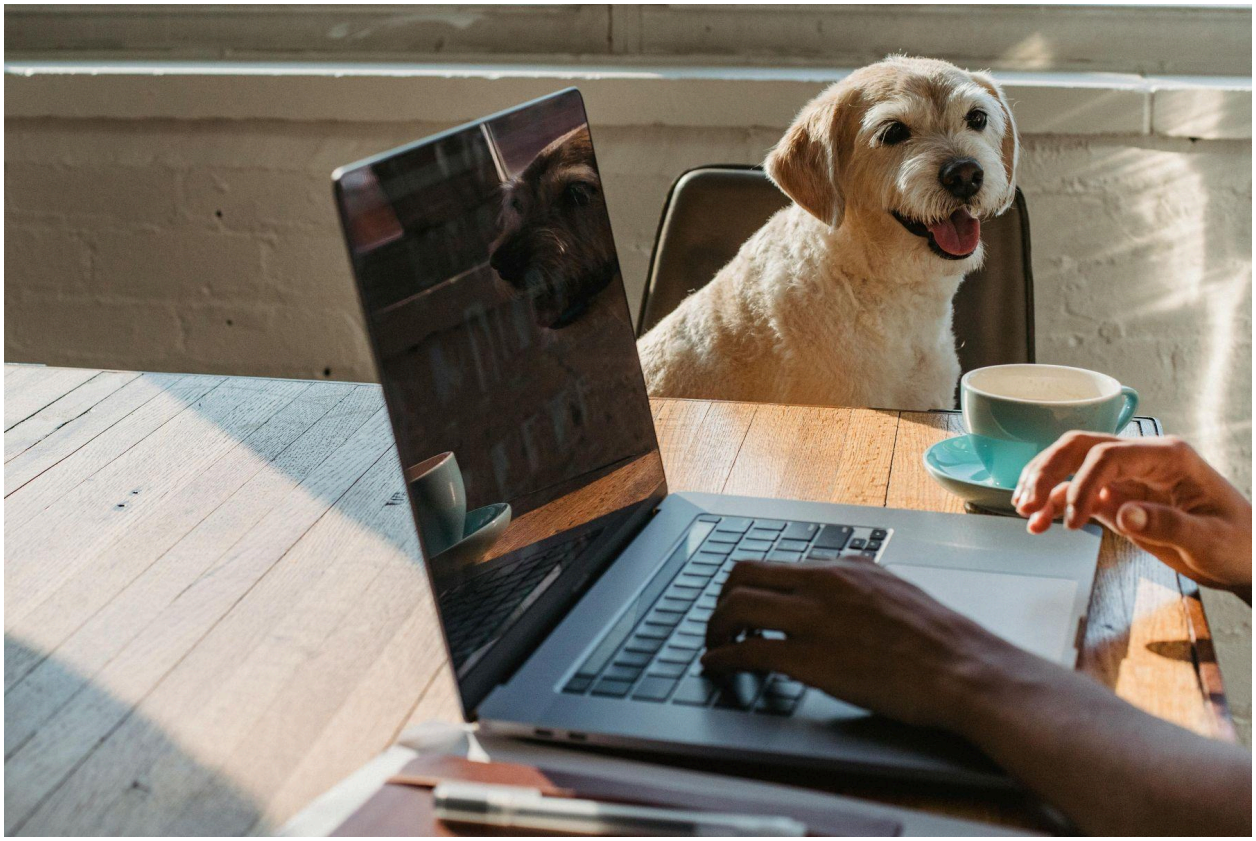
From Pet Screening to Lease Terms: How to Safely Expand Your Rental's Pet Policy



Millions of households in the United States have adopted pets as cherished family members, making pet ownership more common than ever. That makes pets a dealbreaker for a growing number of renters. According to the American Pet Products Association, over 70% of U.S. households own a pet, and those tenants need somewhere to live.

Allowing pets in your rental doesn't mean opening yourself up to risk. With the right screening process and clearly written lease terms, you can protect your property while making it more competitive in today's rental market. Read along as this post walks you through exactly how to build a pet policy that works in your favor.

Setting Clear Pet Screening Criteria Before Opening Units to Pets

Establish a clear set of screening criteria, especially if you’re going to advertise a unit as pet-friendly. Doing this tells applicants exactly what you will and won't accept in your rental property. Without this, inconsistencies may still appear that could create fair housing headaches down the road.

You should first consider which pets you are comfortable with in your property. For ordinary pets, landlords may establish reasonable, clearly communicated policies consistent with applicable law. However, animals requested as reasonable accommodations must be handled separately from ordinary pet screening, and pet-related breed, size, and other restrictions may not automatically apply. If you manage a second-floor unit with shared hallways, a 90-pound dog is a different conversation than a 15-pound terrier. Solid pet screening is what separates a pet-friendly policy that works from one that creates ongoing property and liability issues.

Establish reasonable documentation requirements that complies with the local laws, aside from the assistance-animal requests through reasonable accommodation. Consistency isn't just good practice; it's your best protection against discrimination claims.

Updating Lease Language for Pet Deposits, Fees, and Rules



Once you've decided to allow pets, your lease needs to reflect that clearly. A verbal agreement or a one-line addendum isn't enough to protect you if something goes wrong. It's important to pay attention to the specifics, and this is where many landlords lose money and legal standing. A local property manager in Delaware County can help set pet screening criteria that are consistent across every unit before expanding your policy.

Start by getting a clear definition of the difference between a pet deposit and a pet fee.. Some landlords charge both, and some opt for a monthly pet rent instead. Whatever structure you choose, make sure it complies with your state's landlord-tenant laws, since deposit caps and fee rules vary by location. Landlords should ensure that pet deposits, fees, and monthly charges comply with the applicable state and local laws.

Beyond the financials, your lease should spell out the behavioral expectations for pets on the property. This means noise rules, leash requirements in common areas, waste disposal responsibilities, and what happens if a pet causes damage or becomes a

nuisance to neighbors. You should view your pet lease terms less as fine print and more as a shared agreement that sets the tone for the tenancy. Clarifying expectations from the start reduces the chances of issues you might face in the future.

Balancing Pet-Friendly Policies with Property Risk

Allowing pets comes with real risks, and it's worth being honest about that. Scratched hardwood floors, stained carpets, and chewed baseboards are common complaints from landlords who've had difficult experiences with pet-owning tenants. But most of that damage is manageable when you've built the right safeguards into your policy from the start.

One of the smartest things you can do is schedule routine property inspections. A mid-lease walkthrough, typically held every six months, lets you catch minor issues before they become costly repairs. It also keeps tenants accountable in a way that end-of-lease move-out inspections simply can't. You should also review your landlord insurance policy before opening units to pets. Some policies exclude pet-related damage, while others offer riders that cover it. Knowing exactly what you're working with gives you a more accurate picture of your actual exposure.

It's also reasonable to factor in pet-related wear and tear in your long-term maintenance budget. Flooring, in particular, tends to take the hardest hit. Factoring that into your financial planning means you're not caught off guard when replacement costs come up at turnover.

Final Thought

Expanding your rental's pet policy doesn't have to feel like a gamble. The rental market is competitive, and pet-owning tenants are actively looking for landlords who take their needs seriously. Apply lawful pet policies consistently to applicants in a similar situation, while evaluating reasonable-accommodation requests. A well-managed pet policy is

one of the simpler ways to reduce vacancy without sacrificing the integrity of your property.