

Section 42.—Low-Income Housing Credit

26 CFR 1.42–15: Available unit rule.

T.D. 8732

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
Internal Revenue Service
26 CFR Part 1

Available Unit Rule

A G E N C Y: Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Treasury.

ACTION: Final regulations.

S U M M A R Y: This document contains final regulations concerning the treatment of low-income housing units in a building that are occupied by individuals whose incomes increase above 140 percent of the income limitation applicable under section 42(g)(1). These regulations affect owners of those buildings who claim the low-income housing tax credit.

D A T E S: These regulations are effective September 26, 1997.

For dates of applicability of these regulations, see §1.42–15(i).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: David Selig, (202) 622-3040 (not a toll-free number).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On May 30, 1996, the IRS published a notice of proposed rulemaking in the **Federal Register** (PS–29–95 at 61 FR 27036 [1997–1 C.B. 862]) proposing amendments to the Income Tax Regulations (26 CFR part 1) under section 42(g)(2)(D) of the Internal Revenue Code. A public hearing was scheduled for September 17, 1996, pursuant to a notice of public hearing published simultaneously with the notice of proposed rulemaking. However, the IRS received no requests to speak at the public hearing, and no public hearing was held. Written comments responding to the notice were received. After consideration of all the comments, the proposed regulations are adopted as revised by this Treasury decision.

Explanation of Revisions and Summary of Comments

The general rule in section 42(g)(2)(D)(i) provides that if the income of an occupant of a low-income unit increases above the income limitation applicable under section 42(g)(1), the unit continues to be treated as a low-income unit. This general rule only applies if the occupant's income initially met the income limitation and the unit continues to be rent-restricted. Section 42(g)(2)(D)(ii), however, provides an exception to the general rule in section 42(g)(2)(D)(i). Under this exception, the unit ceases being treated as a low-income unit when two conditions occur. The first condition is that the occupant's income increases above 140 percent of the income limitation applicable under section 42(g)(1), or above 170 percent for a deep rent skewed project described in section 142(d)(4)(B) (applicable income limitation). When this occurs, the unit becomes an over-income unit. The second condition is that a new occupant, whose income exceeds the applicable income limitation (nonqualified resident), occupies any residential unit in the building of a comparable or smaller size (comparable unit).

Rules and Definitions

One commentator suggested that the available unit rule under the proposed regulations did not clearly indicate whether the aggregate income of all occupants of a unit is taken into account. Accordingly, the final regulations clarify that an over-income unit means a low-income unit in which the aggregate income of the occupants of the unit increases above 140 percent of the applicable income limitation under section 42(g)(1), or above 170 percent of the applicable income limitation for deep rent skewed projects described in section 142(d)(4)(B).

Commentators requested that the final regulations specify whether a comparable unit is measured by floor space or number of bedrooms. The final regulations provide that a comparable unit must be measured by the same method the taxpayer used to determine qualified basis for the credit year in which the comparable unit became available.

Some commentators stated that the provision in the proposed regulations that all available comparable units (not just the “next available” unit) must be rented to qualified residents to continue treating an over-income unit as a low-income unit is inconsistent with the title of section 42(g)(2)(D)(ii). Although the title of that provision uses the term next available unit, the text of the rule provides that if any available comparable unit is occupied by a nonqualified resident, the over-income unit ceases to be treated as a low-income unit. This means that if a building has more than one over-income unit, renting any available comparable unit (a comparably sized or smaller unit) to a qualified resident preserves the status of all over-income units as low-income units. Similarly, if any available comparable unit is rented to a nonqualified resident, all over-income units for which the available unit was a comparable unit lose their status as low-income units; thus, comparably sized or larger over-income units would lose their status as low-income units. In operation, this means that the owner must continue to rent any available comparable unit to a qualified resident until the percentage of low-income units in a building (excluding the over-income units) is equal to the percentage of low-income units on which the credit is based. At that point, failure to maintain the over-income units as low-income units has no immediate significance. (However, the failure to maintain an over-income unit as a low-income unit may affect the owner's decision of whether or not to rent a particular available unit at market rate at a later time.) Consequently, the final regulations provide that all available comparable units in the building, not only the next available comparable unit, must be rented to qualified residents to retain the low-income status of the over-income units.

Application of Rules on a Building by Building Basis

The proposed regulations provide that in a project containing more than one low-income building, the available unit rule applies separately to each building. Some commentators suggested that the regulations should permit residents of over-income units to move to available

units in different buildings within the same low-income housing project without violating the available unit rule. However, because the requirements under section 42 must be satisfied on a building by building basis, the final regulations provide that the available unit rule only permits a current resident to move to another unit within the same building of a low-income housing project.

