

Minutes of the Fairfax County Tenant-Landlord Commission

February 13, 2020

Fairfax County Government Center
12000 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, Virginia 22035
Conference Room 8
Chairman Fielding presiding

Attendance:

Commissioners Fielding, Fusaro, Geier-Smith,
Harberg, Park

Absent:

Commissioner Purnell

Staff Attending:

Michael S. Liberman, Director
Cable and Consumer Services
Rebecca L. Makely, Director
Consumer Services Division
Susan C. Jones, Branch Chief
Consumer Affairs Branch
Vee Johnson, Consumer Specialist
Consumer Affairs Branch

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Chairman Fielding.

Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Geier-Smith and seconded by Commissioner Park to approve the minutes from October 17, 2019. The motion carried unanimously.

Report of the Chairman

Chairman Fielding welcomed Commissioner Fusaro to the Commission and acknowledged the expertise he will bring to the Commission in serving the tenant-landlord community. Commissioners and staff introduced themselves and also welcomed Commissioner Fusaro. Commissioner Fusaro expressed his eagerness to participate in the work of the Commission.

The service and contributions of Commissioner Chris Kocsis, who recently passed, was acknowledged and recognized.

Chairman Fielding outlined actions taken in response to his service on multiple boards and commissions. He confirmed his commitment to continue to serve on the Tenant-Landlord Commission.

Report of the Directors

Director Liberman spoke about the FY 2021 Budget, which will be done in conjunction with the County's Strategic Plan. On February 25th, the County Executive will present the FY 2021 Advertised (proposed) Budget Plan. The Board of Supervisors will hold public hearings on the budget from April 14-16th. The budget mark-up, which determines the budget package and tax rate is April 28th. The adoption of the FY 2021 Budget is May 5th. The budget will go into effect on July 1, 2020.

Director Liberman informed the Commission that the Board of Supervisors is moving forward on Supervisor Lusk's initiative for a public-private partnership that will focus on significant new office development in the Historic Richmond Highway corridor to attract emerging technology companies. This investment will create more employment opportunities for those who live in this area. The County Executive will assign staff to identify and present next steps to the Economic Advisory Committee.

Director Makely shared information about the four new Board members sworn in on December 16, 2019, Rodney L. Lusk, Lee District; Dalia A. Palchik: Providence District; Walter L. Alcorn, Hunter Mill District; and James R. Walkinshaw, Braddock District.

Staff Report

A case regarding the lack of heat and hot water in an apartment building in January was summarized. After not having heat and hot water for two days, the tenant filed a complaint with Consumer Affairs. According to the tenant, the landlord was not providing information about when the services would be restored. Prior to significant intervention from Consumer Affairs, the landlord explained that an emergency repair was required due to issues with the boiler system. The heat and hot water were fully restored within three days. However, the landlord acknowledged that tenants were not informed throughout the process, but in the future, better communication will be provided when emergency repairs are required.

Comments were requested from Commissioners regarding a bill introduced in both the Senate and House of Representatives of the Virginia General Assembly, which require the Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development to develop a statement of tenant rights and responsibilities to be signed by all parties to a rental agreement. This bill amends § [55.1-1204](#) of the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act. A summary of Senate Bill No. 707 was provided. Commissioners offered their comments regarding this bill.

The Northern Virginia Housing Expo is Saturday, April 4th from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at Dominion High School in Sterling Virginia. Commissioners were invited to join Consumer Affairs staff at this event to talk with attendees about tenant-landlord matters. Chairman Fielding shared his experiences in attending the expo during the years. Flyers will be emailed so Commissioners can share this event throughout their network.

Commission Matters

The calendar was reviewed. Commissioner Fusaro is not available for the April 9th meeting. No other updates at this time.

Commissioner Harberg inquired about a landlord's role when there is a dispute between tenants. During discussion, it was affirmed that the landlord is responsible for ensuring the terms of the lease are followed. Feuding tenants may need to seek civil remedies.

Commissioner Geier-Smith was promoted to Residential Process Manager and is working out of the Southern Management corporate office. She is also serving on the Mason District Task Force to review the South County Site-Specific Plan Amendment.

Commissioner Geier-Smith inquired about the outcome of mediation by Consumer Affairs on behalf of a tenant whose dispute was featured in the *Washington Post*. Director Makely informed that the matter was resolved favorably.

Commissioner Fielding had no further matters to present.

Commissioners Park had no matters to present.

Commissioner Fusaro had no matters to present.

Old Business

None

New Business

Pursuant to Article IV of the Bylaws, the following slate of candidates was nominated:

Commissioner Park	Landlord Vice-Chair
Commissioner Harberg	Tenant Vice-Chair
Commissioner Fusaro	Secretary

A motion was made by Commissioner Geier-Smith to accept the slate of candidates as nominated. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Harberg. The slate was unanimously accepted as nominated.

Director Makely shared information about the [2020 Census](#) and the Complete Count Committee established by the Board of Supervisors. Commissioners were encouraged to create awareness in their communities about the importance of being counted.

Director Liberman informed that the Bylaws, which were last revised in 2015, will be updated using a template provided by the County Attorney's office on behalf of the Board of Supervisors. This new model allows Boards to make some modifications, but they must be approved by the Board of Supervisors. A draft will be presented at the April meeting for review by the Commission.

March 1-7th is National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW). Branch Chief Susan Jones outlined the events and activities Consumer Affairs will offer and participate in throughout the community in observance of NCPW. Staff will send a link to Commissioners of activities scheduled during the week. Commissioners were encouraged to share this information as well as attend events.

A motion was made by Commissioner Harberg and seconded by Commissioner Park to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 p.m.