

Minutes of the Fairfax County Consumer Protection Commission

August 18, 2020

7:30 PM
Audio Bridge Electronic Meeting
Chairman Fee presiding

Attendance:

Commissioners: Belkowitz, Callender, Fee,
Gulakowski, Hargraves, Hine, Kirk, Kratovil,
Lynch, Roark, Rosier

Absent:

Commissioners: Javed

Staff:

Michael S. Liberman, Director
Cable and Consumer Services
(in Conference Room 11)
Rebecca L. Makely, Director
Consumer Services Division
(on audio bridge)
Susan C. Jones, Branch Chief
Consumer Affairs Branch
(in Conference Room 11)
Heidi Baggett, Administrative Assistant IV
Consumer Affairs Branch
(on audio bridge)

The electronic meeting was called to order at 7:31 PM by Chairman Fee.

Quorum, Location and Audibility of Members' Voices

Chairman Fee conducted a Roll Call to verify that a quorum of members were participating; and that each member's voice was clear, audible, and at appropriate volume for all of the other members; and the location from which member was participating. The roll call was as follows:

Chairman Fee, Fairfax County Government Center
Commissioner Belkowitz, Fairfax Station
Commissioner Callender, Great Falls
Commissioner Gulakowski, Burke
Commissioner Hargraves, Alexandria
Commissioner Hine, Fairfax
Commissioner Kirk, Falls Church
Commissioner Kratovil, Mount Vernon
Commissioner Lynch, Oak Hill
Commissioner Roark, Lorton
Commissioner Rosier, Great Falls

Chairman Fee passed the virtual gavel to Vice Chairman Gulakowski. A motion was made by Chairman Fee that each member's voice was adequately heard by each member of the Consumer Protection Commission (Commission). This motion was seconded by Commissioner Gulakowski. This motion passed unanimously.

Need for an Electronic Meeting

A motion was made by Chairman Fee that the State of Emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic made it unsafe for the Commission to physically assemble and unsafe for the public to physically attend any such meeting, and that as such, FOIA's usual procedures, which require the physical assembly of the Commission and the physical presence of the public, could not be implemented safely or practically. Chairman Fee further moved that the Commission conduct the meeting electronically through a dedicated audio-conferencing line, and that the public access the meeting by calling 1-877-336-1829 and entering access code 8628844. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gulakowski. The motion passed unanimously.

Need to Dispense with FOIA's Usual Procedures to Assure Continuity in Government/Continue Operations

A motion was made by Chairman Fee that all of the matters addressed on the agenda addressed the Emergency itself, were necessary for continuity in Fairfax County government, and/or were statutorily required or necessary to continue operations and the discharge of the Commission's lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Gulakowski. The motion was passed unanimously.

Minutes

A motion was made by Chairman Fee and seconded by Commissioner Gulakowski to approve the minutes from the February 18, 2020. The motion passed unanimously.

Report of the Chairman

The Chairman had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Report of the Director

Director Liberman discussed the Fairfax County FY 2021 budget process and the Countywide Strategic Plan. He explained how the Fairfax County FY 2021 budget aligned with the Fairfax Countywide Strategic Plan.

Director Makely discussed the Consumer Protection Commission Draft FY 2020 Annual Report to be ready for review by the Commission in September. She discussed the options for a commission photo and stated the delay in the report would not impact the FY 2020 statistics.

Commission Matters

Commissioner Belkowitz expressed concerns about the COVID-19 related fraud scams to consumers.

Commissioner Callender agreed on the ingenious ways COVID-19 scams took money from consumers.

Commissioner Gulakowski had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Hargraves had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Hine had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Kirk congratulated everyone on the ability to have this meeting.

Commissioner Kratovil asked how COVID-19 information was being assimilated to consumers. Director Liberman addressed how Consumer Affairs was providing the information.

Commissioner Lynch had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Roark had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Rosier stated she spoke with several different groups who asked why the cost of food has gone up so much and asked if anyone else had seen this. Director Liberman stated he had heard about the cost of food rising and saw several articles addressing this issue.

Chairman Fee said he had used delivery services during the pandemic. He also stated he had issues with his bank bouncing two of his checks despite having money in the account. He is working with the bank to waive the returned check fees. He had success in doing so with one check and may have Consumer Affairs assist him if the other fee is not waived.

Old Business

There was no old business before the Commission.

New Business

1. COVID-19 Pandemic:

Director Liberman provided an overview of the work performed by the Department of Cable and Consumer Services.

Communications Policy and Regulation Division:

- Working on franchise negotiations.
- Provides online information for low-cost internet connection options.
- In June 2020 requested an extension of the Board of Supervisors on Comcast franchise agreement.
- Staff 100 percent teleworking.

Communications Productions Division:

- Produced virtual budget town hall meetings, and COVID-19 messaging.
- Staff on rotating schedule, with teleworking and in-person productions.

Consumer Services Division (update provided by Rebecca L. Makely, Director, Consumer Services Division):

Accounting and Finance:

- Completed year-end budget for FY 2020.
- 100 percent teleworking.

Meeting Space Management and Event Support:

- Assisting customers with rescheduling, cancelling, and modifying reservations.
- Staff on rotating schedule with teleworking and meeting support.

Regulation and Licensing:

- Processing in-person license applications on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. (Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)
- Worked with the County Attorney's office to issue temporary licenses.
- Staff on rotating schedule.

Consumer Affairs:

- Processing complaints electronically.
- Posting COVID-19 updates on Consumer Affairs Facebook page.
- *Your Community, You're Connected* aired on July 7, 2020, was an electronic segment with guests appearing virtually to discuss the 2020 Legislative Review for HOAs.
- *Consumer Connection* program is live every month. The August 27, 2020, topic is Tenant- Landlord Rights and Responsibilities as it Relates to COVID.
- Consumer Affairs sends information to the Office of Emergency Management blog and has posted information on anti-price gouging, landlord-tenant rights, frauds, and scams.
- Working with Fairfax County Public Schools on a virtual curriculum.
- Staff 100 percent teleworking.

Director Liberman gave an overview of different methods the Board of Supervisors used to hold meetings and obtain public input.

Director Liberman gave an overview of the options to meet for boards, authorities, and commissions. A discussion ensued on these options.

Commissioner Hargraves expressed concern over absentee applications with incorrect information that were mailed to residents of Fairfax County and whether it was in the Commission's purview to address. Staff reported that the Office of Elections was coordinating with the City of Fairfax to ensure that Fairfax County absentee applications were properly received.

Fee made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Gulakowski seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.