In addition, in response to requests from several commentators, the final regulations make clear that when a current resident moves to a different unit within the same low-income building, the units exchange status. (See example 2 of §1.42–15(g) of the proposed regulations and §1.42–15(h) of the final regulations.) Thus, the newly occupied unit adopts the status of the vacated unit, and the vacated unit assumes the status the newly occupied unit had immediately prior to its occupancy by the qualifying residents.

Timing Issues

The methods of committing rental units to tenants varies in different jurisdictions. However, it is a common rental practice to have some form of preliminary reservation for a unit prior to the date on which a lease is signed or the unit is occupied. Thus, several commentators have requested clarification that once a unit is reserved for a prospective tenant, it is no longer treated as available for purposes of the available unit rule. Accordingly, the final regulations provide that a unit is not available for purposes of the available unit rule when the unit is no longer available for rent due to a reservation that is binding under local law.

Finally, financing arrangements using obligations that purport to be exempt facility bonds under section 142 must meet the requirements of sections 103 and 141 through 150 for interest on the obligations to be excluded from gross income under section 103(a). The requirements under section 142(d) may differ from those under section 42. Accordingly, the final regulations provide that the rules under the final regulations are not intended as an interpretation of the applicable rules under section 142.

Special Analyses

It has been determined that this Treasury decision is not a significant regula-

tory action as defined in EO 12866. Therefore, a regulatory assessment is not required. It also has been determined that section 553(b) of the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. chapter 5) does not apply to these regulations, and, because these regulations do not impose on small entities a collection of information requirement, the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. chapter 6) does not apply. Therefore, a Regulatory Flexibility Analysis is not required. Pursuant to section 7805(f) of the Internal Revenue Code, the notice of proposed rulemaking preceding these regulations was submitted to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration for comment on its impact on small business.

Drafting Information

The principal author of these regulations is David Selig, Office of the Assistant Chief Counsel (Passthroughs and Special Industries), IRS. However, other personnel from the IRS and Treasury Department participated in their development.

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Adoption of Amendments to the Regulations

Accordingly, 26 CFR part 1 is amended as follows:

PART 1—INCOME TAXES

Paragraph 1. The authority citation for part 1 is amended by adding an entry in numerical order to read as follows:

Authority: 26 U.S.C. 7805 * * *
Section 1.42-15 is also issued under 26 U.S.C. 42(n); * * *

Par. 2. Section 1.42-15 is added to read as follows:

§1.42–15 Available unit rule.

(a) *Definitions.* The following definitions apply to this section:

Applicable income limitation means the limitation applicable under section 42(g)(1) or, for deep rent skewed projects described in section 142(d)(4)(B), 40 percent of area median gross income.

Available unit rule means the rule in section 42(g)(2)(D)(ii).

Comparable unit means a residential unit in a low-income building that is comparably sized or smaller than an over-

come unit or, for deep rent skewed projects described in section 142(d)(4)(B), any low-income unit. For purposes of determining whether a residential unit is comparably sized, a comparable unit must be measured by the same method used to determine qualified basis for the credit year in which the comparable unit became available.

Current resident means a person who is living in the low-income building.

Low-income unit is defined by section 42(i)(3)(A).

Nonqualified resident means a new occupant or occupants whose aggregate income exceeds the applicable income limitation.

Over-income unit means a low-income unit in which the aggregate income of the occupants of the unit increases above 140 percent of the applicable income limitation under section 42(g)(1), or above 170 percent of the applicable income limitation for deep rent skewed projects described in section 142(d)(4)(B).

Qualified resident means an occupant either whose aggregate income (combined with the income of all other occupants of the unit) does not exceed the applicable income limitation and who is otherwise a low-income resident under section 42, or who is a current resident.

(b) *General section 42(g)(2)(D)(i) rule.* Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, notwithstanding an increase in the income of the occupants of a low-income unit above the applicable income limitation, if the income of the occupants initially met the applicable income limitation, and the unit continues to be rent-restricted—

(1) The unit continues to be treated as a low-income unit; and

(2) The unit continues to be included in the numerator and the denominator of the ratio used to determine whether a project satisfies the applicable minimum set-aside requirement of section 42(g)(1).

