

THE SAVANNAH PROPERTY OWNER'S GUIDE

10 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Property Manager

A free resource for Savannah, GA property owners

Not all property management companies are the same. The right company protects your investment, fills vacancies fast, and communicates proactively. The wrong one costs you money and creates headaches you didn't sign up for.

This guide gives you the 10 most important questions to ask any property manager before you sign — along with what the right answer looks like and red flags to watch for.

01

What is your full fee structure — not just the management fee?

The headline management percentage tells you almost nothing about what you'll actually pay. Hidden fees live in the details: vacancy fees, setup fees, lease renewal fees, maintenance markups, inspection fees, and cancellation penalties.

✓ Good Answer:

A complete written fee schedule, provided upfront before you sign anything. Every fee itemized.

■ Red Flag:

Reluctance to provide a written fee schedule, or vague answers like "it depends."

02

Do you charge fees when my property is vacant?

Some property managers charge a monthly management fee even when your property sits empty and generates zero income. This misaligns their incentives with yours — they get paid whether they perform or not.

✓ Good Answer:

No management fees on vacant months. You only pay when your property generates rent.

■ Red Flag:

Any monthly fee structure that applies regardless of occupancy.

03

Walk me through your tenant screening process.

The most expensive property management mistake is a bad tenant placement. One eviction can cost more than years of management fees. Rigorous screening is your most important protection.

✓ Good Answer:

Credit check, criminal background, national eviction database search, income verification (2.5-3x rent), employment verification, and direct calls to previous landlords.

■ Red Flag:

Vague answers, skipping eviction history searches, or accepting income claims without documentation.

04

What is your maintenance markup and will I see the original vendor invoice?

Most property managers add a markup to maintenance invoices — typically 10-15% — to cover coordination costs. This is reasonable when disclosed. What's not acceptable is an undisclosed markup or inflated vendor invoices.

✓ Good Answer:

A flat, disclosed markup (10% is standard) and yes to seeing the original vendor invoice every time.

■ Red Flag:

Markups above 20%, refusal to share original invoices, or evasive answers about vendor relationships.

05

Who will be my primary point of contact, and what is their response time commitment?

Poor communication is the #1 complaint about property management companies. A dedicated point of contact who knows your portfolio is fundamentally different from a rotating call center.

✓ Good Answer:

A specific named person assigned to your account with a defined response time commitment.

■ Red Flag:

"Our team" handles communications. No specific person, no defined response standard.

06

Do you offer any guarantees on tenant placement or satisfaction?

A property manager confident in their work will stand behind it with real guarantees. A leasing guarantee protects you if a placed tenant leaves early. A satisfaction guarantee protects you if the service doesn't meet expectations.

✓ Good Answer:

A leasing guarantee (re-lease for free if tenant vacates within 6 months) and a satisfaction/cancellation guarantee.

■ Red Flag:

No guarantees of any kind, or guarantees buried in fine print with so many exclusions they're meaningless.

07

How do you handle maintenance requests and what is your emergency coverage?

Maintenance is where many property managers lose their owners' trust — through slow response, poor vendor quality, or lack of transparency. A 24/7 emergency line is essential for protecting your asset and your tenants.

✓ Good Answer:

Digital work order tracking, a vetted vendor network, owner approval thresholds, and a true 24/7 emergency line.

■ Red Flag:

No after-hours coverage, no digital tracking system, or vague descriptions of their vendor network.

08

How do you set and adjust rental pricing for my property?

Accurate rent pricing is one of the most valuable things a local property manager provides. Set too high and you sit vacant. Set too low and you leave money on the table for years. This requires active, current market knowledge — not a formula.

✓ Good Answer:

Data-driven pricing based on current comparable rentals in your specific neighborhood, reviewed at each vacancy and renewal.

■ Red Flag:

Generic market data, pricing based solely on your previous rent, or an algorithm that doesn't account for neighborhood differences.

09

What technology do you use for inspections, reporting, and owner access?

Modern property management should give you real-time visibility into your investment. Inspection documentation protects you in security deposit disputes and tracks asset condition over time.

✓ Good Answer:

A 24/7 owner portal, digital inspection reports with detailed photo documentation, and digital work order tracking.

■ Red Flag:

No owner portal, paper-based reporting, or inspections with minimal documentation.

10

What are the terms for canceling the management agreement?

A property manager confident in their service doesn't need to trap you with punitive cancellation clauses. Understand exactly what it takes to leave before you sign.

✓ Good Answer:

Clear cancellation terms with reasonable notice (60 days is standard), no early termination penalties, and no fees charged after notice is given.

■ Red Flag:

Long lock-in periods, large cancellation fees, or vague language about what happens when you want to leave.

✓ Full fee structure disclosed upfront	Published on our website before you sign
✓ No vacancy fees	We only earn when your property generates rent
✓ Rigorous tenant screening	Credit, criminal, eviction, income, and landlord verification
✓ 10% flat maintenance markup	Same on every invoice — original vendor invoice always included
✓ Dedicated owner relations manager	One named person, not a call center
✓ Leasing + satisfaction guarantees	6-month leasing guarantee and cancel-anytime policy
✓ 24/7 emergency maintenance	True round-the-clock coverage for your residents
✓ Data-driven rent pricing	Current market comparables — neighborhood specific
✓ Owner portal + digital inspections	Real-time access and detailed 360-degree documentation
✓ 60-day cancellation notice	No penalties, no lock-in, no early termination fees

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