

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 1, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER *J*

SUBJECT: RECEIPT OF THE FY 2005 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE
CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMISSION

ISSUE: City Council receipt of the FY 2005 Annual Report from the Consumer Affairs Commission (Attachment).

RECOMMENDATIONS: That City Council receive the Annual Report from the Consumer Affairs Commission and thank the Commission for its efforts on behalf of the City.

DISCUSSION: The Consumer Affairs Commission is comprised of eleven members who review and analyze consumer issues, and educate the public through various outreach efforts. City Council appoints seven citizen members, two business members, and two members of local consumer action organizations.

ATTACHMENT: FY 2005 Annual Report for the Consumer Affairs Commission.

STAFF:
Rose Williams Boyd, Director of Citizen Assistance
Jacqueline Levy, Consumer Affairs Administrator

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Consumer Affairs Commission



Annual Report
September 2004 through June 2005

The Commission met monthly to review and analyze consumer protection policies and regulations and make recommendations to appropriate agencies for improved consumer relations. Each meeting included a discussion of consumer issues, legislation and relevant current events that can have potential impact on City residents. Attention is given to both the response to consumer complaints and proactive educational and outreach efforts that will allow consumers to avoid the pitfalls of the marketplace. During the reporting period, the Commission undertook the following activities:

- Drafted a proclamation for Council to designate February 6 - 12, 2005 as National Consumer Protection Week which focused on “phishing” as a current tool of choice for identity thieves. The Commission developed a Consumer Bulletin on “phishing” to advise residents on identity theft scams using methods such as mail, telephone, or electronic impersonation of banks, financial institutions, retailers and other avenues of commerce.
- The Commission continues to develop channels for outreach throughout the City. Consumer Bulletins are drafted monthly on various topics. Bulletin topics during this reporting period have included Disaster Relief scams and Check 21. Information on important consumer topics is disseminated regularly through various means including speaking to community groups and working with City services such as the Multicultural Coalition and the Commission on Aging.
- Individual Commission members have written articles on various consumer issues that have been made available to the *Alexandria Gazette-Packet*. The Commission continues to seek publication of these articles.
- The Commission reviewed its Mission Statement and revised it to read as follows:

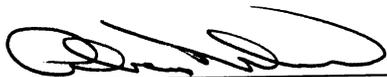
“The Consumer Affairs Commission reviews and analyzes consumer protection policies and regulations and makes recommendations to appropriate agencies for improved consumer relations and educates and advises the public about consumer issues and remedies.”

Future plans include continuous development of bulletins for placement on the City's website, publication in local newspapers, and posting on Comcast Public Access Community Channel 69. The Commission is researching and developing additional literature to provide the Consumer Affairs Office to distribute to residents, and offers speakers and newsletter content to associations and community groups throughout the City.

Consumer issues change rapidly and often arise in reaction to things that affect us on a daily basis. Unfortunate events, whether they occur in the City or across the country as we saw with Hurricane Katrina, propagate scams and deceptive practices such as price gouging and counterfeit charity efforts. The Commission stays abreast of these events and issues, continues to monitor them, and actively educates City residents through the development and maintenance of multiple methods of outreach.

The current Commission roster is attached.

Respectfully submitted,



ALAN DUBOW, Chair



KATHRYN VANZANT, Secretary