

## **POLICY GOVERNING ELECTRONIC MEETINGS AND ELECTRONIC PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS – Forestry and Natural Resources Commission**

### **Electronic Meetings**

Occasions may arise when the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission is unable to form a physical quorum to conduct a public meeting. Under certain circumstances, Virginia law permits certain public bodies<sup>1</sup> to hold all-virtual public meetings using electronic means such as telephone or video conferencing, in which no physical quorum is otherwise required. The law limits the instances in which this may occur, prescribes procedures that must be followed when a public body holds an all-virtual public meeting, and requires that a written policy governing such meetings be adopted. This Policy, as hereafter set forth, sets forth the procedures under which the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission may hold an all-virtual public meeting.

The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission may hold an all-virtual public meeting in which no physical quorum is assembled under the following circumstances:

1. An indication of whether the meeting will be an in-person or all-virtual public meeting is included in the required meeting notice along with a statement notifying the public that the method by which the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission chooses to meet shall not be changed unless the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission provides a new meeting notice in accordance with the provisions of Va. Code § 2.2-3707; and
2. Public access to the all-virtual public meeting is provided via electronic communication means; and
3. The electronic communication means used allows the public to hear members of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission participating in the all-virtual public meeting and, when audio-visual technology is available, to see members of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission as well; and
4. A phone number or other live contact information is provided to alert the public body if the audio or video transmission of the meeting provided by the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission fails, the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission monitors such designated means of communication during the meeting, and the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission takes a recess until public access is restored if the transmission fails for the public; and
5. A copy of the proposed agenda and all agenda packets and, unless exempt, all materials furnished to members of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission for a meeting is made available to the public in electronic format at the same time that such materials are provided to members of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission; and

6. The public is afforded the opportunity to comment through electronic means, including by way of written comments, at those public meetings when public comment is customarily received; and
7. No more than two members of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission are together in any one remote location unless that remote location is open to the public to physically access it; and
8. If a closed session is held during an all-virtual public meeting, transmission of the meeting to the public resumes before the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission votes to certify the closed meeting as required by section D of Va. Code § 2.2-3712.
9. The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission does not convene an all-virtual public meeting (i) more than two times per calendar year or 25 percent of the meetings held per calendar year rounded up to the next whole number, whichever is greater, or (ii) consecutively with another all-virtual public meeting; and
10. Minutes of all-virtual public meetings held by electronic communication means are taken as required by Va. Code §2.2-3707 and include the fact that the meeting was held by electronic communication means and the type of electronic communication means by which the meeting was held; and
11. This policy shall not be applicable to electronic meetings held during declared states of emergency, which shall be governed by the applicable provisions of the Code of Virginia.

### **Electronic Participation in Meetings**

Occasions may arise when a member of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission is unable to be physically present at the meeting. Under certain circumstances, Virginia law permits members to participate in meetings through electronic means such as telephone and video conferencing. The law limits the instances in which this may occur, prescribes procedures that must be followed when a member participates in a meeting through electronic means, and requires that a written policy governing such participation be adopted. This Policy, as hereafter set forth, sets forth the instances when a member may participate in a meeting electronically and the procedures that apply.

### **Circumstances When Electronic Participation Is Permitted**

A Forestry and Natural Resources Commission member may participate in a meeting through electronic means from a remote location not open to the public under the following circumstances:

1. a. A member shall notify the chair on or before the day of the meeting that such member is unable to attend the meeting due to a personal matter, and shall identify with specificity the nature of the personal matter. The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission shall record in its minutes the specific nature of the personal matter and the remote location from which the member participated.

b. Such participation by the member shall be limited each calendar year to two meetings or 25 percent of the meetings of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission held per calendar year rounded up to the next whole number, whichever is greater.

2. A member may notify the chair that such member is unable to attend a meeting due to a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that prevents the member's physical attendance, or a family member's medical condition that requires the member to provide care for such family member, thereby preventing the member's physical attendance. The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission shall record this fact and the remote location from which the member participated in its minutes.

3. A member may notify the chair that such member is unable to attend a meeting due to the member's principal residence being more than 60 miles from the meeting location identified in the required notice for the meeting. The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission shall record this fact and the remote location from which the member participated in its minutes.

4. If a member's participation from a remote location pursuant to any of the reasons stated above is disapproved because such participation would violate the provisions of this Policy, such disapproval shall be recorded in the minutes with specificity.

### **Procedural Requirements**

Participation by a member of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission as authorized above shall be only under the following conditions:

1. A quorum of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission is physically assembled at the primary or central meeting location.

2. The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission makes arrangements for the voice of the member who is participating remotely to be heard by all persons at the primary or central meeting location.

3. This Policy shall be applied strictly and uniformly, without exception, to all members and without regard to the identity of the member requesting to participate remotely or the matters that will be considered or voted on at the meeting.