Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program
Information Guide for Potential Landlords

What is the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program?
The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program provides rental subsidies to individuals and families with incomes at 50% or less than the median income for Sonoma County. It is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is operated by the City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority for units within the city limits. Owners retain their private property rights, including choice of tenants, and enforce their own written rules just as in any other rental situation. Tenants seek and select their own housing. Many types of housing may qualify for the program – apartments, houses, duplexes, shared rentals (with individual lease), mobile homes – as long as the unit is within city limits, passes Housing Quality Standards inspection, and is regarded as legal in terms of zoning, required building permits, etc.

How much can an owner charge for rent?
The rent (and all rent increases) will depend upon the local market for units with similar amenities and will be subject to a rent reasonableness test by the Housing Authority. Per HUD regulations, at move-in tenants are prohibited from paying more than 40% of their gross income toward their portion of the rent.

Can the owner collect a security deposit and first/last month’s rent?
The property owner can collect a standard security deposit in accordance with state and local laws. The tenant is responsible for payment of security deposit; the Housing Authority supplies resources to tenants for local agencies that assist with deposits. The first month’s rent will be paid by both the tenant and the Housing Authority after the unit passes inspection and the signed rental agreement, Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) Contract, and vendor information is completed and returned by the owner. Both parties will pay last month’s rent at the time it is due.

Does the Housing Authority offer direct deposit for rent payments?
Yes. We encourage owners to participate in direct deposit as it is safe and more efficient than issuance of paper checks. We will provide owners with the required documents to enroll.

Can the owner use his/her own rental agreement?
Yes. The property owner must use his/her own rental agreement or lease. The Housing Authority will attach a Tenancy Addendum to the owner’s rental agreement/lease. The rental agreement must conform to State and Local law, as well as HUD regulations prohibiting certain lease provisions, most of which are already prohibited by State law.

If an owner chooses to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program, must s/he accept the first voucher holder who applies?
No. The Housing Authority encourages property owners to screen their applicants thoroughly and in accordance with Fair Housing laws. Owners may select or reject applicants with vouchers in the same manner as other applicants who do not have vouchers.

If an owner chooses to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program, does s/he always have to rent that unit to a voucher holder?
No. The contract is for the chosen tenant only. Once the tenant vacates, the property owner is under no further obligation to rent to a voucher holder.

Is it permissible to grow marijuana on properties where Housing Choice Vouchers are being utilized?
No. Although marijuana has been legalized in the state of California, under the Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. Section 801 et. seq., marijuana is categorized as a controlled substance; manufacture, distribution, or possession is illegal under federal law, even if it is permitted under state law. The Housing Choice Voucher program receives federal funding from Housing & Urban Development (HUD), which mandates adherence to the Controlled Substances Act.

How does the property owner benefit from the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program?
- There is a guaranteed monthly cash flow. Generally, over half of the rent is paid by the Housing Authority directly to the property owner. Tenant rent is typically about 30% of monthly income. This rent calculation keeps rents affordable for voucher holders.
- When a property owner needs to raise the rent, s/he issues a 60-day notice and the Housing Authority reviews for rent reasonableness. Oftentimes, the Housing Authority can absorb the increase and the tenant’s portion of the rent may not be affected.
- The initial and biennial Housing Quality Standards inspections performed by the Housing Authority help to protect property owner’s investment and inform owners of potential housekeeping or other issues.
- The program ensures that rent is affordable to the tenants, so there is generally lower turnover with Housing Choice Voucher tenants.
- The Housing Authority has a free vacancy listing service for landlords on our website.
- The Housing Authority can provide assistance with problem solving. If requested, we can serve as liaison between property owner and tenant in certain situations.
- The process of choosing a tenant, choosing terms of tenancy (month to month, annual lease, etc.) and of terminating a tenant are the same as in the private market.
- There is significant community and social benefit realized by renting to households on the Housing Choice Voucher program. Through this program, individuals and families can improve their living situations, pursue employment or further education, and become more involved in the community. Those living on fixed incomes are given the opportunity to remain housed, even in a challenging housing market.

Additional Questions?
Feel free to reach out. Contact information is below.