

Stephanie B. Nixon, *Chair*
John F. Tanner, Jr., *Vice Chair*
Bette Brand
Gillian Gordon-Moore
Stuart C. Siegel

Waqas Ahmed
Executive Secretary



Virginia Racing Commission
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Minutes of the Commission Meeting Held February 14, 2025, at 1:00 p.m.

Location: State Corporation Commission, Tyler Building, Courtroom C, 1300 East Main Street, Richmond, Virginia

In Attendance

Commission Members Stephanie B. Nixon, Chair
John F. Tanner Jr., Vice Chair (attending remotely due to distance)
Bette Brand
Gillian Gordon-Moore
Stuart C. Siegel

Commission Staff Waqas Ahmed, Executive Secretary
Ada Caruthers, Equine Medical Director
Andy Conway, General Admin Manager
Yolanda Lopez Macias, Commission Veterinarian
Kimberly Mackey, Director of Operations
Elizabeth B. Myers, Counsel
Israel Saavedra, Compliance Officer

The February 14, 2025, meeting of the Virginia Racing Commission (VRC or Commission) was called to order by Chair Stephanie B. Nixon at 1:00 p.m. A roll call confirmed the presence of Vice Chair John F. Tanner, Jr. (participating remotely due to distance), Commissioner Bette Brand, Commissioner Gillian Gordon Moore, and Commissioner Stuart C. Siegel. With a quorum established, Chair Nixon began the meeting.

Chair Nixon made a few opening comments, recognizing the recent passing of a long-time horse owner Larry Johnson. She also expressed appreciation for a recent performance review of the VRC, noting that the agency values the expertise and guidance. Chair Nixon and Commissioner Brand thanked Executive Secretary Waqas Ahmed for his commitment and the actions already taken to strengthen internal controls.

The floor was opened for public comment with a three-minute limit per speaker and a request to keep comments tailored to the agenda items. Dan Schmitt, Chairman of the Henrico County Board of Supervisors, addressed the Commission regarding the proposed Rosie's historical horse racing project in Henrico County. He stated there is significant public and bipartisan opposition to the project. Mr. Schmitt clarified that no board in Henrico County has approved the project. He provided background on the county's planning process and noted that Rosie's had not responded to requests from the Board of Supervisors and the General Assembly delegation to withdraw and resubmit their application for a public hearing. Mr. Schmitt distinguished historical horse racing from traditional horse racing and emphasized that Henrico County voters have not had the opportunity to weigh in on it. He

respectfully requested the Commission to object to the issuance of a license at that location until Rosie's goes through a public process. Commissioner Siegel thanked Mr. Schmitt for the update and reiterated his personal view that the project should proceed in a proper fashion through the county's provisional use permit process, emphasizing that the Commission doesn't have a seat at that table.

John Vithoulkas, Henrico County Manager, echoed Mr. Schmitt's comments and emphasized the county's desire for Rosie's to go through the established public hearing process. He highlighted the more residential nature of the proposed Rosie's location on Glenside Drive compared to the Rosie's locations in Richmond and New Kent. Mr. Vithoulkas reiterated the county's bipartisan stance and the General Assembly delegation's support for a public hearing.

Chair Nixon moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting held on December 3, 2024. Commissioner Siegel moved to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gordon-Moore. Executive Secretary Ahmed confirmed that staff had no further changes and recommended approval. All commissioners present voted yes. The motion carried.

Dr. Alfred Griffin, co-chair and director of racing for the Virginia Gold Cup Association, provided an update. He mentioned the preparations for the upcoming event, stating that the course conditions were looking good and the National Steeplechase Association was involved in monitoring the course. Mr. Griffin offered to answer any questions. The Commission expressed their anticipation for the event.

Frank Hopf of Colonial Downs provided an update on the Virginia Derby, which was 28 days away. He highlighted the new racing secretary from Churchill Downs, Dan Bork, and the retention of most of the summer staff. Mr. Hopf noted the increased purses, particularly for Virginia-restricted races, which has generated excitement among horsemen. He discussed the track maintenance by Racing Surfaces Testing Laboratory, facility preparations including A/C units with heaters, and marketing efforts with CBS-6. He outlined some of the planned entertainment and logistical arrangements for Virginia Derby Day, including additional entrance points and commemorative tickets. Mr. Hopf confirmed the race dates and post times. Commissioner Gordon-Moore commended the arrangement with Maryland and inquired about horsemen turnout. Mr. Hopf expressed confidence in the preparations and readiness for the event.

