

John F. Tanner Jr., *Chair*
Gillian Gordon-Moore, *Vice Chair*
Stuart C. Siegel
Martha S. Mavredes
Nancy L. Williams



Waqas Ahmed
Executive Secretary

Brian Wolford
Deputy Executive Secretary

Virginia Racing Commission
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Minutes of the Commission Meeting Held June 24, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.

Location: Colonial Downs
Ballroom, 4th Floor
10515 Colonial Downs Parkway
New Kent, VA 23124

In Attendance:

Commission Members John F. Tanner Jr., Chair
Gillian Gordon-Moore, Vice Chair
Martha S. Mavredes
Stuart C. Siegel
Nancy L. Williams

The June 24, 2026 regular meeting of the Virginia Racing Commission (VRC) was called to order at 1:01 p.m. by Chair John F. Tanner Jr. A roll call confirmed that all commissioners were present, establishing a quorum.

No public comments were offered during the first public comment period.

A motion to approve the minutes of the March 11, 2026 commission meeting was made by Commissioner Siegel and seconded by Vice Chair Gordon-Moore. The motion was approved unanimously.

Under department reports, Executive Secretary Waqas Ahmed provided an update on agency operations since the last meeting. He welcomed two new stewards for Colonial Downs Summer Meet, Brooke Hawkins and Reese Howard. He noted that Jim Lages returns to the VRC as its new safety director and stated the Dr. Dave Stanford, DVM onboarded a large team of regulatory veterinarians. Mr. Ahmed also introduced Michelle Quay, Financial Services Specialist in the Division of Finance. Mr. Ahmed informed the Commission regarding changes within the agency structure. The staff has continued to conduct After-Action Reviews (AAR) following race meetings. The staff is implementing a new timeline this year for all licenses. Director of Licensing Katreena Lewis will send out the 2027 applications. Under fiscal updates, budget requirements are due to the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry by mid-September. Mr. Ahmed emphasized the fact that the Virginia Racing Commission is regulating a rapidly growing multibillion-dollar industry under baseline regulations and resources that in many cases have not been updated since 1998. In fiscal year 2026, the VRC brought in over \$40 million in non-general fund revenues through historical horse racing and ADW revenues;

however, the \$4.6 million appropriation limits VRC oversight abilities across all racing in the Commonwealth.

Next, Darrell Wood and Aidan Turnage-Barney presented a recap of the spring 2026 races at Shenandoah Downs. Mr. Wood provided the new commissioners with an overview of the history of harness racing in Virginia. Harness racing took place at Colonial from 1998 through 2014. In 2015, it moved to Oak Ridge Estate in Nelson County. In 2016, the Virginia Equine Alliance (VEA) invested nearly one million dollars to upgrade the track to a state-of-the-art oval. Races have now been held there for 11 years. Last year, a \$2 million barn was constructed on the backstretch to provide safe housing for the horses.

Mr. Wood also discussed the establishment of the Wall of Colors in 2026 to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to harness racing at Shenandoah. Chief Robins, the project manager for the barn at Shenandoah, was the first inductee. The second inductee was Dr. Scott Woogen, who has been involved with the Virginia Harness Horse Association (VHHA) for decades. The final inductee was Dr. Charlie Dunavant, the first president of the VHHA. Dr. Dunavant continues to own trotters that compete annually in Virginia Breeder's races and stake races. Mr. Turnage-Barney also highlighted William Carter, a rising star who won his first race during the 2021 Shenandoah Downs County Fair meet at 21 years of age. He also recognized Roger Hammer, an iconic trainer from Bedford, Pennsylvania, who has supported Virginia racing for more than 20 years and has competed at both Colonial Downs and Shenandoah Downs. Mr. Turnage-Barney also highlighted various promotions at Shenandoah.

Next, Frank Hopf provided an overview of the activities scheduled for Colonial Downs' 2026 live racing summer season, which was scheduled to begin on June 25 and conclude on Labor Day, September 7. Racing would be held Thursday through Sunday, with a post time of 12:30 p.m. each day. The season's promotional schedule included Corgi dog racing and an all-jump-day card at the opening of the meet, the Festival of Racing at midseason, and Old Dominion Derby Day at the conclusion of the meet. Mr. Hopf noted that Sunday was a new race day for the season and would feature appreciation events and family-oriented activities. He also discussed marketing initiatives and facility improvements, including upgrades to the saddling paddock and the HVAC in the jockeys' room.

Next, Dr. Al Griffin provided a recap of the 101st Virginia Gold Cup races, held on the first Saturday in May. He reported that the event featured seven hurdle and timber races offering total purses of \$405,000. Dr. Griffin stated that the relationship between Great Meadow and the Virginia Gold Cup Association had never been stronger and that the event drew its largest crowd since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Advertising efforts in Norfolk, Williamsburg, and Lynchburg contributed to a significant increase in sales. Dr. Griffin also reported that Wi-Fi service at the event had been upgraded, allowing attendees to wager through the TwinSpires app. Jill Byrne (VEA) created a tutorial video explaining how to download and use the app. These efforts contributed to the largest one-day wagering handle in Virginia Gold Cup history, totaling slightly more than \$200,000. The Virginia Gold Cup Association plans to explore opportunities to export its racing signal to England and Ireland, as more than half of the participating horses are from Ireland. Dr. Griffin emphasized that the Virginia Gold Cup is a community event that supports local charitable organizations.



