What Does a Property Manager Actually Do? An East Bay Landlord’s Guide



Most landlords who’ve never used a property manager picture the job as “collects rent, calls a plumber when something breaks.” That’s part of it. It’s also the smallest part.

In practice, a professional property manager serves as the owner’s leasing agent, compliance coordinator, maintenance manager, financial administrator, and day-to-day point of contact for tenants — often simultaneously, across dozens of units.

Here’s what that actually looks like day to day, what East Bay-specific complexity adds to it, and how to tell a property manager who’s doing the work from one who’s just charging for a phone number.

In Short: What Does a Property Manager Do?

A property manager markets the property, screens tenants, collects rent, coordinates maintenance, keeps the property compliant with California and local rental laws, maintains financial records, and serves as the primary point of contact for both owners and tenants. In the East Bay specifically, that compliance piece is heavier than most owners expect — Oakland, Berkeley, and other East Bay cities each layer local rent control rules on top of state law, and the rates change on different schedules.

Key Facts

Question	Answer
What does a PM actually handle?	Leasing, tenant screening, rent collection, maintenance coordination, compliance tracking, owner accounting, tenant/owner communication
Is a license required?	Yes — a California DRE broker license, or supervision by one. No exemption for small portfolios or part-time management.
What changed for 2026?	AB 1482's cap rises to **8.8%** and Oakland's RAP rate rises to **2.3%**, both effective Aug 1, 2026 — confirmed by BLS CPI data and the City of Oakland's own published rate table. See Sources below.
What does AEBP charge?	6–8% of monthly rent collected — no setup fee, no maintenance markup, no cancellation penalty

Prefer video? Watch the video version, with chapter links and a full transcript.

title="What Does a Property Manager Actually Do? (East Bay Guide)"]

Video Transcript

Most landlords picture a property manager's job as "collect the rent, call a plumber when something breaks." That's part of it. It's the smallest part.

A property manager is running six jobs at once: leasing and marketing, tenant screening, rent collection, maintenance coordination, compliance tracking, and owner accounting. Every one of those is time a landlord either spends themselves, or risk they're taking on without realizing it.

In the East Bay, that compliance piece is heavier than most owners expect. Oakland, Berkeley, and other East Bay cities each layer their own rent control rules on top of state law, and the rates change on different schedules. This year alone, AB 1482 rises to eight-point-eight percent and Oakland's RAP rate rises to two-point-three percent, both effective August 1st. A property manager's job is to catch that before the next rent notice goes out — not explain the mistake afterward.

Here's how we handle that day to day. Our AI leasing assistant, LISA, answers rental inquiries and schedules showings around the clock, so a prospective tenant who finds a listing at nine p.m. isn't waiting until Monday to hear back. Our owner and tenant portals handle rent collection, maintenance requests, and monthly statements in one place. And our maintenance line takes requests in Spanish as well as English.

That bilingual line isn't a nice-to-have. About a third of the requests that come through it each month are ones we're confident would never have been submitted in English. That's deferred maintenance caught early, not found later during an expensive move-out walkthrough.

Here's a question most owners never ask: is this person actually licensed? California requires a real estate broker license to manage property for someone else, for compensation — no exception for small portfolios or side gigs. Unlicensed management is illegal, and it can create real problems for the owner too if something goes wrong. Verifying a license takes

thirty seconds on the DRE’s public lookup. Do it before signing anything.

So what separates a good property manager from a bad one? A good one can explain your specific rent cap without looking it up. They’ll show you their license without hesitation. Maintenance billing has no hidden markup, or it’s disclosed upfront. And when you ask for a monthly statement, it already exists — you’re not waiting on a phone call.

If a property manager can’t clear those basics in a first conversation, that’s useful information — just a reason to keep interviewing.

All East Bay Properties has been managing East Bay rentals since 2005 — 600-plus units across Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville. The full breakdown, plus our fee structure with no hidden line items, is linked below.

All East Bay Properties. Link below for the full guide.

Sources for the rent-cap figures mentioned in this video: BLS CPI data, San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, April 2026 and the City of Oakland’s own published rate table, which directly confirms the 2.3% figure effective August 1, 2026 — full citations in the Sources section below.

The Day-to-Day Breakdown

Function	What it actually involves
Leasing & marketing	Listing photos, syndication to Zillow/AppFolio/etc., showing scheduling, application intake
Tenant screening	Credit, income verification, rental history, eviction records, fair housing-compliant criteria applied consistently
Rent collection	Online payment processing, late notice timing, grace period tracking (which varies by lease, not just by law)

Function	What it actually involves
Maintenance coordination	Vendor dispatch, habitability triage, emergency response, invoice review
Compliance tracking	Local rent control compliance, annual RAP or rent registry filings, lawful rent increase calculations, notice preparation, security deposit compliance, fair housing documentation, and tracking state and local rules as they change
Owner accounting	Trust accounting, monthly statements, 1099s, reserve management
Owner & tenant communication	Portal access, after-hours contact, dispute mediation

Every row represents either time a landlord must personally invest or risk they must personally assume. The compliance row is where East Bay owners get hurt most — Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville each layer local rules on top of state law, and the rates change on different schedules. A property manager's job is to catch that before your next rent notice goes out, not explain the violation to you after a tenant's attorney already has.

What This Looks Like at AEBP

We built our systems around the two things that actually determine whether a landlord's experience with a PM is good or bad: **response speed** and **whether small problems get caught before they're expensive**.