Executive Secretary Ahmed announced that the next meeting would be held on March 26 at 1:00 p.m.. He mentioned looking forward to the Gold Cup application and noted that Colonial Downs, in a joint request with HBPA, had filed an amendment to also conduct steeplechase races with wagering during the summer meeting. He acknowledged Commissioner Gordon-Moore's unique idea that facilitated this.

Representatives from the Shenandoah County Agricultural Foundation, Inc's team, Darrell Wood, Aidan Turnage-Barney, and Debbie Warnick gave an update regarding activities that will be conducted at the Spring meet to include simulcasting on the Triple Crown races: Kentucky Derby, Preakness, and Belmont Stakes. The VRC reviewed the application for a limited license to conduct race meeting in 2025. Commissioner Gordon-Moore inquired about a sprinkler system in the new barn, to which Ms. Warnick replied there was none at this time. A motion to approve the limited license was made and unanimously carried.

The Commission moved to approve the Virginia Downs Foundation limited license to conduct a race meeting in 2025. Executive Secretary Ahmed clarified this was the second part of the Shenandoah Downs' meet license for Virginia Downs Foundation. A motion to approve the limited license was made and unanimously carried.



Executive Secretary Ahmed provided background information on the approximately \$2.5 million balance in the Virginia Breeders Fund for 2024, after administrative costs. Debbie Easter, Executive Director of the Virginia Thoroughbred Association, and Debbie Warnick, Executive Director of the Virginia Harness Horse Association, gave an update on the Virginia Breeders Fund Distribution for 2024. The VTA and the VHHA agree \$2,561,846 will be split 80/20: eighty percent to the Thoroughbreds and twenty percent to the Standardbreds. Ms. Easter detailed the VTA's plan to distribute \$1,899,477 for breeders and \$150,000 for stallion owners. Ms. Warnick presented the VHHA's plan to apply their portion (\$512,369) to purses for restricted races already paid. A motion to approve the disbursement was made and passed with Commissioners Brand, Siegel, and Vice Chair Tanner, and Chair Nixon voting in favor of approving the distribution for 2024. Commissioner Gordon-Moore abstained pursuant to §2.2-3112.

The Commission moved to approve the joint request from Colonial Downs Group, LLC and Virginia Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association to reduce retainage. Executive Secretary Ahmed explained the joint request by Colonial Downs and HBPA to lower the takeout for Pick 5 and Pick 6 wagers to 12 and 15 percent, respectively, for both the Virginia Derby and summer meets. Frank Hopf of Colonial Downs clarified that this was a consistent request from previous years to promote wagering in those pools. A motion to approve the joint request was unanimously carried.

The Commission moved to authorize the Executive Secretary to enter into a Voluntary Implementation Agreement for 2025. Executive Secretary Ahmed discussed the voluntary implementation agreement with the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority (HISA), noting the Commission's previous voluntary participation and the assessment costs. He sought authorization to sign the agreement, which includes remitting the assessment and volunteering staff resources. A motion to approve was made and unanimously carried.

Pursuant to §59.1-392(S), the Commission moved to approve the Virginia Harness Horse Association's (VHHA) request to "withdraw for administrative costs associated with servicing the interests of the horsemen an amount not to exceed two percent of the amount in the horsemen's (purse) account." Executive Secretary Ahmed presented the VHHA's request. A motion to approve was made and unanimously carried.

The Commission moved to approve the Virginia Harness Horse Association's (VHHA) request for disbursement of benevolence funds. Executive Secretary Ahmed explained the VHHA's request to disburse benevolence funds to assist Virginia-licensed harness horse trainers and drivers in need, outlining the accountability measures. A motion to approve was made and unanimously carried.

During the second public comment period, Debbie Easter thanked the Commission and the Executive Secretary in their efforts to move the Commission forward. Dan Chancey, a Virginia resident, owner, and trainer with harness horses, spoke about the need to promote and educate younger generations to ensure the future of the harness racing industry. Chair Nixon and Commissioner Siegel acknowledged the importance of this issue, though Commissioner Siegel noted the Commission's lack of direct control over it. Commissioner Tanner also expressed his support for Mr. Chancey's point.

With no further business, Chair Nixon entertained a motion to adjourn. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting concluded at 2:30 p.m.