Next, Chair Tanner recognized the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Ben Rowe. Deputy Secretary Rowe highlighted the Administration's support of Virginia's equine industry, recognized recent accomplishments, and expressed his appreciation for the Commission's continued efforts.

Under the request for approval of the pari-mutuel retainage percentages submitted by Colonial Downs with the agreement of VHBPA for the 2026 summer live racing meet, Commissioner Siegel made a motion to approve the request. Vice Chair Gordon-Moore seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Next, Executive Secretary Ahmed informed the Commission that 30 percent of the breakage from each pari-mutuel pool is deposited into the Racing Benevolence Fund for each meet. Those funds are disbursed with commission approval for gambling addiction and substance abuse counseling, recreational and educational programs, and other related purposes. The Virginia HBPA submitted a proposed 2026 budget for \$220,920. The proposed budget exceeds available funds by about \$14,000. The Virginia HBPA confirmed in writing that any expenditure exceeding available fund balances will be covered directly by the Virginia HBPA. Commission staff followed up with Virginia HBPA on several line items that showed meaningful variance between last year's budgeted and actual figures. Commissioner Mavredes inquired regarding the miscellaneous category becoming the largest category in the budget. Glen Berman informed the Commission that, "we never know what requests are going to come in. It's anything from bed frames and bed mattresses to washing machines to who knows what is going to happen. This year, 20 beds needed mattresses because the old ones were moldy and needed to be replaced. The need isn't known until June." Commissioner Tanner recommended figuring out how to best handle the recurring problem with the washers. Commissioner Mavredes moved to approve the 2026 Virginia HBPA benevolence budget in the amount of \$220,920 as presented with the understanding that any expenditures exceeding available Racing Benevolence Fund balances will be funded directly by the Virginia HBPA. Vice Chair Gordon-Moore seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Next, Executive Secretary Ahmed gave a brief background regarding the Virginia Breeders Fund in a non-general fund special revenue fund under the VRC. Oversight of the day-to-day promotions and distribution functions are under the VRC umbrella. The VRC has delegated this to the Virginia Thoroughbred Association for the thoroughbred side of the fund due to their expertise and involvement in the industry. Last month, Virginia Thoroughbred Association self-reported an administrative error in the 2025 distribution that resulted in overpayments to certain participants and the exclusion or underpayment of two individuals participating in the fund. After consultation with the Virginia Thoroughbred Association, our legal counsel and staff recommend the following corrective path will be taken for approval. First, the Virginia Thoroughbred Association will advance the owned funds, which total approximately \$21,000 from its operating capital to immediately pay the individuals who were excluded or underpaid. Second, the Virginia Thoroughbred Association will issue formal written communication to all individuals who received owner payments explaining the administrative error and requesting return of the excess funds. Third, any decisions regarding funds that are not successfully returned will be deferred until the initial recruitment effort is completed. A motion to approve the corrections to the 2025 Virginia Breeders Fund distribution was made by Commissioner Mavredes and seconded by Commissioner Siegel. The following Commissioners voted, aye: Chair John Tanner; Commissioner Siegel; Commissioner Mavredes; and Commissioner Williams. Vice Chair Gordon-Moore abstained from the vote.



During the public comment period, Dr. Scott Woogen commented on a question about seven-horse fields versus eight-horse fields in harness racing. He stated that, “historically, harness racing is raced on half-mile ovals for a distance of a mile. A horse that travels one horse length further out than the rail position travels 88 feet more through that mile. So traveling towards the rail is critical. It seems that the eighth horse in an eight-horse race field is at a tremendous disadvantage. The seventh horse a little less so. But for the betting public, it’s a better opportunity not to bet on horses that have limited opportunities to win. To support the horsemen, we make sure we have more races with seven horses rather than less races with eight horses. It provides everyone the opportunity to race and the betters and the gamblers an opportunity to be more successful.”

Next, Vice Chair Gordon-Moore moved to enter closed session pursuant to Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(1) and (A)(8) to discuss personnel matters and legal advice from counsel. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mavredes and passed unanimously.

Returning from closed session, Chair Tanner moved to certify the closed session pursuant to Va. Code § 2.2-3712(D). Executive Secretary Ahmed conducted a roll call vote. Chair John Tanner; Vice Chair Gordon-Moore; Commissioner Siegel; Commissioner Mavredes; and Commissioner Williams all voted aye. The motion passed unanimously.

Next, Commissioner Siegel moved to direct the Department of Human Resource Management to increase the salary of the Executive Secretary to the Midpoint of the Level III range designated for Agency Heads in the State Budget effective July 1, 2026, seconded by Commissioner Mavredes. The motion passed unanimously.

With no further business or public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