- **LISA, our AI leasing assistant**, handles inbound rental inquiries and showing scheduling around the clock — so a prospective tenant who finds your listing at 9pm on a Tuesday isn't waiting until Monday morning to hear back. Faster response on inquiries is one of the biggest levers on vacancy length, and it's also one of the easiest things a

self-managing landlord falls behind on simply because they have a day job.

- **AppFolio owner and tenant portals** handle rent collection, maintenance requests, and monthly statements in one place — no chasing down a check or a text thread to reconstruct what happened with a repair.
- **A bilingual maintenance line** takes requests in Spanish as well as English, staffed 24/7.

That last one isn't a nice-to-have. About a third of the maintenance requests that come through our bilingual line each month are ones we're confident would never have been submitted at all if the tenant had to describe the problem in English through a web form. That's not a translation convenience — that's deferred maintenance we're catching early instead of finding out about during a much more expensive move-out walkthrough or habitability complaint.

All East Bay Properties has been managing East Bay rentals since 2005. Today that's 600+ residential units across Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville, and the surrounding communities, with a 95%+ occupancy rate and an average 25–30 days from listing to signed lease — numbers we track internally against every property we manage, not just headline stats.

The License Question Landlords Skip

California requires anyone who manages property for someone else, for compensation, to hold a real estate broker license — or to work under a broker who does (Business & Professions Code §10131). This covers the core activities of the job: collecting rent, placing tenants, negotiating leases, soliciting listings. There isn't a "handyman with a spreadsheet" exemption.

This matters for two reasons:

1. **Unlicensed property management is illegal**, and can create significant legal problems — including disputes over the manager's authority to act on the owner's

behalf if a lease or notice is later challenged.

2. **The exposure doesn't necessarily stay with the manager.** Property owners who knowingly hire an unlicensed manager may also face legal and financial exposure themselves, particularly if trust funds are mishandled or state law is otherwise violated.

Before you sign with anyone, verify their license on the DRE's public license lookup. It takes thirty seconds and it's the single highest-leverage question you can ask. AEBP's own license — California DRE #01516255 — is verifiable the same way.

What a Property Manager Doesn't Do

A property manager isn't a general contractor, attorney, accountant, or tax advisor. A good manager coordinates maintenance vendors, keeps you informed on legal compliance, and provides detailed financial reporting — but you should still consult a licensed contractor for major construction, an attorney for contested legal matters, and a CPA for tax planning. A property manager who claims to replace all three is a red flag, not a value-add.

Good PM vs. Bad PM: What to Actually Look For

Signal	Good PM	Red flag
Licensing	Verifiable DRE broker license, happy to show it	Vague answer, "we don't need one for what we do"
Compliance	Can explain your specific rent cap (city + state) without looking it up	Quotes a flat rate or doesn't know your city has its own ordinance
Maintenance billing	No markup, or markup disclosed upfront in writing	"We handle it" with no invoice detail

Signal	Good PM	Red flag
Response time	After-hours contact method that’s actually staffed	Voicemail box that isn’t checked till Monday
Reporting	Monthly owner statement, on-demand portal access	“Call me if you want an update”
Fee structure	Plain-language fee sheet, no surprise line items	Reluctance to put fees in writing before you sign
Insurance	Carries E&O insurance and can explain the coverage	Can’t explain their insurance, or says “that’s not necessary”

If a property manager can’t clear most of that table in a first conversation, that’s information — not a reason to be suspicious of the whole industry, just a reason to keep interviewing.



The difference between a good property manager and a bad one usually shows up before you sign anything.

The Bottom Line

A property manager who’s doing the job well is running leasing, screening, rent collection, maintenance, compliance, and accounting as one coordinated system — not as five separate people who occasionally talk to each other. In a market with as much local regulatory overlay

as the East Bay, the compliance piece alone is usually worth more than the fee.

If you want to see exactly what that costs, our property management fees page lays out our structure with no hidden line items. And if you're still weighing whether to hire a PM at all, we ran the real math on that here. For the compliance side specifically, see our breakdown of the 2026 rent cap changes.

Schedule a free consultation →

Sources

- California Civil Code §1947.12 — AB 1482 rent cap formula
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — CPI, San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, April 2026 (published May 12, 2026)
- City of Oakland — Allowable Rent Increases (confirms the 2.3% RAP rate effective Aug 1, 2026)
- California Business & Professions Code §10131 — real estate broker license requirement
- California DRE — Public License Lookup

Frequently Asked Questions

Do property managers handle maintenance?

Yes. A property manager coordinates repair requests, dispatches vendors, triages habitability issues, and reviews invoices — typically without marking up the cost of the repair itself.

Can a property manager evict tenants?

A licensed California property manager can prepare and serve many of the required notices and coordinate the eviction process, but actual court filings and contested evictions require an attorney. A good property manager knows where that line is and brings one in at the right point. See our eviction notice requirements guide for the notice types involved.

Do property managers collect rent?

Yes — this is one of the core, licensed activities under California law. Most managers now handle this through an online portal with automated late-notice tracking rather than paper checks.

Do property managers inspect rental properties?

Yes. Routine inspections — move-in, move-out, and periodic check-ins — are standard, both to document condition and to catch maintenance issues before they become habitability problems.

Is a property manager required to be licensed in California?

Yes. Anyone managing property for compensation on behalf of someone else must hold a California DRE broker license, or work under a broker who does, per Business & Professions Code §10131. There's no exemption based on portfolio size or part-time status. Verify any manager's license here.

Source: https://dev.alleastbayproperties.com/what-does-a-property-manager-do-east-bay/