

MEETING OF THE VIRGINIA HORSE INDUSTRY BOARD

WARRENTON, VA

MARCH 25, 2025

Draft Minutes

3/25/2025

Members Present:

Sharon Molster

Debbie Easter

Ernest Oare

Oliver Brown

Steve Escobar- proxy

Beth Sheely

Beth Smith

Amy Moore

Gail Rezendes-Dell

Joseph Guthrie- ex officio

Members Absent:

Barbara Riggs

Guests:

Robert Banner

Heather Wheeler- VDACS

Beth Greene- Governor's Office

I. **Call To Order- 11:41am**

- a. The meeting was called to order and introductions were made

II. **Review Meeting Minutes**

- a. The meeting minutes from December 18, 2024 were reviewed. D. Easter made a motion to approve the minutes. S. Escobar seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Molster	Yes
Oare	Yes
Brown	Yes
Sheely	Yes
Smith	Yes
Moore	Yes
Rezendes-Dell	Yes

III. **Financial Update**

- a. Program Manager G. Petro reported the finances for each fund. Income and revenue are listed as follows:

Coggins- cc 625 (Figures through 2/28/2025?)

Feed Tonnage- cc626 (Figures through 2/28/2025?)

IV. **Marketing Contract- Decision to Extend**

- a. Ashley Spoleti and Judi Friedman from TopRight Partners, LLC gave a presentation summarizing plans for year two scope of work, contingent on approval of the second year of the marketing services project contract. The scope of work and accompanying budget represented a baseline annual plan utilizing \$1M budget, but observations were made on opportunities presented with an increased budget.
- b. It was noted that content creation would be a large focus moving forward, both financially and time-wise, and would most likely be an increased cost above the \$1M baseline contract expense. There was a brief discussion on hiring of this contractor through the Board or through TopRight, and it was ultimately decided TopRight would be better suited to hire and manage this person as an extension of their own team. A comment was made that this content creation could warrant hiring two separate individuals, as content

creation and calendar management could entail too much for just one person.

- c. New campaign strategy for year 2- Western discipline- as an addition to the continuing focus on English Disciplines.
- d. Budget Increase- An observation was made by J. Friedman on budget increase and allowance for necessary media buys for year 2- an increase from year 1 as it would be covering the entire year versus 3 months. It was additionally noted that this increase would cover development of new creative assets specifically for Western Disciplines.
- e. Brand Awareness Surveys- Creation of new brand awareness surveys was proposed, both for comparative metrics against original surveys distributed in 2024 and new metrics integrating an additional discipline (western). There would be 2 discipline-specific surveys in circulation.
- f. Segmented Messaging- Likewise, messaging would increase and be segmented to appeal to separate disciplines
- g. VHIB Event Planning & Materials Creation- An industry sponsorship program- a development of the Board's Spring Listening Event at Colonial Downs earlier in March- was brought forward as a development item. In short, it was explained as a program that could utilize a package comprising deep audience and consumer data of the Virginia horse industry to attract sponsorship from larger, national sponsors at local equine events. Land Rover was used as an example of a luxury brand. This sponsorship "package" of data could be provided to large-scale sponsors by smaller statewide organizations and represent an opportunity to these sponsors by spreading their marketing dollars across multiple events in lieu of a single, smaller event.
- h. Event Materials- The idea of specific event materials for spectator engagement was also presented, including a "how-to" guide on increasing spectatorship at events for hosting organizations, and a discipline "cheat sheet" which would simplify and explain equine disciplines to otherwise unfamiliar spectators.
- i. Ultimately, additional expenses surpassing the \$1M baseline budget proposal prompted the Board to pause on a decision to approve the full budget and scope of work for year 2 of the Marketing Services Project until more data was provided. It was requested of TopRight that a budget addendum be created, which would encapsulate these additional expenses on a sliding scale of incorporation. The Board decided to approach this decision again at their next Board meeting.

V. **Conflict of Interest Training**

- a. Virginia Attorney General Justin Bell gave a virtual presentation on Conflict of Interest policy and procedure according to the Code of Virginia.