(c) *Exception.* A unit ceases to be treated as a low-income unit if it becomes an over-income unit and a nonqualified resident occupies any comparable unit that is available or that subsequently becomes available in the same low-income building. In other words, the owner of a low-income building must rent to qualified residents all comparable units that are available or that subsequently become

available in the same building to continue treating the over-income unit as a low-income unit. Once the percentage of low-income units in a building (excluding the over-income units) equals the percentage of low-income units on which the credit is based, failure to maintain the over-income units as low-income units has no immediate significance. The failure to maintain the over-income units as low-income units, however, may affect the decision of whether or not to rent a particular available unit at market rate at a later time. A unit is not available for purposes of the available unit rule when the unit is no longer available for rent due to contractual arrangements that are binding under local law (for example, a unit is not available if it is subject to a preliminary reservation that is binding on the owner under local law prior to the date a lease is signed or the unit is occupied).

(d) *Effect of current resident moving within building.* When a current resident moves to a different unit within the building, the newly occupied unit adopts the status of the vacated unit. Thus, if a current resident, whose income exceeds the applicable income limitation, moves from an over-income unit to a vacant unit in the same building, the newly occupied unit is treated as an over-income unit. The vacated unit assumes the status the newly occupied unit had immediately before it was occupied by the current resident.

(e) *Available unit rule applies separately to each building in a project.* In a project containing more than one low-income building, the available unit rule applies separately to each building.

(f) *Result of noncompliance with available unit rule.* If any comparable unit that is available or that subsequently becomes available is rented to a nonqualified resident, all over-income units for which the available unit was a comparable unit within the same building lose their status as low-income units; thus, comparably sized or larger over-income units would lose their status as low-income units.

(g) *Relationship to tax-exempt bond provisions.* Financing arrangements that purport to be exempt-facility bonds under section 142 must meet the requirements of sections 103 and 141 through 150 for interest on the obligations to be excluded from gross income under section 103(a). This section is not intended as an interpretation under section 142.

(h) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate this section:

Example 1. This example illustrates noncompliance with the available unit rule in a low-income building containing three over-income units. On January 1, 1998, a qualified low-income housing project, consisting of one building containing ten identically sized residential units, received a housing credit dollar amount allocation from a state housing credit agency for five low-income units. By the close of 1998, the first year of the credit period, the project satisfied the minimum set-aside requirement of section 42(g)(1)(B). Units 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were occupied by individuals whose incomes did not exceed the income limitation applicable under section 42(g)(1) and were otherwise low-income residents under section 42. Units 6, 7, 8, and 9 were occupied by market-rate tenants. Unit 10 was vacant. To avoid recapture of credit, the project owner must maintain five of the units as low-income units. On November 1, 1999, the certificates of annual income state that annual incomes of the individuals in Units 1, 2, and 3 increased above 140 percent of the income limitation applicable under section 42(g)(1), causing those units to become over-income units. On November 30, 1999, Units 8 and 9 became vacant. On December 1, 1999, the project owner rented Units 8 and 9 to qualified residents who were not current residents at rates meeting the rent restriction requirements of section 42(g)(2). On December 31, 1999, the project owner rented Unit 10 to a market-rate tenant. Because Unit 10, an available comparable unit, was leased to a market-rate tenant, Units 1, 2, and 3 ceased to be treated as low-income units. On that date, Units 4, 5, 8, and 9 were the only remaining low-income units. Because the project owner did not maintain five of the residential units as low-income units, the qualified basis in the building is reduced, and credit must be recaptured. If the project owner had rented Unit 10 to a qualified resident who was not a current resident, eight of the units would be low-income units. At that time, Units 1, 2, and 3, the over-income units, could be rented to market-rate tenants because the building would still contain five low-income units.

Example 2. This example illustrates the provisions of paragraph (d) of this section. A low-income project consists of one six-floor building. The residential units in the building are identically sized. The building contains two over-income units on the sixth floor and two vacant units on the first floor. The project owner, desiring to maintain the over-income units as low-income units, wants to rent the available units to qualified residents. J, a resident of one of the over-income units, wishes to occupy a unit on the first floor. J's income has recently increased above the applicable income limitation. The project owner permits J to move into one of the units on the first floor. Despite J's income exceeding the applicable income limitation, J is a qualified resident under the available unit rule because J is a current resident of the building. The unit newly occupied by J becomes an over-income unit under the available unit rule. The unit vacated by J assumes the status the newly occupied unit had immediately before J occupied the unit. The over-income units in the building continue to be treated as low-income units.

(i) *Effective date.* This section applies to leases entered into or renewed on and after September 26, 1997.

Michael P. Dolan,
*Acting Commissioner of
Internal Revenue.*

Approved August 28, 1997.

Donald C. Lubick,
*Acting Assistant Secretary of
the Treasury.*

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