

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Demolition Taking Place At Horse Race Tracks In Preparation For Upgrades; Mapp Nominates Additional Members To Commission

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Randall "Doc" James Racetrack

ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has nominated Sheldon A. Turnbull and Jay T. Watson to the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission, Government House announced Thursday. Once confirmed by the Legislature, Mr. Turnbull will serve three years in the St. Thomas/St. John district and Mr. Watson will represent the district of St. Croix for two years.

The new, unified commission was created in order to provide consistent oversight of the territory's horse racing industry, which is set for major expansion as a result of the landmark agreement negotiated by the Mapp-Potter Administration and ratified by the Legislature in late 2016. Local casino operator [VIGL is investing nearly \\$30 million](#) in private capital to transform the Clinton E. Phipps and Randolph "Doc" James facilities. The project stands to make the U.S. Virgin Islands the region's premier destination for horse racing, the Mapp administration says.

"A single horse racing commission will bring efficiency to the oversight and governance of an industry that is an integral part of the Virgin Islands culture," the governor said.

"Additionally, professional horse racing will encourage positive economic growth through jobs and tourism benefiting the territory as a whole."

The Virgin Islands Government is currently demolishing some of the older structures at the territory's racetracks in preparation for construction, Government House said. VIGL is now preparing to present its plans to the Coastal Zone Management Commission, said Jason Williams, VIGL's general manager for horse racing operations. He said CZM hearings are set for next week on both St. Thomas and St. Croix. An interim lease agreement was signed with VIGL earlier this year in the hope that races could commence this summer; however, Mr. Williams indicated that they have been delayed due to some logistical issues, including the need to remove damaged reviewing stands, according to Government House.

"We hope to present renditions of what the completed projects will look like at the CZM hearings," he said.

Mr. Mapp has said a revamped horse racing industry will create numerous new opportunities for young people interested in horses, veterinary science and hospitality, including the allotment of more than \$100,000 in related scholarships. Starting with the construction phase, many new short and long-term jobs will be created, to include:

- The refurbishment and expansion of the Territory's two racetracks
- Construction of bars, restaurants, lounges, restrooms, viewing stands, parking, jockey locker rooms and vendor kiosks
- New barns, quarantine areas and veterinary care facilities

VIGL must provide for a minimum of 18 live race days annually on both St. Thomas and St. Croix in the first three years and a minimum of 24 each year thereafter. Races will have a \$100,000 minimum purse per race day.

Mr. Mapp said the agreement with VIGL exemplifies the Mapp-Potter administration's commitment to sports tourism, economic development and creating new opportunities for all Virgin Islanders.

Henry E. Schjang, Ian Samuel, Ronald A. Phillips and Dr. Laura Palminteri, DVM were previously nominated by Governor Mapp to serve on the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission.