

Racing Committee Minutes  
February 14, 2012 – 2:00 p.m.

Present: Chairman Collyer; Supervisors A. Johnson, Veitch, Southworth; Yepsen, Peck and Wood; Ryan Moore, Mgmt. Analyst; Todd Shimkus, Saratoga Chamber; Barry Seigle, Micky McGivern, Henry Westbrook, Horsemen's Association; League of Women Voters; Press.

Chairman Collyer called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

**On a motion made by Ms. Yepsen, seconded by Mr. Veitch the minutes of the September 8, 2011 meeting were approved unanimously.**

Chairman Collyer requested that all committee members turn their cell phones off during the meeting. He said he considers it very annoying and unprofessional at committee meetings, Agenda meetings and Board Meetings when cell phones are activated and used. Mr. Collyer stated that there should be a county policy made in reference to that.

Mr. Collyer announced the appointment of Mr. Veitch as committee Vice Chair.

Mr. Collyer appointed Ms. Yepsen, Mrs. Southworth and himself as members of the Racing subcommittee.

Mr. Collyer introduced Todd Shimkus from the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Shimkus said the Chamber is absolutely committed to working with Saratoga County and the City of Saratoga Springs to continue the advocacy for VLT host benefits. He said the most exciting development in terms of the regions racing industry is the new VLT facility at Aqueduct. Mr. Shimkus said he traveled there approximately a week after it opened where he was given a tour and met with Mr. Hayward. The VLT's have exceeded expectations in terms of the revenue that is being generated. NYRA is projecting this year that purses are going to go up substantially at all of the racetracks and especially Saratoga. Higher purses allow us to get better horses, jockeys, and breeders with more buyers and visitors. Mr. Shimkus said NYRA is projecting an \$8 million profit this year as a result of the funds coming in and they are moving forward with their continued study of capital improvements on the racecourse.

Mr. Shimkus said the IDA study showed a \$200 million impact on the eight county areas. This is an opportunity for us to remind the Albany Legislature of the substantial economic engine that racing is here in Saratoga County. He said the Chamber is monitoring closely the Governors effort to allow table games in NYS. The Saratoga Casino and Raceway is also a significant local employer with nearly 600 people employed with an economic impact of approximately \$100 million.

Mr. Shimkus said the Chamber would be hosting a breakfast on March 15<sup>th</sup> between 7:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. where Saratoga Gaming and Raceway will give a presentation on what

their expectations and plans would be if table games were allowed. This is part of a public process that they are starting to talk about what they would like to do and to gather feedback and comments from the local communities.

Mr. Shimkus said the Chamber has not taken a position, as they are awaiting details from the Governor's office. The Chamber realizes that the Saratoga Casino and Raceway is committed to making sure table games are value added for Saratoga and that the racing industry globally. They have been great partners with the County, Chamber and the city of Saratoga Springs, and we all want to see them succeed, but the political situation in Albany is a big unknown. Mr. Shimkus said he would be agreeable to participating again with the County, City of Saratoga Springs, and the Committee to petition the Governor to meet with our entities, and have a conversation about what he is envisioning, and allow, us to be able to share what would be truly value added for Saratoga County.

Mr. Shimkus said 2013 is the Sesquicentennial celebration for the Saratoga Racecourse (150 years). There is a committee that has been working for well over a year to develop a plan for what will be a least a five-month celebration of racing in Saratoga County. The website address is [www.saratoga150.com](http://www.saratoga150.com). Mr. Shimkus said Saratoga Racecourse is one of, if not the best places to see racing in the entire world, and we are the standard to which others are judged.

Mr. Collyer said he is hopeful that thoroughbred and harness racing will continue in Saratoga Springs.

Ms. Yepsen said the Racing Committee and beyond is going to have to do everything they can to maintain Racing as the number one tourism industry as opposed to racing and gaming. Gaming could be a supplemental and support system for the racing industry, but we want to make sure that historically we are recognized as a racing community and county moving forward. Part of the racing portfolio is just not thoroughbreds, the standard bred's provide a huge draw and business for Saratoga Springs and Saratoga County as well. Ms. Yepsen said that she not only wants to make sure that racing is number one in the area, but also that New York breds are number one, both Standard bred and Thoroughbred.

Ms. Yepsen said on February 7<sup>th</sup> the New York Thoroughbred Breeders Association put out a press release talking about a new alliance that has been formed. A copy of the press release was distributed to all committee members for their review.

Ms. Yepsen introduced Mr. Seigle, Mr. McGivern and Mr. Westbrook from the Horsemen's Association.

Mr. McGivern from the Standard bred Horseman's Association said they run nearly ten months of the year in Saratoga with most of the jobs generated as year round jobs. The association currently has 1,068 members made up of owners, trainers, drivers and grooms. Last year there were 287 licensed trainers, approximately 100 drivers and 400 grooms. Mr. McGivern said in addition there are several full time black smiths at the track and three feed supplies that provide the feed to the track with most of their business

generated from the harness track. There are approximately 800 horses stabled at the track as well as three or four training centers in the area, where horses train and then race at the Saratoga track. In addition, there are many local farmers that sell hay to both the feed companies that supply the track and several deliver directly to the horsemen at the track. There are two full time people who deliver shavings to the track and three full time horse transporters. Mr. McGivern said one of their objectives with regard to the gaming would be to make sure that a percentage of that proceeds goes toward purses because if a big shift of money from VLT's goes to table games that could very adversely affect horse racing. Standard bred is the second highest purse structure track in New York State and there are nine harness tracks in the State.

Mr. McGivern extended an invitation to the Board of Supervisors to attend opening day at the track on March 4<sup>th</sup> with post time at 12:45 p.m.

Mr. Veitch said, as Chairman for the Saratoga Gaming and Raceway Foundation for the last four years, he appreciated all the support that horse person's association has given monetarily to give back to not for profits in the area.

Ms. Yepsen said when the Economic Impact study is completed it should include standard bred and harness racing. There are nine tracks in New York State, and there needs to be something documented about the economic impact of harness racing as well as thoroughbreds.

Mr. Veitch distributed a copy of a proposed resolution with regard to VLT's to all committee members for their review. The resolution resolve would be to urge the Legislature of the State of New York to include further changes to the proposed amendment, limiting the locations of full casinos to areas not located near already operating VLT facilities and to forward it on to the Legislature.

Ms. Southworth suggested that it might be worth having conversations with the Governor first and then to write a resolution based on those conversations, being as specific as possible as to what we want in Saratoga County.

Mr. Collyer said he would like to receive more information before moving forward, after discussion the committee agreed.

Mr. Moore said he would put some language together in terms of the county wanting to become active participants, sending it to the Racing Committee members and Legislative and Research Committee members for their review in advance of the Law and Finance Committee meeting.

**On a motion made by Mrs. Southworth, seconded by Mr. Johnson the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Chris Sansom