



ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION

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October 13, 2017

Ontario Racing
400-10 Carlson Court
Toronto, ON M9W 6L2
Attention: Gavin Van Elsberg

Dear Mr. Van Elsberg,

Thank you for your e-mail dated October 10, 2017 asking for input on the 2018 race date applications. We find it encouraging that Ontario Racing seeks to improve transparency. However the current race date applications omit any financial information that would allow a proper evaluation. In order to properly analyze and evaluate the proposed schedules can you please provide the OHHA with both the revenues generated and the expenses paid at each of the tracks for the last three years? Only with that information will we be in a position to provide a qualified response. Due to the limited funds now available to the industry it is important to ensure they are allocated to generate the very best return on that investment.

OHHA finds it interesting that you asked to specifically comment on two out of the fifteen proposed applications, those being Georgian Downs and Kawartha Downs. While Kawartha Downs has offered a vague business plan there is no plan for Georgian Downs, or many others for that matter, to consider. Could you please explain why those two tracks have been singled out for consideration? The OHHA board is concerned with the scheduling at all racetracks but it appears from your communication to us that those two tracks are getting extra attention for some reason. Again, as stated before, we would appreciate having the financial information from those two tracks to assist us in responding.

The OHHA directors do not support the elimination of Standardbred racing at Woodbine Racetrack. There has been no explanation given that would satisfy horse people that leaving the largest home market area in Canada would be beneficial to the Standardbred racing industry. Recent articles quoting Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) executives indicate that the Woodbine site is on the verge of a major expansion with the anticipated approval of expanded gaming. There have been estimates of 10-12 million additional customers to the Woodbine site when completed. If there are no Standardbred race dates at Woodbine the only live horse

racing that the new customers will be exposed to will be Thoroughbred racing. There will be no opportunity to showcase Standardbred racing and therefore opportunities are missed to generate new fans. The WEG application indicates that “ Woodbine, due to its infrastructure, is not capable of presenting an attractive venue for Standardbred racing” however, senior management of WEG have gone on record stating that once the Standardbreds leave Woodbine the current Standardbred surface will be redone to accommodate another turf course for the Thoroughbreds to race on. Perhaps consideration could be given to racing Standardbreds on the one- mile track after the Thoroughbred season is completed.

The application goes on to state that “live Standardbred racing enthusiasts stopped going to Woodbine years ago” yet, over those years we have seen little to no effort to reengage those fans or adjust the product to encourage them to come back.

Despite the apparent resignation that Standardbred racing cannot be fostered in the largest metropolis in Canada, there seems to be a belief that it can be grown in Milton. While Toronto has a population in excess of 3 million people, Milton, in comparison, has a population of around 100,000. If the industry truly wants to grow, the efforts and investments should happen in the larger home market.

Recent annual reports from the Ontario Racing Commission allow us a very limited understanding of the financial realities at the two tracks and a comparison of 2014-2015 vs 2015 -2016 shows that live wagering per race on Standardbreds is currently higher at Woodbine than at Mohawk and year over year actually grew at Woodbine and declined at Mohawk.

OHHA does not understand the motive or the desire to eliminate live Standardbred racing at Woodbine and believes that it should have equal opportunity to share in the benefits of the proposed expansion of the site. We therefore submit that the current application should not be considered at this time and that the traditional race season at the Woodbine site be maintained.

In closing, please note OHHA’s concern with the lack of business plans for most tracks. That being said, we look forward to receiving the financial data requested and will respond after full consideration of the current economic realities and a review of the applications.

Yours truly,



Ken Hardy
President