

# Investing in the landlord-tenant relationship

MEGAN MARTIN  
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

When investing in residential revenue properties of any sort, the tenants you select and your relationship with them will have a huge impact on your day-to-day experience as an owner. The relationship between landlords and tenants varies hugely depending on circumstances, but there are things that each can do to help minimize potential issues.

“It can be very smooth or very rocky,” said Sylvan Schneider, a local attorney who specializes in real-estate law. “I deal with a whole host of issues from both perspectives and sometimes the tenant is at fault and other times it’s the landlord; there are so many scenarios from incomplete repairs to nonpayment and every case is different.”

Schneider works with both landlords and tenants, and the range of problems they encounter is as long as it is varied.

“I highly suggest that landlords do their homework and research about potential tenants beyond a simple credit check,” Schneider said. “I recommend verifying at the rental board whether or not



COURTESY OF SYLVAN SCHNEIDER  
**Sylvan Schneider, a Montreal lawyer specializing in real-estate law.**

the tenant has had judgments rendered for or against them in the past.”

For landlords this is key because it gives them a sense of the tenants’ credibility.

“I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had landlords say to me: ‘If only I had known about the tenant’s record at the board, I never would’ve rented to them.’ That’s why it’s so important to look into it,” Schneider said.

Acquiring legal advice from an expert in real-estate law early on in the process of purchasing revenue property is among the best ways to ensure protection for landlords, he added.

“People sometimes avoid this step, but it’s crucial because if a client comes to me early enough we can set out a plan to do things properly at every step of the way,” Schneider said. “If a client only comes to me when they’re already in a bind, it can be a lot more difficult to sort matters out.”

From the tenants’ perspective, Schneider suggests performing a check on a landlord’s history at the Régie de logement prior to signing a lease.

“You can verify at the rental board to see if a landlord has been sued in the past, but being sued by a tenant isn’t an indication of the quality of a landlord,” Schneider said. “Some landlords have been in the business for decades and own hundreds of units so it’s not uncommon to have a few encounters with tenants who go on to file a lawsuit over the years.”

There are also slumlords out there, however, and landlords who do not fulfill their responsibilities; most of the time the

judgments against slumlords indicate that they don’t do the repairs they’re required to do.

In order to help ensure a smooth relationship with a landlord, tenants should be clear about their expectations when signing a lease.

“There shouldn’t be any ambiguity regarding what the tenant is expecting,” Schneider said. “If they want something redone, repaired or replaced, they should try to negotiate that and have it in the lease.”

Managing expectations is important as well.

“Tenants need to be realistic,” Schneider said. “It’s next to impossible to find a unit with marble counters for \$400 a month; people need to understand what’s reasonable within their budget.”

The types of problems that arise between landlords and tenants are vast.

Naturally, new multi-unit constructions tend to have fewer issues than older buildings.

“Generally, the standard concerns with new buildings are faulty workmanship and issues with regards to installations and utilities,” Schneider said. “Older buildings are where most of the

problems occur.”

With older constructions, the simple age of the building is a factor in many of the troubles that arise.

“When tenants move into older buildings, they’re going into a previously occupied space and they may not like the paint colour, or there may be problems requiring maintenance,” Schneider said. “Again, these are issues that should be addressed in the lease to avoid any confusion as to who is responsible.”

Experienced landlords are typically in the best position to handle these types of problems because they’ve been exposed to them before.

“There’s more naïveté when it comes to single-property landlords,” Schneider said. “On the other hand, owners with several buildings tend to be very organized and have a team in place.”

Whether you’re a landlord or a tenant, familiarizing yourself with your rights is imperative. The appropriate knowledge goes a long way in ensuring your protection.

Consult the Régie du logement online at [www.rdl.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.rdl.gouv.qc.ca) for more information.

## Community snapshot: Verdun

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Located between the Aqueduct Canal and the St. Lawrence River, the borough of Verdun is one of the only communities in Montreal surrounded by water.

Founded in the late 1600s, Verdun is actually one of Canada’s oldest communities. Naturally, it contains many buildings of historical significance.

Verdun is divided into three neighbourhoods: Desmarchais-

Crawford, comprising Verdun West; Wellington-De l’Eglise, the borough’s main commercial sector; and Nuns’ Island.

The borough’s population of roughly 66,000 is spread over Verdun’s 9.83-square-kilometre territory.

“It’s a neighbourhood that’s welcoming and warm,” said Ann Guy, city councillor in Verdun.

“Our residents really get involved in the community in every way.

“We have so many volunteer

organizations and activities going on all the time.”

This is well suited to the 9,500 families with children that live in the borough.

“Since the 1990s there have been major efforts to attract young families,” Guy said. “Our green spaces are a good example of this.

“We have about 45 parks, most of which have been renovated or updated in recent years.”

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GORDON BECK, GAZETTE FILES  
**As one of the oldest communities in Canada, Verdun has its share of heritage buildings, one of which is the art-deco Natatorium on LaSalle Blvd.**



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