

Chapter 3

APPLYING FOR ADMISSION

[24 CFR 982.204]

INTRODUCTION

It is the policy of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County (HOC) to ensure that all families who express an interest in housing assistance are given an equal opportunity to apply, and are treated in a fair and consistent manner. This chapter describes the policies and procedures for completing an initial application for assistance, placement and denial of placement on the wait list, and any limitations on who may apply. The primary purpose of the intake function is to gather information about the family, but HOC will also utilize this process to provide information to the family so that an accurate and timely decision of eligibility can be made. Applicants will be placed on the wait list in accordance with this Plan.

A. OVERVIEW OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The initial wait list application is referred to herein as the pre-application. The purpose of pre-application taking is to permit HOC to gather basic information about applicant households and determine placement on the wait list regarding any preferences. The pre-application will contain questions designed to obtain only pertinent program information.

Families who wish to apply for any of HOC's programs must create an electronic wait list profile and complete an electronic wait list pre-application on HOC's Housing Path website at www.HOCHousingPath.com. Accessibility assistance is available for wait list applicants with limited English proficiency, disabilities, or other accessibility concerns (for example: inability to access the internet).

An applicant may apply for an HOC program prior to age 18, however, he or she would not be eligible to receive assistance as head of household until age 18 or otherwise legally able to execute a contract.

Other than for brief periods of time for system maintenance, HOC's electronic wait list is open indefinitely. When the wait list is open, any family that submits an electronic pre-application to be placed on the wait list for the Housing Choice Voucher and other HOC programs will be added to the Housing Path wait list in order of the date and time which they applied.

The next phase is the "final determination of eligibility" (referred to as the full application). The full application takes place when the family is called up from the wait list to receive assistance. At this time HOC ensures that verification of all HUD and HOC eligibility factors, including any preferences, are current and correct in order to determine the family's eligibility for the issuance of a voucher subsidy.

HOC offers both tenant-based and project-based voucher assistance. The assistance to a tenant-based voucher (TBV) is tied to the customer. The assistance to a project-based voucher (PBV) is tied to the unit. For PBVs, HOC enters into a contract with an owner for units at one or multiple sites or locations so as to secure an inventory of project-based units. If a customer wishes to apply for the project-based voucher program, the family must follow the same Housing Path wait list sign-up as described above.

B. OPENING/CLOSING OF APPLICATION TAKING [24 CFR 982.206, 982.54(d)(1)]

Opening the wait list

Other than for brief periods of time for system maintenance, HOC's electronic wait list – Housing Path – is open indefinitely.

When the wait list is open, HOC will accept applications from all eligible families unless there is good cause for not accepting the application, such as denial of assistance because of action or inaction by members of the family for the grounds stated in the "Denial or Termination of Assistance" chapter of this Administrative Plan. [24 CFR 982.206(b)(2)]

Closing the Wait List

Should HOC's wait list ever need to close HOC will announce the closing of its wait list by public notice, which may be at the same time that the announcement is made to open the wait list.

HOC will give at least 3 days notice prior to closing the wait list.

Limitations on Who May Apply

When the wait list is open:

Any family seeking placement on the wait list for the Housing Choice Voucher or other HOC programs is given the opportunity to complete a pre-application on the Housing Path website at www.HOCHousingPath.com. The only applicable limitation at the time of pre-application is income eligibility. If a family is not income eligible at the time they seek application to the wait list, they will be denied. All other eligibility verification is conducted at the time of call-up.

C. "INITIAL" APPLICATION PROCEDURES [24 CFR 982.204(b)]

HOC's pre-application form can be found only on the internet at www.HOCHousingPath.com. To provide specific accommodations for persons with disabilities, HOC staff or another person may assist a wait list applicant with creating their Housing Path profile and the electronic application. Translation/Interpretation will also be provided to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP).

The purpose of the pre-application is to permit HOC to preliminarily assess family eligibility or ineligibility for the selection process. Duplicate applications will not be accepted.

Ineligible families will be removed from the Housing Path wait list.

Pre-applications will not require an interview. The information on the pre-application will not be verified until the applicant is selected for final eligibility determination. Final eligibility will be determined when the full application process is completed and all information is verified.

D. APPLICANT STATUS WHILE ON THE WAIT LIST [CFR 982.204]

Applicants are required to inform HOC of any changes in address and/or income by updating their wait list profile and application on the Housing Path website. Applicants are also required to respond to requests from HOC to update any other information on their application and to determine their interest in assistance.

If, after a review of the pre-application, the family is determined to be preliminarily eligible, they will be notified in writing, or in some other accessible format upon request, as a reasonable accommodation for a disability-related need.

If the family is determined to be ineligible based on the information provided in their wait list application, HOC will notify the family in writing (or in some other accessible format upon request, as a reasonable accommodation for a disability-related need), state the reason(s) for their ineligibility, and inform them of their right to an informal review. Persons with disabilities may request to have an advocate attend the informal review as a reasonable accommodation. Please see the "Complaints and Appeals" chapter.