VI. **Twilight Jumpers- Budget Change Request**

- a. A Budget change was proposed by the High Performance Equestrian Foundation for their active “Twilight Jumpers” event grant through the VHIB. It was proposed to add an additional expense category for Print Advertisements in the amount of \$750, increasing their current budget of \$3,500 to \$4,250. D. Easter made a motion to approve the Budget change request. E. Oare seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously

Molster	Yes
Escobar	Yes
Brown	Yes
Sheely	Yes
Smith	Yes
Moore	Yes
Rezendes-Dell	Yes

VII. **VHIB Fall Summit**

- a. G. Petro presented details of a site walkthrough he had with J. Friedman and A. Spoleti of TopRight Partners, as well as K. Foltman, at Morven Park Equestrian Center in Leesburg, VA, as this site was proposed for the VHIB’s Fall Summit. Morven Park proposed that VHIB be a Headline Sponsor for their 3-day eventing weekend including the International & Fall Horse Trials and the USEF Open Eventing Final, contributing \$25,000 in exchange for a comprehensive sponsorship/ad package. In addition to being a headline sponsor, the VHIB expressed interest in holding a VIP Summit event the night before the weekend’s events start, which would include food & beverage for attendees, a special outdoor tent on the grounds, and a chance to commiserate, among other things. It was noted by D. Easter that expenses for food & beverage catering, additional personnel, and the like would fall to the VHIB to support, and without complete cost figures the Board couldn’t make a sound decision within the meeting. S. Escobar made observation that that Morven should offer more specifics of signage and ad placements included in the sponsorship package as well to provide a complete picture of the event and its costs. S. Escobar mad a motion to sponsor Morven Park’s eventing weekend at \$25,000, but to hold any decisions on a VIP event for the

VHIB until further expense details could be ascertained. E. Oare seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Molster	Yes
Easter	Yes
Brown	Yes
Sheely	Yes
Smith	Yes
Moore	Yes
Rezendes-Dell	Yes

VIII. Establish new Board Chair and Vice Chair

- a. Since K. Foltman fulfilled her full term on the Board and was replaced towards the beginning of the year, the Board needed to vote on establishing a new board Chair, which is typically reviewed and decided annually. D. Easter, current Board Vice Chair, expressed no issues with her current role and its responsibilities. It was generally noted that the Board had no issues with D. Easter maintaining her position as Vice Chair. A discussion was had regarding responsibilities and expectations of Board Chair, to which S. Molster replied she felt confident she could maintain and execute the duties thereof. D. Easter made a motion to elect S. Molster the new VHIB Board Chair. S. Escobar seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Molster	Yes
Oare	Yes
Brown	Yes
Sheely	Yes
Smith	Yes
Moore	Yes
Rezendes-Dell	Yes

IX. Marketing Subcommittee Discussion

- a. Considering 2 marketing subcommittee members completing their appointments with the VHIB, and per annual review standards, the decision was made to review the current makeup of the marketing subcommittee members. It was noted that although K. Foltman and R. Banner remain repositories of tacit knowledge pertinent to the ongoing nature of the marketing services project, the marketing subcommittee should be comprised of individuals currently appointed to the Board. After a brief

discussion of the duties and responsibilities of subcommittee members, G. Rezendes-Dell asserted that she feels confident about her ability to assume the role. With this, S. Molster also made the comment that she would maintain subcommittee oversight as Board Chair. With this new formation of the subcommittee, however, the importance of keeping K. Foltman and R. Banner involved as advisors was discussed. D. Easter asserted that the marketing subcommittee must include K. Foltman and R. Banner on all matters as advisors moving forward. S. Molster agreed. D. Easter made a motion to approve G. Rezendes-Dell as a new Board member of the marketing subcommittee, while maintaining the ability to reference and/or include K. Foltman and R. Banner -at their discretion- on all marketing matters moving forward. S. Escobar seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Molster	Yes
Oare	Yes
Brown	Yes
Sheely	Yes
Smith	Yes
Moore	Yes
Rezendes-Dell	Yes

X. **Public Comment- none**

XI. **Next Meeting Dates**

- a. It was acknowledged that an additional meeting date would be necessary so as to continue discussion on the marketing contract scope of work for year 2, and it was decided we would entertain a virtual meeting on April 08. Dates were discussed for June, and it was decided that 6/10 and 6/17 were favorable. September

XII. **Adjournment- 3:16pm**