If you are going through a divorce, your divorce decree or separation papers must state that you will no longer be on the deed or mortgage of the home. If your house is going through foreclosure, you must prove that it will be foreclosed on prior to your move-in date. All this must be documented for SEB prior to them issuing your letter of eligibility.

**Q: What are the income eligibility requirements?**

**A:** To be eligible to lease an affordable unit, the combined annual income for all income sources of all income-earning members in the household must be at or below eighty percent of median income for Boston HMFA. **All sources of income are counted, see below for more details.**

### Maximum Income

Household Size	Maximum Income Limit
1	\$82,950
2	\$94,800
3	\$106,650
4	\$118,450
5	\$127,950
6	\$137,450

subject to change with HUD’s publication of 2024 AMI

## **Minimum Income**

The affordable housing program does not have a set minimum income limit. Rather, the Leasing Office will determine if an applicant has enough monthly income to cover the rent using the same methodology for applicants applying to their market rate units. **Applicants who receive a housing subsidy (like Section 8) are not subject to the minimum income requirements** but, like all other applicants, will also have to pass reviews on credit scores, tenant history, and criminal background checks in accordance with DHCD's requirements regarding same. Please see "Leasing Office Review" in the step-by-step process for more details.

### **Q: How is a household's income determined?**

**A: A household's income is the total anticipated amount of money received by ALL members of the household over the next 12 months** (starting from the date of application and projecting forward 12 months) based on their current income and assets. In an effort to provide as accurate an income estimation as possible, SEB will also review historical income data to provide a basis for future income estimates. Any monies you anticipate receiving in the next 12 months will be counted as income and monies received over the previous 6 months will be analyzed to help estimate future income. This includes, but is not limited to, Social Security, alimony, child support, overtime pay, bonuses, unemployment, severance pay, part-time employment, matured bonds, monies to be received in court settlements, and actual or imputed interest and dividends on bank accounts and other assets. **ALL SOURCES OF INCOME ARE COUNTED** with the exception of income from employment for household members under the age of 18 and any income from employment over \$480/year for full time students who are dependents of a household member who is also occupying the unit (but note that all such income must still be documented even if it is exempt from the household income calculation).

It will be assumed that all applicants will continue to receive any monies they have received over the past 12 months unless supporting documentation proves otherwise. It is also not up to the household to determine what monies received over the past year should and should not be counted as their calculated income. Therefore, all monies should be listed on the application and the inclusion of these monies in determining a household's eligibility will be based on affordable housing guidelines.



## Allowable Assets

There is no asset limit for applying households for this development. However, the higher of the actual income earned from assets, or the imputed income of 0.06% of all assets, will be counted as income. Household Assets are calculated at the time of application. Assets may include cash, cash in savings and checking accounts, net cash value of stocks, net cash value of retirement accounts (such as 401k), real property, bonds, and capital investments.

If any household member currently owns property, the total amount of equity in the home shall be added to their total value of assets.

*Example: A household has \$8,000 in savings, \$30,000 in a retirement account that they are not drawing down from (\$20,000 net cash value) and a home assessed at \$300,000 on which they currently have \$278,000 remaining on the mortgage (\$22,000 in equity).*

<i>Their assets total is:</i>	$\$8,000 + \$20,000 + \$22,000 = \$50,000$
<i>Actual Income from assets is:</i>	$\$300 + \$0 + \$0 = \$300$ (A)
<i>Imputed Income at 0.06% is:</i>	$0.06\% \text{ of } \$50,000 = \$30$ (B)

*For this household, \$300 would be added to their income they receive from all other income sources (employment, Social Security, Alimony etc.) as the program takes the greater of (A) actual income from assets OR (B) imputed income from assets.*

**Q: I cannot withdraw money from my 401k or retirement fund, do I have to include it when I list my assets?**

A: Yes. You need to include the *net cash value* of all your current retirement funds. We realize that most retirement funds assess large penalties for early withdrawal but this does not technically mean that you “cannot” withdraw your funds. The post-penalty amount is what you need to provide along with supporting documentation.

**Q: If I cannot qualify for a Lease based on my own income or credit history, can I have a co-signer on my Lease?**

A: No. Only people who will live in the unit can sign the lease. Applying households must be able to meet the income qualifications on their own. If someone outside the household is going to help pay the rent, the amount to be paid must be listed as “Periodic Payments” on the Income Table in the Program Application. These payments will be counted towards the applying household’s income. Guarantors will NOT be allowed.

**Q: Do I have to be a resident of the City of Melrose to apply?**

A: No. All households that meet the income guidelines specified above may apply for an affordable unit and there is no local preference for any of the affordable units.

