

Minutes of the Fairfax County Tenant-Landlord Commission

October 8, 2020

7:30 p.m.

Zoom Video Meeting

Chairman Fielding, presiding

Attendance:

Commissioners: Chamberlain, Fielding,
Fusaro, Geier-Smith, Islam, Park, Purnell

Absent:

Harberg

Staff Attending:

Michael S. Liberman, Director
Cable and Consumer Services Division
(Fairfax)
Rebecca L. Makely, Director
Consumer Services Division
(Conference Room 11)
Susan C. Jones, Branch Chief
Consumer Affairs Branch
(Springfield)
Vee Johnson, Consumer Specialist II
Consumer Affairs Branch
(Fairfax Station)

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

Quorum, Location, and Audibility of Members' Voices

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

Commissioner Chamberlain, Alexandria
Commissioner Geier-Smith, Orkney Springs
Commissioner Islam, Fairfax
Commissioner Park, Fairfax
Chairman Fielding, Herndon
Commissioner Fusaro, Springfield
Commissioner Purnell, Alexandria

Chairman Fielding passed the virtual gavel to Vice Chairman Park. A motion was made by Chairman Fielding that each member's voice was adequately heard by each member of the Tenant-Landlord Commission (Commission). This motion was seconded by Commissioner Geier-Smith. This motion passed unanimously.

Need for an Electronic Meeting

A motion was made by Chairman Fielding 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 Fielding

further moved that the Commission conduct the meeting electronically through a dedicated video and audio-conferencing line, and that the public access the meeting by calling 301-715-8592 and entering access code 951 8655 1527. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chamberlain. 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 Fielding 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 Geier-Smith. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Geier-Smith and seconded by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the minutes from August 13, 2020. The motion passed unanimously.

Report of the Chairman

Chairman Fielding did not have a report but inquired about the Annual Report that was scheduled for review in September and discussion in October.

Report of the Directors

Director Liberman provided an update regarding the Annual Report. When ready, it would be presented to the Commission for review and approval.

Director Liberman informed that Consumer Affairs, along with other business areas in DCCS, continue to telework while efficiently providing services and resources to meet the needs of consumers and the tenant-landlord community. Offices had been modified to safety accommodate staff and public.

Director Liberman commented on the Absentee/In-Person Voting conducted at the Government Center and the 14 satellite sites that will open on October 14, 2020. Approximately 1,000 people per day have come to the Government Center to cast in-person ballots.

Staff Report

Consumer Specialist Johnson summarized a case regarding a tenant who had a job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The tenant was unable to continue their lease because of the unexpected job loss and was unable to give a 60 day notice as required by the lease agreement. The tenant requested the landlord accept a 30 day notice and not charge the tenant penalties due to the hardship caused by the pandemic. After Consumer Affairs intervention and mediation, the landlord accepted the 30 day notice provided by the tenant and waived the penalty fee.

Commissioners discussed the impact of COVID-19 on tenants and landlords. Staff will email resources to Commissioners that provide assistance and financial relief for both tenants and landlords through county, state, and federal programs, and moratoriums.

An invitation was extended to Commissioners to consider joining the Fairfax County Human Rights Commission Fair Housing Task Force.

Commission Matters

Commissioner Chamberlain discussed the need for balance during eviction moratoriums and inquired about how the county will respond when the CDC moratorium expires on December 31, 2020.

Commissioner Fusaro was pleased to be able to meet by Zoom. He expressed concerns about financial and housing costs as the pandemic continues.

Commissioner Geier-Smith spoke about how evictions are handled differently in Maryland and Virginia and that many tenants are not aware of the declaration required by the CDC order.

Commissioner Islam appreciated the Zoom meeting and the opportunity to exchange information. She is concerned about the build-up of past due rent payments and the unintended consequences.

Commissioner Park thanked staff for setting up the virtual platform.

Commissioner Purnell discussed concerns about the domino effect COVID-19 has on housing as well as the economy. She initiated a discussion about rent increases during the pandemic.

Commissioner Fielding asked about speakers for upcoming meetings.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

A motion was made by Commissioner Geier-Smith and seconded by Commissioner Fusaro to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:31 p.m.