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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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**STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE & INDUSTRY MAKE PROGRESS**

DEL MAR, CA – Racetrack executives and horsemen told state racing commissioners Friday they are willing to do whatever it takes to improve the racing product and turn business around, and that includes a reorganization of racing dates in California, major improvements to facilities, and significant investments in advertising and promotions.

“I believe this is the beginning of a new era in California racing,” said California Horse Racing Board Richard B. Shapiro after the public meeting Friday. “Industry leaders agree with us that along with challenges come opportunities to take the reins and create even better racing throughout the state. Hopefully, we are going to build on this momentum, obtain firm commitments, and develop a racing calendar that plays to our strengths and rewards those who perform.

“This may result in less racing days per week and fewer racing weeks overall with breaks in between some meets. Hopefully, that would result in fresher, sounder horses and larger fields, renewed enthusiasm for fans and participants, and more creative marketing programs to build on our successes. I believe all stakeholders are committed to achieving our common goal of improving our product throughout the state. This likely will be a multi-year endeavor, but in the end I am hopeful we will have the vision and the foresight to accomplish our goals.”

In the first of a series of public meetings of the Board’s Strategic Planning Committee, CHRB Vice Chairman Marie Moretti, Commissioner John Amerman, Commissioner John Harris, and Chairman Shapiro met for more than three hours with racetrack executives, horsemen, labor representatives, and other interested parties at Del Mar.

The testimony was candid and at times inspirational, and some of the ideas presented were creative, motivated by the harsh realities that two of the major racing venues, Hollywood Park and Bay Meadows, could be developed for non-racing purposes within a few years, and that slot machines are not likely to come to California racetracks to enhance purses and track revenues.

Given the possible closure of Hollywood Park, competing plans were announced earlier this year for major improvements at Fairplex Park and Los Alamitos. Each project is dependent on receiving significant thoroughbred racing dates.

Encouragingly, many of the northern fairs have agreed the time has come to unite among themselves and produce a calendar that could result in consolidation and major improvements to their facilities while providing a better, more viable contribution to racing in California.

Joseph Barkett, general manager of the Solano County Fair, unveiled a plan Friday that is endorsed by most but not all of the Northern California fairs, which would essentially create a four-month fair circuit, allow for additional racing on fair properties, provide for a Christmas break, and shift racing to Golden Gate Fields for the winter and spring.

Representatives of the Thoroughbred Owners of California, California Thoroughbred Trainers, Magna Entertainment (Santa Anita and Golden Gate), and Fairplex Park along with others all embraced the concepts expressed at the meeting.

Commissioner Harris, who served as CHRB chairman in 2004-05, commented, "I look at the dates issue as one in which success will be more of a journey than a destination. While some advocate dramatic changes, I would prefer we do some selective trimming here and there rather than any severe pruning. But I still want to see some changes made."

Wasting no time, the committee has agreed to meet again Monday, August 28.

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