## HOUSEHOLD SIZE AND COMPOSITION

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**Q: How is appropriate household size determined?**

A: According to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development guidelines:

Within an applicant pool first (priority) shall be given to households requiring the total number of bedrooms in the unit based on the following **criteria**:

- a. There is at least one occupant and no more than two occupants per bedroom.
- b. A husband and wife, or those in a similar living arrangement, shall be required to share a bedroom. Other household members may share but shall not be required to share a bedroom.
- c. A person described in the first sentence of (b) shall not be required to share a bedroom if a consequence of sharing would be a severe adverse impact on his or her mental or physical health and SEB receives reliable medical documentation as to such impact of sharing.

Household size shall not exceed state sanitary code requirements for occupancy of a unit.

**Q: Can a one person household or a married couple (or those in a similar living arrangement) lease a two-bedroom unit?**

A: Yes, but only when there are no larger households on the waiting list. By Department of Housing and Development definitions, a one person household or married couple (or those in a similar living arrangement) leasing a two bedroom unit, is not a “household of appropriate size”. Therefore, “inappropriately” sized households must understand that if and when an “appropriately” sized household applies for a 2BR unit and all 2BR units are currently leased, then the applicant will have to move into an affordable one-bedroom if one is available at the end of the initial lease term.

**Q: If I am currently going through a divorce/separation or planning on being divorced / separated soon, can I still apply?**

A: You will need to provide proof that the divorce process has begun or has already been finalized. If no divorce has been initiated, then we would need you to certify and document that your spouse has a separate address. The Certification Application will guide you through the documentation that you will need to provide.

## Yearly Eligibility and Rent Review

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Approximately 90 days before lease renewal, you will need to submit updated income and asset documentation to the Leasing Office so they can ensure that you are still under the maximum income guidelines. You will not be able to renew your Lease until you have submitted all required documentation. You should maintain records of your taxes, pay-stubs, bank statements and asset statements while living in the affordable unit. Maintaining records makes this yearly review very simple.

**Q: How long can I lease my affordable unit?**

A: As a **current resident only**, you are considered income eligible for an affordable unit as long as your household earns an income that does not exceed **140% of the current year's income limit** for a household of your size

*Using the Current Income Limits as an example:*

Household Size	Current Income Limit for New Applicants Affordable Units (80% AMI)	Income Limit for Current Tenants Affordable Units (140% of 80% AMI)
1	\$82,950	\$116,130
2	\$94,800	\$132,720
3	\$106,650	\$149,310
4	\$118,450	\$165,830
5	\$127,950	\$179,130
6	\$137,450	\$192,430

According to the table above for the years shown, if a household's income exceeds the Income Limit for Current Tenants at the time of their renewal, their unit shall still remain affordable until the next available market rate unit with the same or greater number of bedrooms is rented at an affordable price. Once this market rate apartment becomes newly deemed as affordable, the apartment that was previously deemed affordable can subsequently be rented at market rates. The household with earnings exceeding the Income Limit for Current Tenants can choose to stay in their apartment, yet would then have to pay the market rate rent.

**Q: Will my rent increase each year, and if so, by how much?**

A: Rents may increase a few percentage points if Boston Area Median Income increases or the costs of utilities decreases (as allowed in the Regulatory Agreement). Likewise, if the Boston Area Median Income decreases and the costs of utilities increases, **rents may decrease**.

## DISABLED-ACCESSIBLE UNIT INFORMATION

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**Q: Who qualifies for a disabled-accessible (DA) unit?**

A: According to *Mass Access: The Accessible Housing Registry*, “units that are barrier-free are accessible to people with disabilities that are wheelchair users, but could also be used by people of different types of disabilities. For example, a person of very short stature, a person with a brain injury or stroke, severe cardiac or respiratory problems, or a person with limited standing, walking, or reaching ability, may use the design features of a wheelchair accessible unit.” Verification of need of a DA unit must be provided in the form of a doctor’s note or equivalent if applicant is selected to rent one of the DA units.

**Q: How are disabled-accessible units awarded?**

A: A household in need of a disabled-accessible unit will get priority for a DA unit over any household who does not need the disabled-accessible features. So if a DA unit is available, and there is a waiting list for the DA unit, the household in need of the unit will jump to the top of that Waiting List.

**Q: Can households that qualify for a DA unit also apply for a non-DA unit?**

A: Yes. Households that qualify for a DA unit will get priority for a DA unit but they can also have positions on Waiting Lists for non-DA units. Their positions on the Waiting List for the non-DA units will be based solely on the time of their application and their household size and their need of an accessible unit will not give them any priority.

**Q: Who is entitled to request a reasonable accommodation?**

A: Persons with disabilities are entitled to request a reasonable accommodation in rules, policies, practices, or services, or to request a reasonable modification in the housing, when such accommodations or modifications may be necessary to afford persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the housing.