E. TIME OF SELECTION [24 CFR 982.204, 5.410]

When funding becomes available, families will be selected according to the following preference order:

- Priority preferences
- Previously applied (eligible applicants from previous wait lists)
- Date/Time Stamp

When there is insufficient funding available for the family selected for assistance, HOC will not admit any other applicant until funding is available for the first applicant.

When PBV units become available, families will be selected by date and time of their application's receipt on the wait list.

F. COMPLETION OF A FULL APPLICATION

All preferences claimed on the pre-application or while the family is on the wait list will be verified after the family is selected from the wait list.

The qualification for preference must exist at the time the preference is claimed and at the time of verification, because claim of a preference determines placement on the wait list.

Documentation to obtain the local preference for living or working in the Montgomery County are as follows:

For verification for living in the County:

- Current lease in Montgomery County, including the name of applicant as a family or household member on the lease (if the lease does not have a list of the resident members, a letter from the landlord identifying the applicant as a resident will be necessary).

OR

- If a lease is not available, a letter from the landlord and a current utility bill in the applicant's name.

If the applicant is unable to provide at least one of the above documents, the following items may be accepted in their stead by HOC at its discretion:

- If the applicant lives in a residence owned by a family member(s), a copy of the deed for the residence belonging to the family member(s) and a notarized statement from a family member who is a record owner of the residence stating the applicant resides there.
- For applicants who are homeless, a statement on letterhead from a government agency stating that the applicant is receiving Montgomery County services.
- Other documentation accepted by HOC at its discretion.

For verification of employment in the County:

- A current pay stub indicating that the location of the work site is in Montgomery County.
- A letter on letterhead from their employer stating that the applicant works in Montgomery County or has approval to work in the County.
- Other documentation accepted by HOC at its discretion.

After the preference is verified, when HOC is ready to select applicants, applicants are required to complete a full application without assistance, unless assistance is needed for, or a request for a reasonable accommodation is made by, a person with a disability.

The full application will be mailed to the applicant, in advance, to complete.

Additional household members other than those on the “pre-application” will not be approved with the exception of additions due to birth, adoption, court awarded custody, a spouse, significant other, or elderly relative as a reasonable accommodation in order to improve the quality of life of the relative by meeting a disability-related need.

Requirement to Attend Interview

HOC uses the full application interview to discuss the family's circumstances in greater detail, to clarify information provided by the family, and to ensure that the information is complete. The interview is also used as a vehicle to meet the informational needs of the family by providing information to them about the application and verification processes, as well as to advise the family of other HOC services or programs which may be available to them.

The head of household is required to attend the interview.

If the head of household cannot attend the interview, the spouse may attend to complete the application and certify for the family. The head of household, however, will be required to attend an interview within seven days to review the information and to certify by signature that all of the information is complete and accurate.

It is the applicant's responsibility to reschedule the interview if s/he misses the initial appointment. If the applicant fails to reschedule or misses two scheduled meetings without contacting HOC, the application is rejected. Exceptions are permitted under extenuating circumstances (for example: a disability-related need to reschedule). It is at HOC's sole discretion to determine what constitutes an extenuating circumstance in this context. After application rejection, the customer's name is removed from the wait list. However, they may reapply to the wait list at any time.

Applicants who fail to appear and want to reschedule a missed appointment must make the request to reschedule no later than three days from the original appointment date. The request must be made to the staff person at HOC who scheduled the appointment.

Reasonable accommodations will be made for persons with disabilities that require an advocate or accessible offices. A designated advocate will be allowed to participate in the interview process, but only with the written permission of the person with the disability.

If an application is denied due to failure to attend the full application interview, the applicant will be notified in writing and offered an opportunity to request an informal review. (See "Complaints and Appeals" chapter.)

All adult household members must sign the HUD Form 9886, Release of Information, the application form, all supplemental forms required by HOC, the declarations and consents related to citizenship/ immigration status, and any other documents required by HOC. Applicants will be required to sign specific verification forms for information that is not covered by the HUD form 9886. Failure to do so will be cause for denial of the application for failure to provide necessary certifications and release as required by HOC.

If HOC determines at, or after, the interview that additional information or document(s) are needed, HOC will request the document(s) or information in writing. The family will be given seven days to supply the requested information. If the information is not supplied in this time period, HOC will provide the family a notification of denial for assistance. (See "Complaints and Appeals" chapter)

G. VERIFICATION [24 CFR 982.201(e)]

Information provided by the applicant will be verified, using the verification procedures in the "Verification Procedures" chapter. Family composition, income, allowances and deductions, assets, full-time student status, eligibility and rent calculation factors, and other pertinent information will be verified. Verifications may not be more than 60 days old at the time of issuance of the Voucher.

H. FINAL DETERMINATION AND NOTIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY
[24 CFR 982.201]

After the verification process is completed, HOC will make a final determination of eligibility. This decision is based upon the information provided by the family, the verification completed by HOC, and the current eligibility criteria in effect. If the family is determined to be eligible, HOC will mail a notification of eligibility. A briefing will be scheduled for the issuance of a voucher and the family's orientation to the housing program.

Any changes in income or family composition may result in a delay in the issuance/ re-issuance of a voucher in order to process the new information.