

Minutes of the Fairfax County Consumer Protection Commission

March 19, 2024
7:30 PM
Government Center
12000 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, VA 22035
Chairperson Kratovil, Presiding

Attendance: Commissioners: Gasimov, Gulakowski, Kirk, Kharat, Kratovil, Roark, Rosier, Svab

Remote Participation: Commissioners: Belkowitz

Absent: Commissioners: Springer

Staff: Rebecca L. Makely, Director
Cable and Consumer Services
Amanda K. Kastl, Director
Consumer Services Division
Susan C. Jones, Branch Manager
Consumer Affairs Branch
Candice J. Hicks, Consumer Specialist 1
Consumer Affairs Branch

Guests: Frederick E. Ellrod III, Director
Communications Policy and
Regulation Division

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 p.m. by Chairperson Kratovil.

Chairperson Kratovil notified the Commission that Commissioner Belkowitz requested to participate in the meeting remotely.

Commissioner Gulakowski made the motion to approve that Chairperson Kratovil’s decision to approve Commissioner Belkowitz’s request to participate from a remote location was in conformance with the Consumer Protection Commission’s Remote Participation Policy. Commissioner Kirk seconded the motion. The motion was approved, 8-0-0.

Chairperson Kratovil made the motion that Commissioner Belkowitz’s voice could be heard by all persons at the primary meeting location. Commissioner Kirk seconded the motion. The motion was approved, 8-0-0. Commissioner Belkowitz participated remotely from Fairfax Station due to being out of town on a family matter.

Minutes

Chairperson Kratovil moved to accept the February 20, 2024, minutes. Commissioner Gulakowski seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted unanimously, 9-0-0.

New Business

1. Communications Policy and Regulation Division Presentation. Rick Ellrod, Director, Communications Policy and Regulation Division (CPRD) provided an overview the CPRD’s mission; consumer assistance; inspections; cable franchise negotiations; public, educational, and governmental (PEG) channels; the institutional network (I-Net); cable operator compliance; outreach; policy monitoring; and rate regulation.

A discussion ensued on shorter franchise contract agreements, current landscape on traditional cable vs. video streaming, PEG grants, term clauses, educational outreach events, customer service compliance, inspection of aerial construction sites, source of revenue, pricing regulation, equipment fees, and outreach to consumers on CPRD’s services and resources.

Report of the Director

Director Makely stated National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW) was a success with 12 in person and virtual outreach events with over 400 attendees—including Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Day, which took place on March 7, 2024.

Director Makely stated a debriefing exercise was done by Consumer Affairs staff to discuss the National Consumer Protection Week on what worked, what did not work, and ways the event can be improved upon next year. Director Makely welcomed the Commissioners to provide feedback or suggestions about the event.

Director Makely informed the Commission that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted on March 14, 2024, to require cable and satellite TV pricing transparency; its new “all-in” pricing rules will address consumers’ confusion on hidden fees in cable and satellite TV billing. Director Makely stated staff will work on a communications campaign with the Board of Supervisors (BOS) to provide answers to questions received from residents. Director Makely met with the BOS in closed session and gained approval to join a coalition to file future comments with the FCC.

Director Makely advised that for the April 16, 2024, Consumer Protection Commission (CPC) meeting, staff will request authorization to advertise a public hearing to be held on May 21, 2024, 7:30 p.m. on proposed amendments to Fairfax County Code Section 84.1-6-3, rates, fares, and charges established.

Old Business

There was no old business before the Commission.

Commissioner Matters

Commissioner Rosier complimented DCCS staff efforts during NCPW.

Commissioner Gasimov had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Kirk advised he is delighted that CPRD is reviewing FCC rulings and legislations so that what happened to the taxicab industry does not happen to the cable industry.

Commissioner Kharat had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Roark had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Gulakowski stated that he watched staff presentations on Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Day on Channel 16. He attended Supervisor Walkinshaw's Braddock District College meeting and shared the duties of the CPC.

Commissioner Svab had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Belkowitz had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Kratovil had several issues to bring before the Commission.

1. Next CPC meeting is scheduled for April 16, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. Both the Consumer Protection Commission Community Engagement Committee and the Consumer Protection Commission Financial Scams and Fraud Committee will also meet on that date and time.
2. NCPW was a success with Consumer Affairs receiving two proclamations from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Director Makely advised one proclamation was to proclaim March 3-9, 2024, as Consumer Protection Week, and the other proclamation was to proclaim March 2024 as Alternative Dispute Resolution Month.
3. Concerns about the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's credit reporting and credit freezes, and the way consumer data is made available.

Chairperson Kratovil made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioners Gulakowski and Kirk seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.