



Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports & Parks
August 25, 2023

Good morning Honorable Senator Angel Bolques, Jr., Senators of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports & Parks, other Senators of the Thirty Fifth Legislature of the US Virgin Islands, and all present. I am Jason Williams, General Manager of VIGL Racing Operations. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill Nos. 35-0083 and 35-0073 as well as the status of the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack on St. Croix.

VIGL supports Bill No. 35-0083 which seeks to reestablish the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John Racing Commissions which are commonly referred to as District Commissions. As is widely known, the prospect of the Territory having one developer and promoter of both the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack in St. Croix and the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack in St. Thomas was the main purpose for eliminating the District Commissions while leaving the VI Horse Racing Commission in place. With events that occurred over the past year or so, this possibility no longer exists. Given this scenario, we no longer see the need for the singular VI Racing Commission.

I am sure most in the horseracing community will agree District Commissions worked successfully over the years. Without a doubt members are in a better position to more readily address issues and concerns relative to their respective tracks. Also, these members can commit their entire focus on providing the highest quality of racing and racing experience to their individual track which will only help horseracing throughout the Territory. Highlighting this assertion is the fact that both racetracks and their sites are vastly different. The horsemen and the track promoters will benefit by having District members who understand the cultural, historical, and operational aspect of their tracks. Therefore, reverting to the District approach rather than maintaining a singular VI Horse Racing Commission seems appropriate.

While VIGL generally supports Bill No. 35-0073, we recommend the duties and responsibilities of the District Commissions and the VI Horse Racing Commission be more clearly defined. As constructed, the Bill seems to give the latter the option to determine which duties it will assign to the District Commissions by using the word "may" in Section 202(a) rather than "shall". Additionally, we strongly suggest the racing secretary, assistant secretary, gate handlers, and starter positions rest with the promoter as it would be more beneficial to race fans and horsemen.

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As a private promoter, we are in a position to mandate our racing secretaries and staff as well as key employees of the company have no ownership or financial interest whatsoever in any racehorse within the Territory. This measure will ensure the complicated task of matching horses for a race will be done impartially and free of any influence. Most importantly, the financial burden of operating the track lies with the promoter. Therefore, the racing secretary would be dedicated to developing race cards that ensure maximum attendance and interest. To be effective, these efforts would have to be done in a manner which promotes fair and credible competition. Simply put, the promoter should be afforded the opportunity to determine the quality of its own product and the racing secretary is chiefly responsible for this development.

Often times the starters and gate handlers will be required to work on non-race days for gate schooling and training. Since the promoter is responsible for maintaining the track surface and the relative components, the track maintenance staff will also work regularly on non-race days. Both gate crew and track maintenance employees work together during training and gate schooling. It will be more efficient to coordinate these activities within one organization rather than two should those positions remain with the Commission. It is important to mention across mainland racetracks, racing secretaries and gate crew positions consistently rest with the promoter. We aim to operate our racetrack in a professional manner and in alignment as much as possible with our mainland partners.

On or around April 10, 2023, VIGL submitted the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) modification package to the Department of Planning & Natural Resources (DPNR) for review and approval. It was approved by the Commissioner of DPNR and then forwarded to the St. Croix CZM Committee to impose any pertinent conditions on the project. The Committee held a public meeting on Thursday May 18th at which VIGL and its representatives made a detailed presentation outlining the features of the development. Attendees included all CZM Committee members, DPNR's CZM staff, and residents including several members of the Flamboyant Park Horsemen Association. Several concerns were expressed in response to the presentation. The seating capacity of the grandstand, the need for additional barns, the location of the quarantine barn, and the shoreline erosion which has occurred adjacent to the site were questioned. In response and while it slightly compromised our model and concept for a successful project, we amended our package which we outlined in a CZM Committee Decision Meeting held on June 29, 2023. After imposing a couple minor conditions, the Committee voted to approve the project.

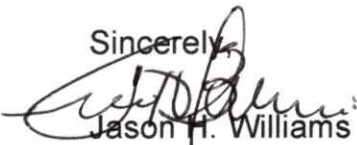
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On July 24, 2023, VIGL received the official approval letter for our modification package. Within a few days as required by our contract, we began submitting our building permit package for approval. We forwarded our civil and foundational submittals which include underground utilities, excavation, roads, and foundations. These filings bring us another step closer to breaking ground which will occur once we receive the necessary permits and licenses.

As the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack developer and operator, VIGL is responsible for providing an industry standard and suitable facility and establishing a professional and sound operation in which horsemen and fans can safely support the sport. We remain focused on these goals and will continue efforts to meet them. We will work closely with the Racing Commission and the Flamboyant Park Horsemen Association to deliver a product that will not only meet but hopefully surpass expectations. To that end, we are extremely proud of the connections we have with a number of mainland racing experts who are already working with us to meet our objectives.

VIGL thanks the residents of St. Croix who continue to encourage and support us with this endeavor. We especially recognize the contributions of the Flamboyant Park Horsemen Association, horseracing enthusiasts, former horsemen, and past track employees who provided their suggestions over the past few months. We look forward to a successful and fruitful partnership with the St. Croix community.

Sincerely,



Jason H. Williams

General Manager – Racing Operations

cc: Andrew Dubuque, VIGL, Managing Member