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Press Contact
Richard Motta
340-474-2399
www.vi.gov
richard.mottajr@go.vi.gov

Governor Bryan Signs Agreement With VIGL That Clears Obstacles to Move St. Croix Horse Racing Forward

Race management company divests interests in St. Thomas track and is given clear timeline of benchmarks for reconstruction of Randall "Doc" James track

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During a press conference Thursday at Government House on St. Croix, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. signed an agreement with VIGL that clears all remaining obstacles to enable the horse racing management company to begin the reconstruction of the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack on St. Croix.

As part of the agreement, VIGL agreed to a timeline of benchmarks it said it will meet to ensure that construction on the St. Croix track proceeds without further delay to bring horse racing back to the island.

Under the agreement, VIGL also agreed to end its involvement with the project to rebuild the Clinton Phipps Racetrack on St. Thomas, which now will be solely managed by Southland Gaming.

Thursday's agreement ends the disputes and issues that plagued an initial agreement with VIGL that was signed by Governor Kenneth Mapp in October 2016 and ratified by the 31st Legislature. That agreement was met with a series of challenges that included appeals to the Coastal Zone Management Commission and Board of Land Use Appeal and objections by the Federal Aviation Administration.

The original agreement also survived a legal challenge by Traxco, the previous leaseholder of the St. Croix track, but the original agreement ultimately resulted in a lawsuit between VIGL, Southland Gaming and the Government of the Virgin Islands that stopped the reconstruction of the tracks on both islands, which were destroyed by the 2017 hurricanes.

In June 2021, the Bryan-Roach Administration settled the lawsuit by bifurcating the original contract into separate agreements for each track, and in March, Governor Bryan sent down amended legislation that the 34th Legislature approved in March 2022 so construction could begin on the tracks in both districts.

While the bifurcated agreements cleared the way for VIGL to begin rebuilding the St. Croix track and laid out the specific permits VIGL would need, Governor Bryan cited a number of factors that delayed VIGL's progress.

"Critically, the cost of construction has gone up significantly while we wrestled with the challenges to this contract, and VIGL has made investments into the original deal that they will not be able to recoup," Governor

Bryan said. “Additionally, the Covid-related shutdowns and restrictions caused significant losses in the gaming industry and weakened the financial positions of those entities.”

The Governor said the most significant element of the agreement he signed with VIGL on Thursday is the addition of a timeline of benchmarks the racing management company is required to meet.

The signing of the amended Thursday now clears the way for all horse-racing in the Territory.

The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory’s people, infrastructure and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit transparency.vi.gov

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